

A Cameronian Christmas
And other winters' tales.

By S.R.Crockett

With an introduction by Cally Phillips

Ayton
Republishing the past

These stories were originally published between 1893 and 1908.

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INTRODUCTION

Why this collection?

This is the first collection of Crockett's short stories to be published in just over a century. During his career there were six such collections published, featuring writing from magazines and novels, and always showing his versatility and eclecticism of subject matter. They are a good read in their own right, and also tempt one towards his many novels, which also cover an incredible range of places and times.

2014 marked the 100th anniversary of S.R.Crockett's death and to commemorate this event Ayton Publishing republished some 32 volumes, brought together as 'The Galloway Collection' in tribute. The Galloway Raiders was founded to promote the work of S.R.Crockett to a new and wider readership and this literary society with a difference undertook a series of events both real and virtual during the year.

Even so, only approximately half of Crockett's work has been brought back into print thus far, and it seems a fitting tribute at the end of this special year, to pull together a collection of Crockett's writing both as an introduction to those new to his work and as a 'treasure' to those who are more familiar with it.

Why A Cameronian Christmas?

Crockett was brought up on the farm at Little Duchrae by his maternal grandparents who were Cameronians. In fact they were probably among the last of the Cameronians, since the 'sect' amalgamated with the Free Church around 1876. This was the year Crockett went up to University in Edinburgh and perhaps partially explains why, when he took up the ministry in 1886, he became a Free Kirk minister. Equally tellingly, his ministry lasted less than ten years and his many writings about ministers and religion offer a possible insight into this. Crockett eschewed hypocrisy wherever he found it, including organised religion, and had a much more basic and vital relationship with his Maker. As such, while he wrote a lot about ministers,

it is as one part of the fabric of a society he observes closely and criticises with as much wit and candour as Charles Dickens before him.

In 1843 Dickens' Scrooge set the standard for the English as to what a Christmas Day should be; for Cameronians in particular, and for the Church of Scotland in general, Christmas was much less of an 'event' than it is today, or was in 19th or 20th century England. In Scotland working on Christmas Day was quite common and remained so within living memory. Indeed it was not till 1958 that Christmas Day became a public holiday in Scotland and arguably not till the late 1970's that Scots adopted what has now become the commercialised, homogenised version of excess and frivolity that we now associate with Christmas. While Dickens offers a redemptive, transformational experience at Christmas, Crockett offers less comfortable fare. Dickens at Christmas offers you (at the end) a warm hearth and a bellyful of turkey and figgy pudding; Crockett offers 'cauld sna' and warm porridge.' As we see in Packman's Pool:

'...away in the little cothouse Robin, for whose unconscious sake certain things might have been done, drew in a creepie stool to his porridge and milk with another thankful heart.

'So this is Christmas Day,' he said, 'and in England where they hae a' the siller they want, folk get presents, and grand gifts, and as muckle as ever they can eat?'

He took one spoonful and then, recollecting that he had forgotten to say grace, he reverently took off his bonnet and asked a blessing.

Then he took another spoonful.

'But after a',' he added thankfully, 'Christmas or no Christmas, porridge is hard to beat!'

This collection features a number of stories that show the reader a different vision of Christmas, a vision as it was held in rural Galloway in the mid to late 19th century, in the hopes that it may be both entertaining and thought provoking for us to consider this period of the year from a different perspective – that of the Cameronian.

Who were the Cameronians?

Today the word Cameronian is usually associated with a now defunct Scottish Regiment, which was formed in one day, 14 May 1689, 'without beat of drum' and continued through to its final disbandment parade, in the form of a Conventicle, which took place on the holm at Douglas on 14 May 1968. Historically the Cameronians were an uncompromising 'sect' who might now be seen as fundamentalists.

In Crockett's writing, especially of his childhood, you can find lots of interesting nuggets of information about the Cameronians as a religious group, and of course, they are shown as people, flaws and all. For in Crockett's writing, respect has to be earned, whatever a man's status or religious proclivity. The religious Cameronians were named after 'The Lion of the Covenant' Richard Cameron (c1647- 1680). He was responsible for the 'Sanquhar Declaration' in 1680, and was killed at Airds Moss later that same year. Crockett's 'Men of the Moss Hags,' 'The Standard Bearer' and 'Love Idylls' all feature him as a 'background' character to the more 'ordinary' heroes who populate his novels and he pops up again in several other Crockett novels.

The Cameronians' fundamental belief was that the covenants (National Covenant, 1638; Solemn League and Covenant 1643) were still binding on Scotland. So they refused to acknowledge the uncovenanted King William II as head of state and they refused to enter the Presbyterian Church of Scotland after the Revolution (1688). They became a separate church after the religious settlement of 1690. In the 18th Century they completely repudiated the civil government, declaring themselves to be both living in a state of nature and to be at war with the state. As late as The Disruption of 1843 they retained a clear separate identity but finally many joined the Free Church in 1876. While the Reformed Presbyterian Church still exists in Scotland, Ireland and USA, the term 'Cameronian' has fallen by the wayside.

A Cameronian Christmas: The Stories.

The Packman's Pool sits in stark contrast to the more familiar Dickensian style of Christmas story. It's certainly a bleak story of a harsh life but with humour as well – Christmas seen as an English festival, a time where people eat and drink too much; an English festival but the boy Robin, who has tasted venison once and remembers it, makes do with porridge as every other day, and is satisfied. The starkness of rural poverty and the hard life Gray Steil lives is made harder by his dissolute brother and in his desperation, Gray is prepared to stoop even to murder to protect his own.

Barracloughs is definitely a realist story set in a more urban environment with death and potentially murder at the core of it. It is also a stark story of domestic abuse. The setting is unclear but probably England, though many 'Little Dublins' existed both in England and Scotland at the time. An area of Castle Douglas was called 'Little Dublin' in Crockett's day and it's just as easy to transpose the story there. Ann Barraclough's Christmas 'gift' comes at quite a price and for such a short story, retains the power to shock.

In *Peter Peatrack* irony is always to the fore. The Dickensian use of 'Biteangry' from the very beginning makes this clear. The Cameronian minister's fight against the influence of Christmas on his flock makes comic reading and his failure is assured from the very beginning. He loses control over his flock and his family and in the end becomes pragmatic and accepting. Transformative redemption is the keyword of Dickens' Christmas stories and Peter Peatrack might be seen as having a similar conversion but in a much doucer, Cameronian way.

Smugglers in all their forms were one of Crockett's recurring story types and in *The Last of the Smugglers* we are introduced to a Cameronian who uses his religion as an excuse to avoid paying his taxes. Again we see a bleak rural landscape, more acted upon by the weather than religion, as a young man from

London comes, ill-prepared to the wilds of Galloway to claim his dues, and gets a lot more than he bargained for.

The Last Anderson of Deeside has an underlying 'spookiness' to it as well as stark realism mixed with couthy Gallovidian humour. Describing a Galloway funeral, it once again draws contrasts between the worlds of London and rural Galloway and between the kinds of people who inhabit both places.

No one writes about winter as convincingly as Crockett. In the second part of this collection there are five stories of winter to prove the point.

Lucy of the Eyes is a very long short story in fourteen chapters. It is reminiscent of the long Romantic poems of Shelley or Byron, set in prose. The story is of Galloway born Stephen Douglas (clearly a version of Crockett himself) who tours Europe as a tutor and finds both love and adventure. Reminiscent in parts of Keats' *'La Belle Dame sans Merci'* it also includes fascinating descriptions of tobogganing and mountaineering from a time when these were both quite new sports. It shows that away from the Galloway hills, even in the Alps, Crockett is a keen observer of the countryside around him, as well as a romancer of the people he encounters there.

'Ice-running' is an excerpt from Crockett's best-known novel *'The Raiders,'* set in the early 18th century and while better remembered perhaps for the coastal scenes, this description of 'ice-running' on the frozen lochs in the Galloway Hills is both vivid and exciting – offering Crockett's trademark combination of adventure tied up with graphic and gripping natural description.

In *'The coming of Snow'* from *'A Galloway Herd'* we are treated to a childhood reminiscence of snow, with all its joys and dangers. Young Wattie is just out of kilts and can enjoy rolling in the snow for the first time in trousers. But for an imaginative young lad, danger is

never far away. Donald the sheep does threaten to steal the show in this excerpt!

'The Sixteen Drifty Days' is another excerpt from *'The Raiders'* and describes the time that Patrick Heron and the redoubtable Silver Sand (aka John Faa, King of the Gypsies) spend holed up in the wilds of the Dungeon of Buchan in the Galloway Hills. It's a great 'fireside' story, which tells of the history of Silver Sand as well as giving a remarkably alive picture of a remote part of Galloway subject to the full forces of nature in winter. And for anyone who has ever endured a particularly harsh Galloway winter, it will ring true.

Finally, in *'Storm on the Wilderness'* from the novel *'Rose of the Wilderness'* we see a more domestic, but every bit as bleak and dangerous tale of the winter season. The excerpt takes us through the year, with the inevitable death of Lily followed by the unrelenting nature of the winter which threatens not just life but livelihood of humans and animals alike. This is about as far from the cheery Christmas hearth as you can expect to get – and not a bad story to read if you're fed up with the modern, commercialised way of the world. It serves to remind that there was (and is) a very different world from the one of singing Santas and fairy lights. A world that, while fictionalised here, is in every sense more 'real.'

I hope that you enjoy reading the stories in this collection and above all, I hope that it inspires you to a New Year Resolution for 2015, to read more and more widely from Crockett's work. There is plenty of variety to choose from. If you don't know where to start, I advise you join The Galloway Raiders and begin your own journey with Crockett. Whether your interest is history, adventure or romance, there will be more than one story to satiate that interest.

Cally Phillips
November 2014

THE PACKMAN'S POOL

'It's just three days to Christmas,' said Gray Stiel to Robin as they stood at the black gates of the farm-town and looked up at the threatening December sky.

'Kirsmas—I think I hae heard tell o' that afore—what is't?' said Robin Stiel, who was Gray Stiel's nephew and twelve years old.

'Oh,' said Gray Stiel, whistling on his smooth-haired little collie, 'it's a time, juist!'

'But what is it a time for?' continued Robin, who was small for his age but mighty persistent.

'Robin, man, ye are awfu' ignorant; I maun send ye to the schule,' said Gray Stiel, who had been as far as Lockerby Lamb Fair and once met an Englishman. 'Christmas is a time when folk hae mair to eat than they ken what to do wi', and mair to drink than is guid for them.'

'O Lord,' groaned Robin, 'I wuss Kirsmas wad come to the Nethertoun. I'm no mindin' what I hae to drink. There's naething sae slockenin' as cauld water, but to hae mair than ye can eat, it's just heeven to think on!'

Gray Stiel sighed, and for a moment his face looked a little weary. He too did not know what it was to have more to eat than left him hungry when it was gone. And, to tell the truth, he did not care much. For he had grown indurated to a brave, brisk, hard life at the hill farm of Nethertoun among the wild hills of Galloway. He had been fourteen years herd to Ralph Edgar of the House of Folds, commonly known as 'Hoppety-Skip' from a hobbling way of walking he had, through his leg having once been put out of joint (it was said by an indignant former herd), and he now knew that he would not make a fortune in the service of his present master.

Gray had thought it was a fine thing when he was a younger man to get such a place, the sole charge of as fine a 'hill' as there was in all Galloway, a cow's grass, one lamb in every two-score of those drafted off the farm at selling time, and five-and-twenty pounds in wages. Gray Stiel at that time was twenty-four years of

age and sanguine.

He was in love, too, and hoped that this 'doing for himself' would bring him quickly to the goal of his hopes. But after the first successful season a series of backward unkindly years had smitten him sore. There were late snowstorms, into which the young lambs were born only to die. He himself was stricken with a pleurisy which cut like a knife into his flesh each time he mounted a brae. But still he struggled on, with hope upspringing in the loyal faithful heart of him. Gray Stiel was true steel.

But yet sorer things to bear struck him. In one year his father died, his mother, left penniless, aged and infirm, came to live with him, bringing one Robin, a baby, the son of Allan, Gray Stiel's elder brother, who had levanted into parts unknown out of the reach of his responsibilities. Then one week after she had come to her son's house, she woke wailing in the dawn with a great and strange fear upon her. She was blind. Something had snapped after long wearing pain in her eyeballs—snapped suddenly and without warning. And so she became a burden upon Gray, and wearied his life out by telling him so—which, indeed, was his greatest burden.

With his own hands he had to dress her, and lead her about the house. He was nurse to little Robin, carrying him often to the hills with him in the nook of his plaid, or in bad weather taking a hasty run down in the mid of the morning to the cot-house to see that all was right within.

Then to show that the blast of misfortune had not blown itself out, the one cow died, and Gray had three miles to walk before he could get a bottle of milk for his two helpless charges, while the road was so rough that oftentimes it was churned into butter in his pocket by the time he got back. After the lambing time it was easier, of course, for then he milked the ewes which happened to lose their lambs. And those who know understand that it is no joke to milk a full-sized old blackface of the mountains—a 'Snaw-breaker' and the mother of many.

But Gray Stiel came through the trial, though it

handicapped him for life. In the autumn his cunning master offered him an advance upon his wages, part of which he used in buying another cow, and part in paying some outstanding obligations of his father's about which his mother kept up a perpetual craking complaint wearisome to listen to.

Then quite suddenly his sweetheart, Peggy Sinclair, a small farmer's daughter in the low country, married his master, Ralph Edgar, called Hoppety-Skip. She was eighteen years of age and she had been acted on by her people, whose pride was awakened when Hoppety-Skip came a-courting in a dark green gig with lines picked out in red. That the bridegroom was within a few years of seventy made no difference to them, though it did to Peggy, gentility's sacrifice.

For many days Gray Stiel went to the hill with a worse pain in his heart than last winter's stitch of pleurisy. He had never seen Peggy since, though she had come to Nethertoun once or twice with her husband. But on these particular days Gray Stiel had business among his flocks on the remotest hilltops, and if Hoppety-Skip wanted to see him, he could come to seek him.

So the years went on and Robin grew a big boy. The weariful complaining of Gray's mother was suddenly stilled in the tenth year of his herdship at Nethertoun, and the lonely man felt the want acutely. But from that day his heart was set on Robin, the child of his lost brother Allan. It used to be his fear that he would come back and claim his son. Gray Stiel felt sure that Allan could do that, or any other mean thing to which he applied his mind.

So at the yett of Nethertoun, leaning upon the top bar and looking at the dull grey of a sky which presaged snow. Gray Stiel and his nephew Robin stood. Three or four dogs, feeling the need of keeping the blood coursing through their veins that nipping winter morning, tumbled over each other with riotous snapping of teeth, worrying and yelping with their noses in the scruff of each other's necks.

A far-away whistle reached them in the midst of their play, and instantly every dog stopped in the midst

of a spring, or was turned to stone with jaws wide open for a snap. Their ears were instantly cocked in the direction of the sound, and a low continuous gur-r-ring quivered through each from sharply-pointed nose to twitching tail.

With a great fear in his heart Gray Stiel went to the barn-end and looked down the valley. What he saw made him turn sharply round and bid Robin go into the house and bide there. Whereat the boy, though infinitely curious, obeyed without question. He had but one law, and that was the will of Gray Stiel.

Then Gray took his staff in his hand and went down the glen to face what he felt might be the greatest peril of his life. Upon a rock sat a tall, burly man clad apparently in rags. The toe of one foot peeped through the broken boot. His hair of a sandy grey was short cropped, and his face had an unwholesome prison pallor like half-bleached cloth.

He was drinking raw spirits out of a bottle as the clean muirland nose of his brother told him a hundred yards off

'Ho, Square-toes!' he cried, waving the bottle about his head, 'come and have a drink. You won't — you upsettin' blastie. Well, then, I will, if ye will not. There!'

He swigged off the remainder of the contents without removing the bottle from his lips. Then catching it by the neck he threw it with unsteady aim at one of the circling collies, who, of course, easily evaded the clumsy missile. The bottle smashed against the rock with an ugly sound as Gray Stiel stood face to face with his enemy.

Allan Stiel balanced himself uneasily, lurching a little, and trying to suppress a hiccough. Then he smiled.

'I have come for my share of the family estate,' he said, 'heir, you know. Gray—eldest son of his parents. Where's the cash my father left— mother too? Give me my portion of goods. Master Stay-at-home, or Allan Stiel will soon let ye ken what's what!'

'Allan,' said Gray Stiel, 'well do you know that our father not only left no money but died in debt—not

through any fault of his own, poor man. And as for my mother, God rest her, she brought me nothing but the clothes on her back.'

Allan Stiel laughed aloud.

'Nonsense, man,' he said, 'I've heard you paid faither's creditors in full, and some o' mine too. That shows ye hae siller. Nae man pays siller that he hasna got. Sae if ye please, nae gammon wi' Allan. Ten pounds ye pay me or I will tak' awa' that callant o' mine to learn my new business. Oh, it's a braw trade!'

There was no need for Gray Stiel to ask what that trade was. The man breathed beggary, theft, and debauchery from polled head to cracked boots. And to think that such an one had a claim upon Robin, and could make him like that!

Gray Stiel drew his breath hard.

'I havena the siller,' he said slowly; 'I havena a pound note i' the hoose!'

'Then ye ken where to get it,' retorted his brother, 'there's your sweetheart, Peggy, married to your rich maister, a young lass wedded to an auld man. She will never refuse a loan to her jo for the sake o' auld lang syne.'

'I cannot do that!' said Gray with a gasp.

Allan Stiel swore a great oath, and held up his clenched hand above his head. His prison paleness flushed purple.

'Then I swear that if ye do not get me that ten pounds by Christmas Day, I will tak' the boy wi' me. It's an awesome-like thing to keep a boy frae his ain faither that has tane a' the trouble o' bringin' him into the world, and noo ye wad hinder him frae learnin' to earn an honest penny, and to be the staff o' his faither's declinin' years!'

The affectionate parent turned and strode unsteadily down the rough rocky track which led towards the loch. Gray Stiel watched him with wild whirling thoughts in his heart. At the angle of the path Allan stopped and shouted back, 'Ten o'clock at the Packman's Pool on Christmas mornin', and mind ye hae the siller wi' ye!'

Gray Stiel went back into the house and his

collies slunk uneasily after him. Their master ought, they knew, to have been on the hill long ere this. There were not so many hours of daylight left in which to cover so much moss and heather. But still Gray Stiel sat and thought.

Robin, wearied of his book, had risen and gone to the door with his dog Airie. Gray Stiel abruptly bade him come in and sit down. He was not to go out of doors that day while he was on the hill. He was afraid that his brother might yet return.

Then, having locked the door, Gray took the path for the Craig Lee knowes, whence the best general idea of the hill can be got. The sheep, it appeared to him, were all on their several ridges and slopes, and Gray Stiel resolved (as he put it) to 'leave them to Providence for yae day!'

Then with an abrupt change of direction he struck right across the moorland for Dee fords, conquering the heather and moss-hags with his long shepherd's stride. He was making a bee line for the House of Folds, where dwelt a woman he had never set eyes upon, since she had looked up and told him how much she loved him. But now it was not a time to let any sentimental considerations stand in the way. He must see Peggy Sinclair— he could not bring himself to say the other name by which men called her. And as he spoke the image of Hoppety-Skip, his mean, narrow-visaged grippy master, rose before his eyes with a sense of physical disgust. He stopped and half turned on his heel. No, he could not do it— not even for Robin's sake. And yet the thought of the babe whom he had held in his arms, laying him down in his plaid only that he might milk the ewes, and— yes, it should be done.

It was late in the short winter's afternoon before he reached the House of Folds and asked for 'the Mistress.'

She came, and at sight of him set hand to her side with a strange little animal cry, something like a weak thing that has been trodden upon.

'Gray,' she whispered mechanically, 'ye hae comed!' Perhaps she was thinking of the tryst she

never kept. At least Gray Stiel was.

Then it was that there came a strange construction into the man's throat. Something seemed to grow so great and hard at the root of his tongue, that he had no words to articulate. Then all at once he noted that it was dark, and he thought of little Robin sitting alone with his dog in the cothouse of Nethertoun. Then words came suddenly to him.

'I have a sudden call,' he said; 'Allan has come back and swears that he will take Robin frae me—and— mak' him a thief like himsel' if I winna gie him ten pounds on Christmas morning!'

There was a pitiful look on the face of the young mistress of the House of Folds and her hand sought her throat, wavering upwards like a little detached flame from a fire of green wood. 'Oh, I havena a shilling. Gray,' she whispered, 'he—he winna— And oh, Gray, it was a' my faither!'

At that moment from the little parlour there came the sound of a kind of skipping patter as if a large dog had leaped down from a chest upon the bare wooden floor. And the girl involuntarily withdrew further from the door, as it were, shrinking within herself.

'Wha's there— wha's there?' cried a high-pitched, querulous voice, 'what for canna ye come in, wha-ever ye are? Stiel—Stiel! What's wrang about Nethertoun? Are ony o' the sheep deid? Dinna say that the steadin's on fire?'

Then he turned to his wife.

'Gang in there,' he said, as he would have spoken to a dog, glancing over his deformed shoulder at her with an ugly look on his face, strange under his crown of reverend hair.

'Lend ye ten pounds to gie to your ill-set brither — my bonny pound notes that I hae worked sae hard for!' he screamed when he understood. 'Gray Stiel, do ye think I hae gane crazy? And ye hae no been that fast in payin' back what ye owe me already, that I should fling awa' ten pounds, for you and your brither to waste in drink an' debauchery!'

'To keep the boy—and what for should ye keep the boy? I wat ye hae wasted mair on that boy than

wad hae paid me my legal debt ten times ower! Na, na, Gray, gang your ways back, and let the wean gang to his faither. That's aye a mouth the less to be fed aff the Nethertoun! And get a strong laddie that will be some use to ye on the hill. Guid-nicht to ye. And mind, dinna leave your hill and my sheep on ony mair siccan daft errands! Ay, or you and me will quarrel, Gray!

The door slammed to and Gray Stiel was left without in the darkness gripping his hands to keep them from taking hold of the miser's scraggy neck. And while Peggy, the wife of Hoppety-Skip, lay all night awake thinking of Gray Stiel and his trouble, hardly once did Gray Stiel think of her. For all his mind was on Robin, the boy whom he must deliver into his father's hand on the morning of Christmas,—the day when Happiness came to the whole earth.

And on the twenty-fifth day of December Robin woke late to see through the curtains of his bed a strange sight. His uncle Gray was taking down the old gun off the wall—the gun with the long single barrel which had not been fired for many a year. He cleaned it carefully, and then as carefully loaded it, measuring the powder in the hollow of his hand and taking care with the wadding and something else that was certainly not the lead pellets he used for rabbit-shooting. And the face of Gray Stiel was as the face of the dead, for he had not slept since he had met with his brother Allan three days before.

Then drawing an ancient web purse from a worm-eaten desk, sole relic of the former better estate of the family, he counted out seventeen shillings and nine pennies, in silver and copper—all his worldly possessions. It was with a somewhat grim look that he thrust this into his pocket, and taking in hand the alternative to the seventeen-and-ninepence, he went out on tiptoe.

Robin drew aside the curtain and saw him striding away down towards the loch through the falling snow. That was why Robin had slept so long. It

was after nine o'clock of the day, but the snow had been falling all night and still continued. His uncle sank nearly to the knees in it. Poor Uncle Gray—Robin thought—to be obliged to go out in such weather. But again, perhaps he had seen a deer on the side of Craig Lee, and was only going to try for a shot.

That might be God's Christmas gift. Robin had once tasted venison and the flavour remained with him yet.

Gray Stiel came of a race which loves not murder, but is not averse to slaying in a just cause. And it was with no thought of the consequences to himself that he resolved that upon no consideration would he deliver Robin to his father. The seventeen-and-ninepence—yes, or—that which he had dropped into the old musket! His brother should have his choice of these two—but not Robin.

The snow fell softly, whisperingly. It was powdery with frost, and slid off the plummy branches of the fir trees with a hushing sound. There— there was the Packman's Pool, dead black amid a perfection of whiteness.

A mist as of blood ran redly across Gray Stiel's eyes. His ears drummed and he gripped the old gun that had been his father's. He could feel his heart beating in his throat. He knit his brows, and tried hard to collect himself, and even to con the speech he had resolved to make to Allan, his brother.

Yet, as he approached, there was no Allan to be seen— an empty bottle winked at him with one black eye from under a hoary eyelid of snow. Beyond, on the edge of the pool, there was a curious mound of snow hunched together.

Something in the shape took Gray Stiel by the heart. He uttered a hoarse cry, and dropping his gun he ran forward and laid his hand upon the thing.

It was his brother, frozen dead, all his evil days and evil deeds covered with the spotless righteousness of the snow.

And Gray Stiel fell on his knees and lifted up his hands in thankfulness to heaven that the sin of Cain was not to be his that bitter Christmas Day.

And away in the little cothouse Robin, for whose unconscious sake certain things might have been done, drew in a creepie stool to his porridge and milk with another thankful heart.

‘So this is Christmas Day,’ he said, ‘and in England where they hae a’ the siller they want, folk get presents, and grand gifts, and as muckle as ever they can eat?’

He took one spoonful and then, recollecting that he had forgotten to say grace, he reverently took off his bonnet and asked a blessing.

Then he took another spoonful.

‘But after a’,’ he added thankfully, ‘Christmas or no Christmas, porridge is hard to beat!’

But though he knew it not, out by the Packman's Pool, God had placed the best Christmas gift that could have come to the cothouse of Nethertoun, or into the life of young Robin Stiel, the nephew of one Gray, a brave man of that name. But that is not the end of the story. Other things even more interesting occurred after the death of Hoppety-Skip, which happened also before that Christmas snow melted.

For death as well as life is the gift of God.

BARRACLOUGH'S

Undoubtedly Anne Barraclough had her griefs. She lived in a hovel which no other in Creelport would condescend to inhabit. It was set far back against the cliff, a dry and crumbly limestone, with cracks in it which opened mysteriously at night and shut during the day equally without reason.

But Anne Barraclough had other sorrows—a son and a husband. Sam, the son, had early despised authority, run with the wild lads from the mills,—played tricks with his master's till, narrowly escaped the jail, and, as the saying went, would have broken his mother's heart, but for the trifling circumstance that that had been broken before— by her husband, Bob Barraclough, poacher, pugilist, breeder of bull pups, pigeon flier and fancier, and, in fact, everything except what he had been brought up to be, the sober hard-working mason his father had been before him.

Nevertheless, Robert Barraclough was still a landlord. His property was, however, confined to the small ex-stable, which a misdirected ingenuity had converted into a shebeen and unlicensed lodging-house for tramps and other free-living gentlemen of undefined professions who objected to being looked up at four in the morning by the police in the regular lodgings of Creelport.

Anne Barraclough was a hard-featured, wizened woman, with a head that seemed always drawn a little back as if to escape a blow. And indeed Bob, her husband, let her know, as he said, 'what was the law of England in the matter of wives,' when he came home after being turned out of the 'Blue Posts' or the 'Anchor' for quarrelsomeness in his cups.

He beat her if he found guests drinking with Anne in their slovenly barrack. Why should she be sitting there and enjoying life while he had been turned out of two public-houses into the raw night air— and him with such a delicate chest. He beat her equally if there were no guests in the shebeen, and, by consequence, no money to furnish him out with on the following morning. Anne was idle, good-for-nothing,

lazy, untruthful, and worse than all, she had money on the quiet, which she was keeping from her lawful husband. She was making a purse for herself. For all which reasons, Anne Barraclough must be corrected. And when Bob Barraclough was incapacitated for the performance of the duty, his son Sam kindly undertook it for him.

Yes, her own son. And him she feared most. For he was more often sober. He was the more cruel, and Anne went in terror lest she should one day reveal her secret hiding-place.

Yes, it was all true. Anne Barraclough at fifty was deceitful, idle, hopeless for herself, and also—she had money, which, with a great carefulness, she was keeping away from her loving relatives—from Bob, her husband, who beat her, and from Sam, her son, who aided and abetted his father so to do.

Anne Barraclough did not drink. She could not afford it. She would have liked dearly to drown her sorrows, and she had many bottles of a certain cheap Water of Lethe, miscalled whisky, stored away at the back of the old stable under the crumbly limestone. But all that was to sell, drop by drop, glass by glass, counted and reckoned—so many pieces of brown money, so many small silver bits—some to be beaten out of her by Bob, some to be yielded to Sam to keep him quiet and decently incapable of observation. But most—especially the silver ones, little and white and jingly, were to be hid away in another place—for another purpose.

What purpose? Ah, but that was Anne Barraclough's secret. Nearly all the world—that is to say all Creelport—looked askance on Anne. The Barracloughs were the worst people in its worst district.

'Down in Little Dublin,' was the standing direction to their neighbourhood, 'as far down as you can, and the farther down the street you go the tougher it gets. The Barracloughs live in the last house.

After IT happened, all Creelport remarked, that they had always known it of Anne Barraclough.

'She has the look of a murderess!' they said, as

usual, exceeding wise after the event.

'She looks secret!' the jurymen whispered in the court when they condemned her, and old Bowlby, of the 'Blue Posts' who had lost a steady customer in the deceased, voted steadily against any recommendation to mercy.

But this is going too fast. It was the revealing of Anne Barraclough's secret which led to the tragedy, and so that must come first.

Yet it was no dark and deadly secret after all. Only that, long before the day of Bob Barraclough, Anne, his wife, had once been young and happy. He had loved her—he had told her how much along by the harbour wall, at the place where there are the fewest lights, and after they were married he had taken her to live away in the great seaport to which, from the deserted pier of Creelport, they could see the vessels passing up channel in a long procession.

Then he had died—died far away from her, and, when his mate called in to tell her of it, and ask if she wanted his chest sent—there was a little baby girl asleep in a borrowed cradle.

These things Bob Barraclough never knew, and Anne, his wife, was afraid that he would find out. That was her secret.

But up yonder in Doggermouth there was a slim girlish pupil-teacher who was to enter the Normal College in November, and people wondered how a mere suburban lodging-house keeper, depending on the poorer class of summer visitors, could afford such an extravagance.

'It was a folly of Mrs. Smith's,' the neighbours said over their neighbourly tea. But then Widow Smith had always been foolish about that girl. They hoped that the money was honestly come by, that was all.

And Lily Smith going to and fro every day—morning at nine, afternoon at ten minutes past four—to the Doggermouth Public School—also thought it was very kind of Aunt Smith, the only relative she had ever known. So, indeed, it was, for though Anne Barraclough's secret was safe behind Widow Smith's mended spectacles, that good old woman added many

little luxuries according to her means, and perhaps a little beyond, to the monthly remittance which came so regularly from the Creelport post office.

Now, Lily Smith was not by any means an ordinary sweet, pretty, young woman. She had a mind of her own, as her father had when he took to running arms and ammunition to the Revolutionists in Cuba and died of it with his back to a wall. Just a little brown-skinned thing, with a capable mouth, a firm chin, and dark grey eyes which glittered quietly under long lashes whenever the head mistress, Miss Priscilla Fisher, rebuked her for what was noways her fault.

Having once or twice encountered this steely and most arresting look, certain young men pupil-teachers, arrogant and over well-informed young men, to whom all knowledge was an open book, very discreetly left her alone.

'That Lily Smith,' said Ernest Towers, savagely, as he experimented gingerly with his first cigar, 'has no more feeling than a cat!'

He was wrong, but it was as well for him that he did not persevere so as to find out. But all that the world saw of Miss Lily Smith was only a trim, grey-gowned, brown-cheeked maiden tripping like a mouse daintily along the doubtful cleanliness of the Doggermouth pavements, half a dozen pupils of doubtful cleanliness tagging about her skirts.

Only a science master, recently appointed to the new secondary school over the way, took very much notice of her, and he merely from a window. She had a sweet smile, and he liked the quick way she had of smacking the little urchins when they muddled her dove-grey dress. This always made him laugh, and as there was not much to laugh at in Doggermouth, Mr. Henry Hurst, B.Sc, was grateful, and at ten minutes to nine and ten minutes after four each day, he was sure to be at his window, carefully examining a test-tube.

Curiously enough, in order rightly to manipulate a test-tube, it is necessary to arrange one's hair before a mirror, and to make certain of a cunning little upward crook of the moustache upon which Mr. Henry Hurst prided himself as upon a scientific discovery. The

left side pleased him best, and so he always held the test-tube sideways to the light, as he examined it carefully, in approved laboratory fashion.

He thought that little brown Miss Lily was quite unconscious of all this, and so most people would have thought too. Yet she noticed him the very first time, remarked the device of the test-tube the second, and the third she kept her head down and muttered 'impudence,' as she walked a little more smartly past.

On this occasion she gave dirty Johnny Sams an extra shake for pulling at her portfolio, and perhaps in part he served as whipping boy to the intrusive science master across the way. But still, being a woman (or on her way thither), in a week or two it began to warm her heart to remember that her passing made a difference to somebody. In a month she would bitterly have resented his absence, and one day when she missed seeing him by the least fraction of a second, her temper was the object of comment to her entire division of the infant class.

However, the prize distribution would take place that day week, and (first) Miss Lily Smith, and (second) Mr. Henry Hurst, B.Sc, reflected that on that day they would be certain to meet face to face.

The great day of the prize-giving, as usual, stirred all Doggermouth, and happened also as usual on the day before Christmas. For the first time since Lily Smith was a little girl, the Creelport registered letter for Aunt Smith failed to arrive at the cottage.

'Something wrong at the office,' said the widow grumblingly; 'them young maids there be surely more concerned with their beaux, than to serve Thomas out his letters to fetch, as is their duty!'

But the reason for the non-arrival of the registered letter was other than the beaux of the girl-clerks of Doggermouth. It concerned the Barracloughs, of Creelport, and in especial Anne, wife of Bob and mother of Sam— mother, too, of Widow Smith's Lily.

Barraclough's shebeen, down at the tough fag-end of Little Dublin, had been in the way of luck—that is, of such luck as came its way. There had been a strike, and the dock labourers thrown out of

employment spent largely upon the fiery fusil-oil and raw spirit concealed at the back among the crumbling limestone. The liquor seemed indeed, more than ordinarily potent. Headaches were more rapidly produced, and even strong men, in that close dry-smelling atmosphere, experienced strange swimmings in the head. There was no doubt about the strength of Bob Barraclough's whisky.

Yet Anne Barraclough hardly did herself justice, for a reason. It was not the responsibility of so much money in her deep under-pocket, which she carried half-full of saw-dust to keep the coins from jingling. It was that she had a little paragraph in her breast, cut from a Doggermouth paper, left by a transient customer on the previous evening.

Doggermouth Public Schools. — The annual Christmas prize-giving, inaugurated several years ago by our local school board, and which has in the past owed so much to the liberality of its generous chairman, Mr. Trophimus Gane, will take place in the large hall of the Technical School on Friday, December 24th, at three o'clock, Mr. Trophimus Gane, J.P., in the chair.

In addition to the interest usual on such an occasion, parents and friends will be treated to the performances of a choir, selected from all the infant schools, trained and conducted by Miss Lily Smith, who has recently so highly distinguished herself at the entrance examination of the Metropolitan Normal College, where she took a first place. Mrs. Gane will preside at the harmonium, the gift of her husband, Mr. Trophimus Gane, J.P., chairman of the board.'

The last noisy guests had departed from Barraclough's on the evening of Thursday, December 23rd. It had been a time of profit, and Anne had a goodly sum to put away. She lingered, however, over the contents of an old pocket-book which she kept (as least likely to be disturbed) within the rough covers of the Barracloughs' family Bible. She knew that for the present Bob, her husband, was harmless. She could see him extended, toes pointing to the ceiling, on the floor. She could hear him snore. She thought that Sam,

her son, was out on one of his mysterious excursions.

Full of the pleasure of being alone, she took out an old pocket-book and gazed in rapture at the contents. There were two or three baby photographs, features and sex equally indistinguishable. Then came a girl—dimpling in corkscrew curls, with eyes like black beads—then a baptismal certificate, a school group, and a collection of such announcements as that quoted above, with the name of Lily Smith, underlined, always prominent among the prize takers. There were also many letters from Widow Smith, much in the same words, acknowledging a monthly remittance.

'Lily is as good a girl as any mother need wish, and no trouble, eggsept shows some temper with her teething.' As who indeed would not.

Anne Barraclough was smiling at this last. A tear was slowly irrigating a furrow on her cheek, and pushing its way towards the angle of her chin, when suddenly a shaky hand, accustomed to larceny, shot over her shoulder from behind and snatched the pocket-book while the thief laughed a triumphant laugh.

'I have it this time, mother,' said Sam Barraclough, and he laughed again as she screamed in fear. He repulsed her several times, as she desperately strove to regain her treasure. Then he lay back on a wooden settle and kept her off with his foot, while he despoiled the pockets, rooting and nosing through them like a beast o' prey, as, indeed, he was.

'Miss Lily Smith,' he cried, 'who's she? A marriage certificate—yours, old lady? A sister, too, have I? So that's where the money goes to, and tomorrow is the school prize-giving! So nice. Well, I'll be there, and I'll see Lily Smith. I'll tell her where the money comes from that's made a fine Miss of her. She goes to no Normal College, not if I know it! Normal College indeed—doing me out of my rights! Ain't I Sam Barraclough? Isn't the money all made at Barraclough's? Well, then—out with it, mother. Show me where you keep the shiners. Give me halves and I'll never trouble you more. You won't, eh? Then, by God, I'm off to Doggermouth Public School tomorrow— it's public, that's one comfort, and

I'll cry out your shame and hers— before all them kids and teachers—some o' them sweet on Miss Lily, no doubt— ay, and before that precious school board that's so fond of her— yaw, that I will!

'I will kill you first!' said Anne Barraclough, the same glitter which lay so stilly under her daughter's lashes coming into her eyes as she looked at her son.

'Show me where you keep the money, then, or I will,' he threatened.

Anne Barraclough appeared to waver. Then, suddenly taking a resolve, she pointed with her hand.

'In there,' she stammered, 'in there, Sam— in one of them cracks of the limestone.'

'What,' cried Sam, 'between our cellar and the Provost's lime-kiln?'

'Yes,' said his mother softly, 'just at the place where it always feels warm when you put your hand against the wall.'

'Gimme a pick,' said Sam; 'I'll have it out, every penny of it.'

He laid down the pocket-book, in his eagerness to search for the hoard. She snatched it up, and was through the door like a shadow.

The Select Infant Choir of the Doggermouth Public Schools, trained by Senior Pupil Teacher Lily Smith, was singing its closing hymn—

'Lord, a little band and lowly. We are come to sing to Thee—'

The science master was crooking the left side of his moustache, and watching the brown cheek of the conductress flush with pride and pleasure, when he saw two policemen enter. They looked a moment, and then the taller laid a hand on the arm of a tired woman in rusty black sitting by the door, a stranger in the neighbourhood. He stooped and whispered something in her ear.

'What for?' she asked simply.

'Murder,' he answered as quietly; 'they are both dead.'

'Who?' said Anne Barraclough, her eyes on his

face.

'Your son and your husband!' said the policeman.

'Thank God,' said Ann, rising with a smile; 'I'll go willin'!

It was long remembered as the most mysterious and difficult criminal case ever adjudged at Doggermouth assizes.

Briefly the facts as presented to the jury were these. Anne Barraclough had had a violent quarrel with her son and her husband, both of whom brutalised her mercilessly. She fled from the house on the night of the 23rd of December. On the morning of the 24th, both were found lying dead, Sam in the limestone cellar still grasping a pick, and a considerable sum of money in silver scattered about. Nearer the door Bob Barraclough was dead, lying on his back on the floor.

The cause of the quarrel probably concerned a child born to a previous marriage, to whom it would be proved that Anne Barraclough was in the habit of remitting considerable sums monthly. The medical experts diagnosed death by poisoning, but failed to find traces of anything specific. But the woman was a known bad character, a shebeener, while raw spirit, chemicals, and dried herbs were found on the premises.

Anne Barraclough herself seemed dazed, and attempted no particular defence. Her official advocate, appointed by the judge, essayed the usual appeal to the feelings, but she seemed solely anxious for him to finish. She was listening for a name— that of Lily Smith. It was not mentioned in court, but was soon afterwards dragged into publicity by an enlightened and up-to-date journalism.

Twenty years was Anne Barraclough's portion, and, as she had said to the policeman who arrested her, she 'went willin'.'

She would have gone less willingly, however, had she known that Lily lost her place the week after, and that she was left without means to take up her course at the Normal College.

But Mr. Henry Hurst, B.Sc, promptly offered her another situation. He even changed his own line of life in order to do it, resuming his original role of chemist to a paper factory. Lily must go with him to Polwarth Mills as his wife. She refused time and again. After what had been printed in the papers about her mother, she would be a shame to no man. But Mr. Henry Hurst was nothing if not scientific. He said that it mattered not a straw to him who or what was her mother or her father, or her stepfather, It was the little brown thing with the flush on her cheek that he wanted.

And so, necessarily, he got her, flush and all.

It was not quite two years before the matter was cleared up. Barraclough's passed to other tenants, a shade more reputable. But it was not long before both husband and wife were found in an unconscious state, one on the threshold of the limestone cave, the other within. The wife died, the husband barely pulled through. The symptoms of poisoning were identical with those present in the Barraclough case. Then there came the long-refused investigation. It was a close day when the investigators arrived, among them Mr. Henry Hurst, still B.Sc, though in strict fact no longer a bachelor.

It chanced that one of the doctors had brought a dog, which, tired of the vapid boredom of the day, and the lack of canine society, stretched himself down on the threshold of the limestone cellar which had been Anne Barraclough's treasure house. By and by his master called. The dog slept on. He kicked him sharply in the ribs, equally in vain. The dog was dead. And Henry Hurst, nosing and searching about the cracks in the limestone, discovered the secret.

There was a lime-kiln on the other side of the little crag into which the original Barraclough had burrowed. As often as it was in action, after Sam's explorations with the pick, deadly carbonic acid gas poured through the cracks, and falling to the floor, mounted knee-deep or higher, an unseen pool of death to all that breathed it.

Thus had died Bob Barraclough and his son Sam, the latter kneeling in the pursuit of the

threepenny bits which rolled about the floor.

When they took Anne out of the prison and told her that she was free, she said it did not matter so long as they were dead. Money was given her in the name of the Crown, to make amends for the terrible miscarriage of justice. But Anne only said, 'It is very kind of the gentlemen. Send it to the Widow Smith at Doggermouth! Thank God, I can always earn my livin'!' And so, for the second time, Anne Barraclough went out into the darkness, this time to be heard of no more.

But she kept the pocket-book, and looked at its contents each morning and night — the baby photographs, the stalky girl in corkscrew curls and all.

'I am glad little Lily is married,' she said; 'he is a good man, they say. God keep such as I from ever coming between them!'

I am indebted for the facts and the dramatic conclusion of this story to Mr. Albert Bataillie's excellent report of the Maison du Four à Chaux case in the 1896 volume of his Causes Criminelles et Mondaines published in Paris by Dentu.—S. R. C.

PETER PEATRACK

Peter Peatrack, minister of the parish of Brinkilly, was a just man. Also an hard. He had argued himself out of friendship with all his neighbours. The very Presbytery of Biteangry had had enough of Peter. They even intimated through their clerk that Peter's attendance at the Presbytery at nine o'clock on the first Monday of every month would not be insisted upon. The brethren recognised that Brinkilly lay so far away, across so many dangerous waters, in such an out-of-the-way situation, that they could not expect to be favoured with the sight of the Reverend Peter Peatrack's countenance more often than, say, twice a year at the outside.

But Peter thought otherwise.

He had not much liked to go there before. He had no mind to jog on his round-barrelled sheltie all these weary miles to the town, and then pay the landlord of the Cross Keys sixpence for stabling, as well as provide a dinner for himself at the town of Biteangry, where the Presbytery dined copiously together after the transaction of business.

But now, since the Presbytery did not want him to go, Peter declared to his meek, inoffensive wife that he would not miss a single Presbytery day, not for all the tiends and tithes of the three Lothians three times augmented.

So Peter went, and his brethren moaned in spirit and were heavily afflicted. For Peter remorselessly lectured them on every subject that occurred to him, making his great brawny ploughman's hands crack together, as if he had resolved to take strength of arm to the Moderator's head in case of the least contradiction.

Peter Peatrack's strong point was consistency—consistency, and the practice of the Church of Scotland.

'Sir,' he would say, addressing the Moderator in stentorian tones, 'I am not aware what you might have meant when you took your ordination vows. But for myself, I resolved to oppose, to the extent of my humble

abeelity, all innovations and creeping seditions, a-a-ll seductions of any Popish or Episcopalian sor-rt, by whomsoever promoted!’

And Peter kept his word.

The singing of mere human hymns within the bounds of the Presbytery, even at family worship or privately in families, was a matter to be dealt with rigorously. No man, said Peter, could tell where the like of that would end. They would presently find themselves sitting alongside of the Great Scarlet Woman on the Seven Hills. Only ‘Woman’ was not the word that Peter used.

Organs Peter could not away with. He could not even speak connectedly on that subject, but spluttered and gasped till the assembled brethren feared (and hoped) an apoplectic fit.

Now, the Presbytery of Biteangry was not a particularly large one, though it included one or two large and influential kirks. Specially Peter detested the two town congregations of his neighbouring metropolis of Biteangry, distant from him only about six miles by the moor road.

One of these was a quoad sacra church — that is something of the nature of a chapel-of-ease, built for the accommodation of the rich folk of the upper end of Biteangry, who found the mile of muddy road between them and their parish kirk in the hollow down by the loch to be too much for their wives and children. At least, they put the blame on the wives and children.

This rich church of St. Bride's had recently called to itself a new minister. He was a young man, tall, with fair hair and a winning smile. Peter Peatrack hated him on sight, and when the Reverend Horace Glasgow first stated some of his college-bred opinions on ‘winning the masses’ and ‘attractive services,’ Peter Peatrack had to be held in his seat by two of the most burly of the Presbytery to prevent his destroying the rash young man on the spot.

After that the noise in the Presbytery of Biteangry could generally be heard two streets off, when Peter was on the war-path against ‘innovations.’

Those of us who have the honour and the

privilege of being ministers o' pairishes, are well aware.'

Peter would begin his harangues, so as to exclude the young minister of St. Bride's from any part or lot in the matter. But one day—it was the first Monday of December—the raw, bony figure of Peter Peatrack could be seen driving the steamy easter haar before him as he flapped his way Presbyterywards with a printed sheet in his hand, his long arms going like old-fashioned steamboat paddles.

The Moderator was closing his prayer when Peter burst in, and hardly was the 'Amen' out of his mouth before Peter, standing at his side, clapped the 'poster' down on the table beneath his very nose.

'It has come at last,' he cried, 'the abomination of desola-a-tion, the Mark of the Beast—the fingermark of the Woman that sitteth on the Seven Hills and snuffeth up the bluid of the Saunts—there it is before ye. Let the clerk read it, and then will I tak' up my testimony!'

The Moderator mildly suggested that Peter was hardly in order, in so far as it was usual for the clerk first to read the minutes of the previous meeting.

'Maister Modera-a-tur, is this a time to be yawpin' about Puir's Boxes and Life-off-Wark when the foundations o' the faith stand no longer sure, and when there is amongst us a young man, caa'in' himsel' a minister o' the Kirk o' Scotland, that is for denyin' the Confession, and going to and fro on the earth daubing wi' untempered mortar — I speak of the Reverend Horace Glasgow, M.A-A-A.' (this with fine scorn), 'of the bit chapel-o'-ease up the hill yonder that they caa' St. Bride's!'

The object of all this sat calm and quiet. He knew that there would be a row presbyterial over his Christmas services, the first in the district, especially over the evening Service of Praise.

'The church richly decorated'— 'music by a select choir'—'the o-a-a-rganist, Mr. H. A. Gregg, Mus. Bac, will preside at the o-a-a-r-gan!' quoted Peter Peatrack, at last finding a subject to which he could do justice. 'Is this a Rood Fair that has come amang us? Is it a play-actin' booth, wi' a hand-organ in the pulpit and a

puggy-monkey on the tap to tak' up the silver collection at the door?'

So for half an hour Peter the Objector invoked the shades of John Knox, or the 'Saunted Martyrs,' of the 'great fa-athers of the Kirk,' and then, suddenly finding himself without support, he snatched up the offending proclamation from the table, ground it under his heel, and took himself off down the street, making the doors of the Presbytery Hall clang after him.

That was Monday, and during the week every parishioner within the bounds received notice that their attendance was requested in the Parish Kirk of Brinkilly on the evening of Thursday the 24th of December (falsely called Christmas Eve) in order to hear a lecture by their minister, the Rev. Peter Peatrack, in which he would prove from Scripture, and from the fathers of the Early Church,—quoting and translating the original tongues,— how utterly impossible it was that the birth of our Saviour could have happened on that day, and also that the celebration of times and seasons was only a mockery and a mummery—a shred of Black Prelacy and a rag of Rome.

Many of these circulars were addressed by Elspeth and Patience Peatrack— and Patience (the younger of the two sisters, and a born mischief) saw to it that one was carefully forwarded to the Rev. Horace Glasgow, St. Bride's Manse, Biteangry. As the young lady was writing to the young gentleman anyway, this is perhaps not so great a wonder as it may seem at first sight. Patience had met him at her aunt's in Edinburgh during the previous winter, but (and this shows the sad laxity of modern principles) she had not thought it worth while to say anything to her father on the subject. It was her mother who received the letters, and trembled all the time she kept them in her side pocket.

As these two estimable young ladies folded up and addressed their father's lecture notices, they smiled one to the other. Such young things they were— so innocent, brought up in a moorland parish in which their father was the chief prop of purity of worship and the self-appointed guardian of the ark presbyterial.

Christmas Eve came. Willie Faddle, the ancient beadle of the Kirk of Brinkilly, grumbling and coughing as usual, went his rounds, lighting the drippy tallow candles which still served to illuminate the Parish Kirk in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

'What's come to the minister?' he growled. 'A lecture on a week nicht! Wha in Brinkilly cares a curse about Kirsmas? Had it been the New Year noo, and a roarin' First-footin' ploy wi' a score o' honest whusky bottles to be uncorked at twal' o' the clock—there wad hae been mair sense in that, and it wad hae brocht oot a' Brinkilly as wan man. But I misdoubt me sair that there will be a thin kirk and a thinner collection this nicht.'

At this moment the pretty head of Patience Peatrack, the minister's younger daughter, was thrust in at the door. She was hatted, and hooded, and boated, and muffed against a winter night's worst inclemency.

'Ay, Willie,' she said, 'are you there? Tell my father when he comes that he is not to wait for us—we may be a little late!'

And with that she was gone. Willie went to the door, and cocked a rather deaf ear in the direction of the high road.

'Deevil tak' my auld deaf lugs,' he growled, 'but if that wasna the clatter o' the minister's powny in the licht cart may I never lift elsin to shoe-leather again!'

Then he went back to the methodical trimming and lighting of the candles, ranged in their 'scoops' along the walls, shaking his head, and muttering.

'Weel, it's nane o' your business, Wullie lad, and she is a feat bit lass. But that there's some ploy on, mair than the minister kens o', I'll wager three pair o' guid single-sole shoon.'

After that there was another long wait. It passed the hour of eight, for which the lecture had been announced, but no one entered the kirk. With his long-handled snuffers in his fingers, Willie resolutely took his stand by the door, ready for all emergencies. At last

he heard an energetic scuffling of feet, and such a kicking of snow off against the wall that the very lights within quivered on the sconces.

Only Peter Peatrack could have done that, and the beadle hurried out to receive his hierarchical superior.

'Is there muckle room left?' demanded the minister, who had spent his day in wondering if he should provide extra seats from the schoolroom. They could easily be placed along the aisles.

'There's no' a livin' sowl in the kirk!' quoth Willie, the beadle.

The minister made one bound into the interior, and faced the yawning vault and the guttering candles with a sudden consternation. It was the end of all things.

'And where are my daughters?' he cried, with a strange false note in his voice, as if it were about to break.

'Weel,' said Willie, 'Miss Patience lookit in a whilie syne, and bade me tell ye when ye cam' no' to wait for them. They micht very likely be late!'

Peter Peatrack stood a moment stunned. His eyebrows drew together ominously.

'And was that all?' he demanded, laying sudden hold of his kirk-officer's garments as if he feared he too would escape.

'Leave go, minister,' cried Willie Faddle; 'ye are rivin' the lapels off my Sunday coat, and though it's time I had anither yin, I am no' likely to get it. There is something mair.'

'What is it—I charge you—speak?' said the minister huskily.

'Weel,' said Willie, 'dinna chairge the candle-snuffers doon my throat and I'll tell ye. Ye ken I'm an auld deaf man, minister, but when the wind is in the west, and I get my lug in the richt direction.'

'Speak plain, or I'll rive the truth oot o' ye, ye dodderin' auld docken leaf!'

'Aweel,' said Willie, 'wha wadna dodder when ye are shakin' them like John Muir's terrier when he grips a rat? But I'll tell ye—oh, I'll tell ye plain, minister. I

thocht I heard Donald's feet in the cairt drivin' awa' in the direction o' Biteangry directly after Miss Patience gaed oot o' the kirk. But then I'm a dodderin' auld docken leaf, ye ken, minister, and ye manna mind what I say!

With one great leap the parish minister of Brinkilly was out of the kirk. He took the graveyard dyke in his stride, and the next moment he was down the road in the direction of St. Bride's.

A score of things which he remembered, but had thought nothing of, now returned to him. His wife was anxious and troubled. Letters had been hidden under aprons at his approach. He had seen books—poetry books—which he certainly had never bought, lying about the house. Why should he? He had been needing a new Turretin for twenty years. Worst of all, there were the strange reticences of his family.

Ah, he had it—they had gone to the Popish festival—to take part in what was little better than a Mass.

Well, they should never enter his house again—NEVER—never—no—never!

But each 'never' grew less emphatic, even as it is printed above. After all they were 'his lassies.' His heart, hard to all else, narrow and shut in as a toad in a rock crevice, expanded when he heard 'his lassies' laugh together. He was proud of them too, proud of their wits and their good looks—though he had never told them so. He would have died first.

But—no, he was resolved. If they had really deserted sound doctrine and gone against his will, on purpose to defy him, to the Christmas Eve celebration at St. Bride's, he would cast them off! Yes, he would—he would!

It was late when he topped the last brae and saw the lighted windows of St. Bride's Kirk, with their illuminated tracery of coloured glass, and heard the solemn tones of the organ playing the people out of the kirk. In spite of the Voluntary, the congregation was already black on the brae when he struck the throng of them. Many knew him. One called him by name. And he heard an indistinct muttering of words that sounded

like 'the minister's daughters— that's their father.' For the St. Bride's congregation were so respectable and rich that they had to speak English to prove it.

He stumbled into the porch. It was a solid arch of greenery and red berries. Somehow he did not seem to mind this so much now. For there, immediately before him, his two daughters were coming out in the company of a tall young man and a sweet-faced old lady with silver hair.

The young minister of St. Bride's, to whose arm Patience had instinctively attached herself at sight of the white, drawn face of her father, came forward, holding out his hand.

'This is kind of you, Mr. Peatrack,' he said. 'Let me introduce you to my mother. These madcap girls had driven over to see her at our little service; but I am sorry to hear that it was done without your permission. Still more so, because I had made up my mind to come over to the Manse of Brinkilly tomorrow to ask you to give me your daughter— your younger daughter Patience. We love each other, as I daresay you know.'

Here he looked down, while Peter fought first for temper and then for breath.

'Sir,' he said, 'I did not know. Their father— who has loved them all their lives—to his shame, more than he has loved his Maker— is the last person they would think of telling!'

At which the two girls, Elspeth as well as Patience, flew to the old man, and with their arms about his neck hid their faces on his shoulder.

'We would have told you— we would indeed, father. Only we thought you would be so angry!'

'So I am—so I am!' gasped Peter, half choked, and trying to clear himself of the soft arms that clung so tight; 'your father that carried you on his back when ye were bairns—that has loved ye.'

And here he too had a difficulty with his voice. The girls wept unrestrainedly. The minister of St. Bride's softly shut the outer door of the church, and coming forward, laid his hand on the shoulder of his ancient and presbyterial foe.

'If there are not many other things we can agree

about,' he said quietly, 'I think we do agree that they are a pair of naughty girls, and that I do you a good turn in relieving your hands of one of them!'

'You are taking a sore burden on your shoulders,' said Peter half-reluctingly— 'a lassie that would deceive her ain father— yea, a yoke on your neck shall she be—a rod to afflict you all your days!'

'She is on your neck at this present moment,' said the young man, somewhat regretfully, 'but as for me, I have no objections to bear the yoke— in fact, I am even prepared to kiss the rod.'

The which, the father of Miss Patience smiling a grim approval, he proceeded to do.

And overhead, all suddenly, the Christmas bells rang out.

THE LAST OF THE SMUGGLERS

I had been so long away from my own country that when I looked out once more upon the heather at the little waterside station of Dornal, on the Port Murdoch line, the width and space about me, the loneliness of the hills, and the crying of the muir-fowl affected me almost to tears. It was not long, however, before I had other things to think about.

I had long been an orphan, and indeed had not felt much the worse for it. My father and mother died when I was a boy at school, and the uncle who brought me up and put me into his own business in England must have taken some distaste to his native country of Galloway. At any rate, he never revisited it, nor for that matter encouraged me to do so. Nevertheless, he gave me an excellent education, and trained me well to his own profession of architect and building contractor, with the idea that I should succeed him in Highgate when he should wish to retire to the pretty house he had built for himself on the shores of one of the most beautiful of English lakes.

But quite suddenly one morning, when I was twenty-four, my uncle was found dead in his bed, and I, Hal Grierson, came into immediate possession of a good business and a very considerable sum of money.

Among other things in my uncle's safe, I found a large number of letters, receipts for money, and private memoranda. From these I learned for the first time that I had a relative living of whom I had never so much as heard. My uncle Walter Arrol was of course my mother's brother and a man singularly reticent in all things not pertaining to business. Still, it struck me as strange, and in a way humorous, that as a young man of twenty-four I should come first to the knowledge that I had a grandfather living.

Yet after many perusals and reperusals of the letters and memoranda, I could come to no other conclusion. It was now the middle of December, and so late as the month before here was a letter dated from the 'Cothouse of Curlywee.' It ran as follows:—

'Dear Son, —Herewith I enclose bank-bill for

twenty-five pound. We have had a good back-end and are well. Please acknowledge receipt.—Your afft. father, John Arrol.’

I laughed aloud when I came upon the letter. It seemed to me that it was rather late to add a live grandfather to my family connection. Then the ‘we’ puzzled me. Had I a grandmother too—or several uncles? At any rate, my curiosity was highly excited.

But as far as correspondence went, I found no clue. My uncle had not encouraged sentiment, and though there were many similar notes, dating at half-yearly intervals for nearly fifteen years back, his ‘afft. Father’ never got beyond the simple and perspicuous statement that it had been a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ year that the ‘lambs were doing fine,’ or that ‘there were many daiths among the yowes.’

I discovered, however, that fifteen years before Walter Arrol had bought a little moorland property in Galloway which had then come into the market. He paid what, with my knowledge of English prices, seemed to me a ridiculously inadequate price for the five or six thousand acres it was stated to comprise.

The title-deeds were there, all in due order, and the receipts for taxation stamps, and lawyers’ charges. There was also the memorandum of a loan of a thousand pounds to ‘John Arrol, my father, to stock the farm of Curlywee with black-faced sheep,’ together with notes of payment of 4 per cent, for the first five years. After that I could trace no further receipts on that account.

It was just the day before Christmas that I set out from a midland town where I had had some business, resolved to find out all that I did not know about my Galloway relatives. I might easily have written, indeed, either to ‘John Arrol’ himself, who from his style of correspondence would have been the very man to give me exact information, or to the firm of lawyers in Cairn Edward whose name was upon the deeds and parchments.

But, though it would have ruined me from a business point of view had it been known in Highgate, I have always had a romantic strain in my blood, and

the little adventure pleased me.

I would take a little climb, I told myself, into the branches of my family tree. I would go in person to the Cothouse of Curlywee, and make the acquaintance of my grandfather. I wondered if 'John Arrol' would turn out to be as ignorant of my existence as I had been of his. At any rate, he was clearly not a person to waste words or squander his sentiment broadcast. Had I been content to prove my title to my uncle's property, he would have continued to sign himself 'John Arrol,' to enclose his half-yearly rent, and to require a receipt therefor to the end of the chapter without making the least effort to cultivate my acquaintance.

So this was the errand upon which I found myself in the little wayside station of Dornal. It was a grim and greyish winter afternoon, and I had occupied myself in speculating, as the train slowly struggled up the incline, how long this rough bouldery desolation was to continue, and at what point it would issue forth upon the level strath and kindly hamlets of men, where I had pictured to myself my venerable relative residing in patriarchal dignity.

'Can you show me the way to the village of Curlywee?' I said to the stationmaster, who came out of his office to take my ticket. He made a dash at me almost like a terrier at a rat.

'The what?' he said sharply, dropping his official manner in his surprise.

'The village of Curlywee!'

The stationmaster laughed a short, quick laugh, almost as one would expect the aforesaid terrier to do in mirthful mood. He turned about on the pivot of one heel.

'Rob!' he cried sharply. 'Come ye here!'

'I canna come! I'm at the lamps— foul fa' them! The oil they hae sent us this time will no' burn ony mair than as muckle spring water!'

'Come here, I tell ye, Rob, or I'll report ye!'

'Report awa'—an' be!' Something that I did not catch.

The stationmaster did not further attempt to bring his official dignity to bear upon his recalcitrant

subordinate. He tried another tack.

‘There’s a man out here wants to ken the road to the village of Curlywee!’

And as he spoke the little wiry stationmaster glanced quizzically up at me, as much as to say, ‘That will fetch him!’

I failed to see the humour— then.

Immediately I heard a bouncing sound. Heavy feet trampled in the unseen lamp-room, a stool was knocked over, and a great broad, jovial-faced man came out still rubbing a lamp globe with a most unclean piece of waste.

‘The village o’ Curlywee?’ he inquired, smiling broadly at me, as it were from head to foot. ‘Did I understand ye to say the village o’ Curlywee?’

I nodded. I was growing vexed.

‘I never heard tell o’t!’ he continued slowly, still smiling and shaking his head.

‘Is there not a conveyance— an omnibus, or a trap of any kind which I can hire to take me there?’

I was getting more than a little angry by this time. It seemed past belief that I should have come so far to be laughed at by a couple of boors in the middle of a Galloway morass.

‘Ow ay, there’s a conveyance,’ said the porter, ‘a pair o’ them!’

‘Then,’ said I tartly, ‘be good enough to put my bag in one of them and let me get off!’

The big man continued to rub and grin. The stationmaster watched me quizzically with his grey birse of a head at the side.

Then, with the piece of dirty waste in his hand, ‘Rob’ pointed to my knickerbockered legs and brown leather shoes.

‘Thae’s the only conveyance ye’ll get to Curlywee if ye wait a month at the Dornall!’

‘What!’ I cried, ‘is there no road? There surely must be some kind of a highway.’

Again the waste rag pointed. It was waved like a banner across the bleak moorish wilderness upon which the twilight was settling grey.

‘Road?’ he cried gleefully, ‘highway? Ay, there’s

the hillside—juist the plain hillside!

He waved me an introduction to it like a master of ceremonies.

'Enough of this,' I said tartly. 'I have come from London.'

'So I see by your ticket—it's a fine big place London!' interjected the stationmaster, with the air of one about to begin an interesting conversation.

'To see a gentleman in the neighbourhood of the name of John Arrol who lives at Curlywee. I would be obliged if you would point out to me the best and quickest way of reaching his house!'

The two men looked at each other. There was nothing like a broad grin on the big man's face now. The stationmaster also had lost his alert and amused air and had become suddenly thoughtful.

As neither of the two spoke, I added still more sharply, 'Do you know the gentleman?'

'Ow ay,' said Rob, 'we ken the man!'

'Well, be good enough to put me on the road to his house!'

Rob of the lamp and rag turned slowly as one of my own cranes turns with a heavy load of stone. His arm pointed out over the thin bars of shining steel of the railroad track.

'Yonder,' he said. 'Keep straucht up the gully till ye come to yon nick in the hill. Then turn to the left for three or four mile through the Dead Man's Hollow. Syne ye will come to a water, and if ye can get across, haud up the face o' the gairy, and gin ye dinna break your neck by faain' intil the Dungeon o' Buchan or droon ye in the Cooran Lane, ye will see the Cothouse o' Curlywee richt afore your nose!'

It was not an appetising description, but anything was better than staying there to be laughed at, so I thanked the man, asked him to put my bag in the left luggage office, and proffered him a shilling.

The big man looked at the coin in my fingers.

'What's this for?' he said.

'To pay the ticket for the left luggage,' I said, 'and the rest for yourself!'

Slowly he shook his head.

'There's no' sic a thing nearer than Cairn Edward as a left luggage office,' he said; 'but I'll put the bit bag in the lamp-room. It'll be there if ever ye want it again!'

'What do you mean?' I cried furiously. 'Do you know that I am?'

'I mean,' said Rob deliberately, 'that ye are like to hae a saft walk and to need a' your daylight before ye get to Curlywee this nicht. A guid journey to ye!'

Upon the details of that weary and terrible journey I need not linger; though, when at first I threw my leg over the wire fencing of the railway and stepped out on the moor, the instinct of the heather seemed to come back to me. I lost my way at least half a dozen times. Indeed, if the moon had not been shining about half full in behind the grey sky, I must have wandered all night without remedy and most likely been frozen to death. My London-made single-soled shoes were soon completely sodden, and the uppers began to part company with the welt. I was wet to the waist or above it by falling into deep moss holes, where the black peaty water oozed through the softest of verdurous green.

I was bruised by constant stumbles over unseen boulders, and scratched as to my hands by slipping on icy rock. A thousand times I cursed myself for leaving my comfortable rooms which looked over to Hampstead Heath. I might have been reading a volume of Rob Roy with my feet one on each side of the mantelpiece. And— at that very moment my foot plunged through the heather into a deep crevasse between two boulders, and I wrenched my ankle sideways with a stound of pain keen as a knife.

By this time I had been six or seven hours out on the moor. I had, to the best of my ability, endeavoured to steer the course set for me by the big-boned genius of the lamp. I possessed a little compass at my watch-chain, and my profession had made me accustomed enough to using it. But in the grey uncertain light the glens seemed to turn all the wrong way, and what 'the face of the gairy' might be I had not the least idea. I only knew that at the moment when I sprained my ankle I had been descending a hillside as lonely as an

African desert and apparently as remote from anywhere as the North Pole.

I managed, however, by an effort to get it out of the trap into which I had fallen, and sat down upon a rock, half dazed with the shock. I remember that I moaned a little with the pain and started at the sound, not realising that I had been making it myself.

When I came round a little I was looking down into a kind of misty valley. The ground appeared to fall away on every side, and I could see shadowy and ghost-like forms of boulders all about me, some standing erect like menhirs, pointing stony fingers to the grey winter sky; some with noses sharpened took the exact shape of Polar bears scenting a prey as you may see them in the plates of my favourite Dr. Kane.

Gradually it dawned upon me that there was some sort of a light beneath me in the valley. It seemed most like a red pulsing glow, as if a nearly extinct fire were being blown up with bellows. A sense of eeriness came over me. I had been educated by my uncle in a severe school of practicality. To be a contracting builder in the better-class suburbs of London is destructive of romance. But I have the Pictish blood in me for all that. Aboriginal terrors prickle in my blood as I pass a graveyard at midnight, and never when I can help it do I go under one of my own ladders! But now, for the first time in my life, I felt a kind of stiffening of the hair of my scalp.

But this did not last long. My foot and ankle recalled me to myself. I could not, I thought, be worse off than I was— wet, miserable, hurt. If that light beneath me betokened a human habitation in the wild, I was saved. If not— well, I was no worse than I had been.

So, with a certain amount of confidence, I made shift to limp downward towards the strange pulsing, undulating glow. But though the sweat ran from me like rain, I could only go a few yards at a time. Nevertheless, the ruddy eye grew ever plainer as I descended, winking slowly and irregularly, waxing and waning like a fire permitted to go low and then again replenished.

At last I was near enough to see that the light proceeded from beneath a great face of rock which sprang upwards into the sky so high that it faded ghost-like into the milky glow of the choked moonlight. Just then my injured foot jarred painfully upon a stone which gave beneath its thrust. The loose boulder thundered away down the declivity, and with a cry I sank upon my hands and knees.

When I came to myself I could not speak. Something had been thrust into my mouth, something that gagged and almost choked me. My hands also were tied behind me. The red pulsing glow had vanished, but between me and the faintly lit grey sky I could see a tall dark figure which moved purposefully about. Presently I found myself dragged to my feet and thrust rudely forward. I tried to make my captor understand that I could not walk; but as I could not speak, I could only do this by lying down and utterly refusing to proceed. Then my captor drew a lantern from behind a heather bush and flashed it upon my face.

As he did so I held up my foot and endeavoured by signs to show where and how it was hurt. I was utterly unprepared for what my captor did next. He took me by the arms and laid me over his shoulders, pulling the plaid which he wore about my body as a kind of supporting belt. Then, with slow steady strides, he began to descend the hill. I suffered agonies lest we should both fall, and my ankle pained me till I nearly wept with sheer agony.

At last, with a fling of his foot my captor threw aside a door, stepped down a step, and I found myself stretched upon some straw.

Then a candle was lit, and the flame, sinking to nothing and then rising again, illuminated a little barn half-filled with sheaves and fodder. Upon a heap of the latter I was lying with my head away from the door.

‘So,’ said he who had brought me, ‘I hae catched ye, sirrah!’

I saw my man now— a tall old man, with abundant grizzled hair, his face clean-shaven, and having a fringe of grey beard beneath the chin. Its

expression was stern, even fierce, and the eyes, under bushy eyebrows that were yet raven-black, looked out undimmed by years, and unsoftened by pity. It was a medieval, almost a savage, countenance. Even so, I thought, might Rob Roy himself have looked in his wilder moments. I had to recur to my wounded foot to convince myself that I had left a nineteenth-century railway station less than ten hours before.

Was it possible that this was the reason that my uncle did not visit his Galloway tenants, and did this one wish to square a deficiency in his rent by making an end of his landlord?

But the old man did not offer to touch me again, not even to release me from my bonds. He simply threw a few sacks over me, picked up the lantern, and went out with these words, 'Bide ye there, my man, till I am ready for you!'

But whether he went out to dig my grave or take his supper I could not make out, though the speculation was not without some elements of interest. At any rate, he locked the door behind him, and I was left alone in the black blank darkness of the barn.

It was poor enough cheer, and I began to shiver with the cold of the moss hags in my bones. Whether that exercise helped to loose the bonds about my wrists I know not— perhaps they were hastily tied. At any rate, it was not long before I had my hands loose. Then I could take the knotted handkerchief with its short cross knuckle of bog-oak out of my mouth. But I could do no more to make myself easy. My foot and ankle were already terribly painful, and the latter, as I could feel with my hand, had swollen almost to double its usual size.

After that I cannot tell very well what happened for some time. It may seem impossible, but I think that I slept at least, certain it is that the night passed somehow, between sleeping and shivering. Hot flushes passed over me, with wafts of that terrible feeling of falling away, which precedes fever.

When I awoke in the morning, it seemed that I saw a young girl sitting opposite me on the edge of an overturned bushel measure. She had her chin in the

hollow of her palm. Yet my head so whirled with the trouble which was on me, that I could not be sure till she rose and came close to me with a pitying look in her eyes. Then I tried to think of something to say to her which might explain who I was, and how I came thither. For I began to be sure there had been some mistake. However, I could think of nothing but what day it was. So I said to her as she approached in the most commonplace way possible, 'I wish you a merry Christmas!'

Yet all the time I knew very well that I was making a consummate fool of myself.

The girl seemed checked by my words, and then touched, perhaps, by the ridiculous anomaly of my appearance and my commonplace greeting, she burst into a ringing peal of laughter. I think I laughed, too, a little, but I am not sure. When next I came to myself I was being supported upon clouds or down, or at least by something equally pleasant and soft. Whereat I opened my eyes, and there was the girl trying to get some hot liquid down my throat out of a long thin-stemmed glass.

As soon as she saw that I was conscious, she said, 'Are you the excise officer from Port Mary who has been watching my great-uncle?'

'No,' said I; 'my name is Henry Grierson. I come from London. Where am I?'

But she sat up with a face of great horror.

'Not the exciseman— why, you are never Hal Grierson, my cousin?'

'That is my name,' I said, steadied by the situation. 'I came to look for a grandfather I never knew I possessed till a week or two ago! His name is John Arrol, and he lives at the Cothouse of Curlywee!'

The girl smiled a little.

'This is the Cothouse of Curlywee, and my great-uncle mistook you for a gauger, an exciseman! It is a mercy he did not kill you! But wait—I will bring him—he will be so sorry!'

By this time I had forgotten the pain in my head, and I was none so eager for the presence of my terrible relative.

'Please wait a moment. I want to ask your name,' I said, looking up at her.

'My name is Elsa Arrol,' she answered frankly, and in a cultivated manner. 'My father used to live here with his uncle during the last years of his life, and when he died I had to leave school in Edinburgh and come to Curlywee to keep house for my great-uncle!'

'Then you are my cousin?' I said, with some eagerness.

'Yes; a cousin of a sort— not a first cousin!'

And even then I was glad somehow, of so much kinship.

'Will you shake hands with your new cousin before you go?' I said.

'I will do better,' she answered, fluttering down from the edge of the corn-mow where she had seated herself. 'This is Christmas Day, and the cobwebs on the roof will serve for mistletoe!'

And, soft as a snowflake, I was aware of a waft of perfumed air and something that, which might have been a butterfly and might have been a pair of lips, alighting on my forehead for a moment.

'There, you will think I am a bold madam, but you are hurt, and deserve a greeting better than a handshake after what you have gone through.'

Again I was left alone. But not for long. I saw the fierce old man again in the doorway, his brow still gloomy, though it was no longer angry.

'This lass tells me you are not the Port Mary gauger,' he said, with a hard accent; 'that you come from London. Is this true?'

'It is,' said I briefly. For I thought of the knuckle of bog-oak between my jaws.

'Then what might you be doing on my hill at midnight of a winter's nicht?'

'Well,' I returned, with some point, 'it is, in a way, my hill also. At least, if it be a part of the property of Curlywee, left me by my uncle, the late Walter Arrol of Highgate.'

'What,' he cried, a little hoarsely, 'ye are never my Annie's boy— wee Harry Grierson?'

'The same!' I said, still curtly. For I wanted to see

how he would extricate himself. He stood frowning awhile, and stripping the piles from a head of corn.

'Ye will not misunderstand me if I confess that I am grieved for what has happened,' he said, with a certain stern and manifest dignity of bearing, which became him. 'I am sorry, not because ye are now my landlord, and I your tenant and debtor— but because I have made a mistak', and showed but poor hospitality to the wayfaring man!'

'Say no more about it,' I answered; 'but give me a bed to lie down on, and a pillow for my head. For I am very ill.'

The old man lifted me in his arms like a child, and carried me into his own room, where he laid me down. Then with a skill, patience, and tenderness I could not have believed possible, he undressed me, and laid me on his own bed.

When this was done he called Elsa, and she brought hot water to bathe my swollen ankle, now in girth well-nigh as thick as my thigh. He said not a word more about his rough treatment of me, nor did he mention my late uncle, nor the quarrel which had separated them in life.

All that strange Christmas Day I was light-headed, and these two gave me brews of herb-tea, famed in Galloway as a febrifuge. I dozed off, and awoke to find my cousin Elsa still unweariedly pouring hot water over my foot, or coming in with a new poultice of marsh-mallow leaves in her hands. I suppose I must have talked a great deal of nonsense. Indeed, Elsa told me afterwards that I made a great many very personal remarks upon her eyes and hair, which made her blush for shame before her great-uncle.

I was somewhat better, however, the next morning, and was able to join in the exercise of family worship, which my grandfather conducted at great length, reading two or three chapters of names and genealogies out of the historical books of the Old Testament in a loud, harsh voice (as if he had a spite against them). Then, reverently laying the great Bible aside, he stood up to pray. I noticed that as he did so

he smoothed his grey badger's brush of hair down on top, as if it were a part of the ceremony.

When he had finished praying, my grandfather stood awhile, and then sat down beside me.

'Elsa,' he said, 'will you betake yourself to the aumry for a space. I have something to say to this young man that is only for a man and a kinsman to hear.'

My cousin obediently vanished. I never heard so light a footfall.

'Now, sir,' said the old man, 'you have been brought up in another school and may misunderstand. But I must e'en tak' the risk of that. Did your uncle give you any religious training?'

'He never mentioned the subject to me, sir!' I said. For my uncle, though a good man, had been no churchgoer or church lover.

'Are you a true Presbyterian, then, or are ye one of the worshippers of the Scarlet Woman that sitteth upon the Seven Hills?'

'I have not really thought much about it,' I replied. 'I am a Christian—I believe I may say that. Though, indeed, I have no claims to be thought better than my neighbours—indeed, the contrary!'

'Then,' said the old man, frowning, 'I fear ye are no better than a heathen man, and a publican.'

'But,' I cried, 'was not there One born this Christmas Day who was partial to the company of publicans and sinners?'

I thought I had him there, but he evaded me.

'That is in the New Testament!' he retorted, somewhat disparagingly. 'You will not understand, but listen. I am an old Cameronian, as my fathers were before me. No one of us has ever owned an uncovenanted king. Arrols not a few have gone to prison and to judgment, because we would not bow the knee to tyranny in the land and prelacy in the kirk. I have never paid a king's cess or tax till the law distrained upon my goods. And I continue to bake my bread and brew my ale as my fathers did before me. And who shall say me nay? Not any gauger that ever tapped a barrel!'

I certainly had no intention of doing so; but, all the same, it seemed a curious thing to have smuggling and illicit distilling put, as it were, upon a religious basis.

The old man continued—

‘Therefore it was that I mistook ye for the spy of the Queen’s excise. I had watched the craitur nosing about the hilltaps for a day or two. I fear I used you somewhat roughly. For that I ask your pardon.’

I hastened to assure him that I never bore a grudge. He thrust out his hand at the word.

‘No more do I,’ he said, quickly adding, however—‘that is, no’ after it is satisfied!’

It was thus that I spent my Christmas Day in the Cothouse of Curlywee. It was three weeks more before I could leave my chair, and a month before I was able to return south to business. So that it was well my uncle had left competent men in charge. During this time, not unnaturally, I saw a good deal of my cousin. I thought her every day more charming, as she certainly grew more beautiful. As for my grandfather, he used to lie out upon the brae-faces with a long spyglass looking for the exciseman from Port Mary. But that gentleman showed the excellence of his judgment by obstinately staying away.

When at last I went over the moor towards the station, I rode upon a strong sheltie. Elsa came part of the way with me, ‘to convoy me off the ground,’ as she said. At our parting-place I asked her a certain question, which at first she refused to answer directly.

Afterwards she stated that she had conscientious scruples about the marriage of cousins and other near relatives. However, I am not without the strongest reasons for hoping that these objections are not insuperable, and that they will be overcome by next Christmas Eve. Already I have observed tokens of wavering. But, in any case, we will not tell my grandfather till the last moment; for where he will get a housekeeper to dwell alone in the Cot-house of Curlywee is more than either of us can tell. Meantime I am grateful for all that my Christmas Eve search for a grandfather has brought me.

THE LAST ANDERSON OF DEESIDE

'Weel, he's won awa!'

'Ay, ay, he is that!'

The minister's funeral was winding slowly out of the little manse loaning. The window-blinds were all down, and their bald whiteness, like sightless eyes looking out of the white-washed walls and the trampled snow, made the Free Church manse of Deeside no cheerful picture that wild New Year's Day. The green gate which had so long hung on one hinge, periodically mended ever since the minister's son broke the other swinging on it the summer of the dry year before he went to college, now swayed forward with a miserably forlorn lurch, as though it too had tried to follow the funeral procession of the man who had shut it carefully the last thing before he went to bed every night for forty years.

Andrew Malcolm, the Glencairn joiner, who was conducting the funeral—if, indeed, Scots funerals can ever be said to be conducted—had given it a too successful push to let the rickety hearse have plenty of sea-room between the granite pillars. It was a long and straggling funeral, silent save for the words that stand at the opening of this tale, which ran up and down the long black files like the irregular fire of skirmishers.

'Ay, man, he's won awa!'

'Ay, ay, he is that!'

This is the Scottish Lowland 'coronach,' characteristic and expressive as the wailing of the pipes to the Gael or the keening of women among the wild Eirionach.

'We are layin' the last o' the auld Andersons o' Deeside amang the mools the day,' said Saunders M'Quhirr, the farmer of Drumquhat, to his friend Rob Adair of the Mains of Deeside, as they walked sedately together, neither swinging his arms as he would have done on an ordinary day. Saunders had come all the way over Dee Water to follow the far-noted man of God to his rest.

'There's no siccan men noo as the Andersons o' Deeside,' said Rob Adair, with a kind of pride and pleasure in his voice. 'I'm a dale aulder than you, Saunders, an' I mind weel o' the faither o' him that's gane.' (Rob had in full measure the curious South-country disinclination to speak directly of the dead.)

'Ay, an angry man he was that day in the '43 when him that's a cauld corp the day, left the kirk an' manse that his faither had pitten him intil only the year afore. For, of coorse, the lairds o' Deeside were the pawtrons o' the pairish; an' when the auld laird's yae son took it intil his head to be a minister, it was in the nature o' things that he should get the pairish.

'Weel, the laird didna speak to his son for the better part o' twa year; though mony a time he drave by to the Pairish Kirk when his son was haudin' an outdoor service at the Auld Wa's where the three roads meet. For nae *sicht* could they get on a' Deeside for kirk or manse, because frae the Dullarg to Craig Ronald a' belanged to the laird. The minister sent the wife an' bairns to a sma' hoose in Cairn Edward, an' lodged himsel' amang sic o' the farmers as werena feared for his faither's factor. Na, an' speak to his son the auld man wadna, for the very dourness o' him. Ay, even though the minister wad say to his faither, 'Faither, wull ye no' speak to yer ain son?' no' ae word wad he answer, but pass him as though he hadna seen him, as muckle as to say—'Nae son o' mine!'

'But a week or twa after the minister had lost yon twa nice bairns wi' the scarlet fever, his faither an' him forgathered at the fishin'—whaur he had gane, thinkin' to jook the sair thochts that he carried aboot wi' him, puir man. They were baith keen fishers an' graun' at it. The minister was for liftin' his hat to his faither an' gaun by, but the auld man stood still in the middle o' the fit-pad wi' a gey queer look in his face. 'Wattie!' he said, an' for ae blink the minister thocht that his faither was gaun to greet, a thing that he had never seen him do in a' his life. But the auld man didna greet. 'Wattie,' says he to his son, 'hae ye a huik?'

'Ay, Saunders, that was a' he said, an' the minister juist gied him the huik and some half-dizzen

fine flees forbye, an' the twa o' them never said *Disruption* mair as lang as they leeved.

"Ye had better see the factor about pittin' up a meetin'-hoose and a decent dwallin', gin ye hae left kirk and manse!' That was a' that the auld laird ever said, as his son gaed up stream and he down.

'Ay, he's been a sair-tryed man in his time, your minister, but he's a' by wi't the day,' continued Saunders M'Quhirr, as they trudged behind the hearse.

'Did I ever tell ye, Rob, aboot seein' young Walter—his boy that gaed wrang, ye ken—when I was up in London the year afore last? Na? 'Deed, I telled naebody binna the mistress. It was nae guid story to tell on Deeside!

'Weel, I was up, as ye ken, at Barnet Fair wi' some winter beasts, so I bade a day or twa in London, doin' what sma' business I had, an' seein' the sights as weel, for it's no' ilka day that a Deeside body finds themsel's i' London.

'Ae nicht wha should come in but a Cairn Edward callant that served his time wi' Maxwell in the *Advertiser* office. He had spoken to me at the show, pleased to see a Gallawa' face, nae doot. And he telled me he was married an' workin' on the *Times*. An' amang ither things back an' forrit, he telled me that the minister o' Deeside's son was here. 'But,' says he, 'I'm feared that he's comin' to nae guid.' I kenned that the laddie hadna been hame to his faither an' his mither for a maitter o' maybe ten year, so I thocht that I wad like to see the lad for his faither's sake. So in a day or twa I got his address frae the reporter lad, an' fand him after a lang seek doon in a gey queer place no' far frae where Tammas Carlyle leeves, near the water-side. I thocht that there was nae ill bits i' London but i' the East-end; but I learned different.

I gaed up the stair o' a wee brick hoose nearly tumlin' doon wi' its ain wecht—a perfect rickle o' brick—an' chappit. A lass opened the door after a wee, no' that ill-lookin', but toosy aboot the heid an' unco shilpit aboot the face.

"What do you want?' says she, verra sharp an' clippit in her mainner o' speech.

"Does Walter Anderson o' Deeside bide here?" I asked, gey an' plain, as ye ken a body has to speak to thae Englishers that barely can understand their ain language.

"What may you want with him?" says she.

"I come frae Deeside," says I—no' that I meant to lightly my ain pairish, but I thoct that the lassie nicht no' be acquaint wi' the name o' Whunnyliggate. I come frae Deeside, an' I ken Walter Anderson's faither."

"That's no recommend," says she. "The mair's the peety," says I, 'for he's a daicent man.'

'So she took ben my name, that I had nae cause to be ashamed o', an' syne she brocht word that I was to step in. So ben I gaed, an' it wasna a far step, eyther, for it was juist ae bit garret room; an' there on a bed in the corner was the minister's laddie, lookin' nae aulder than when he used to swing on the yett an' chase the hens. At the verra first glint I gat o' him I saw that Death had come to him, and come to bide. His countenance was barely o' this earth—sair disjaskit an' no' manlike ava'—mair like a lassie far gane in a decline; but raised-like too, an' wi' a kind o' defiance in it, as if he was darin' the Almichty to His face. O man, Rob, I hope I may never see the like again.'

'Ay, man, Saunders, ay, ay!' said Rob Adair, who, being a more demonstrative man than his friend, had been groping in the tail of his 'blacks' for the handkerchief that was in his hat. Then Rob forgot, in the pathos of the story, what he was searching for, and walked for a considerable distance with his hand deep in the pocket of his tail-coat.

The farmer of Drumquhat proceeded on his even way.

'The lassie that I took to be his wife (but I asked nae questions) was awfu' different ben the room wi' him frae what she was wi' me at the door—fleechin' like wi' him to tak' a sup o' soup. An' when I gaed forrit to speak to him on the puir bit bed, she cam' by me like stour, wi' the water happin' off her cheeks, like hail in a simmer thunder-shoo'er.'

'Puir bit lassockie!' muttered Rob Adair, who had three daughters of his own at home, as he made

another absent-minded and unsuccessful search for his handkerchief. 'There's a smurr o' rain beginnin' to fa', I think,' he said, apologetically.

'An' ye're Sandy MacWhurr frae Drumquhat,' says the puir lad on the bed. 'Are your sugar-plums as guid as ever?'

'What a question to speer on a dying bed, Saunders!' said Rob.

'Deed, ye may say it. Weel, frae that he gaed on talkin' about hoo Fred Robson an' him stole the hale o' the Drumquhat ploods ae back-end, an' hoo they gat as far as the horse waterin'-place wi' them when the dogs gat after them. He threepit that it was me that set the dogs on, but I never did that, though I didna conter him. He said that Fred an' him made for the seven-fit march dike, but hadna time to mak' ower it. So there they had to sit on the tap o' a thorn-bush in the meadow on their hunkers, wi' the dogs fair loupin' an' yowlin' to get haud o' them. Then I cam' doon mysel' an' garred them turn every pooch inside oot. He minded, too, that I was for hingin' them baith up by the heels, till what they had etten followed what had been in their pooches. A' this he telled juist as he did when he used to come ower to hae a bar wi' the lassies, in the forenichts after he cam' hame frae the college the first year. But the lad was laughin' a' the time in a way I didna like. It wasna natural—something hard an' frae the teeth oot, as ye micht say—maist peetifu' in a callant like him, wi' the deid-licht shinin' already in the blue een o' him.'

'D'ye no' mind, Saunders, o' him comin' hame frae the college wi' a hantle o' medals an' prizes?' said Rob Adair, breaking in as if he felt that he must contribute his share to the memories which shortened, if they did not cheer, their road. 'His faither was rael prood o' him, though it wasna his way to say muckle. But his mither could talk about naething else, an' carriet his picture about wi' her a' ower the pairish in her wee black retical basket. Fegs, a gipsy wife gat a saxpence juist for speerin' for a sicht o' it, and cryin', 'Blessings on the laddie's bonny face!'

'Weel,' continued Saunders, imperturbably taking

up the thread of his narrative amid the blattering of the snow, 'I let the lad rin on i' this way for a while, an' then says I, 'Walter, ye dinna ask after yer faither!'

'No, I don't,' says he, verra short. 'Nell, gie me the draught.' So wi' that the lassie gied her een a bit quick dab, syne cam' forrit, an' pittin' her airm aneath his heid she gied him a drink. Whatever it was, it quaitened him, an' he lay back tired-like.

'Weel,' said I, after a wee, 'Walter, gin ye'll no' speer for yer faither, maybe ye'll speer for yer ain mither?'

'Walter Anderson turned his heid to the wa'. 'Oh, my mither! my ain mither!' he said, but I could hardly hear him sayin' it. Then more fiercely than he had yet spoken he turned on me an' said, 'Wha sent ye here to torment me before my time?'

* * *

I saw young Walter juist yince mair in life. I stepped doon to see him the next mornin' when the end was near. He was catchin' and twitchin' at the coverlet, liftin' up his hand an' lookin' at it as though it was somebody else's. It was a black fog outside, an' even in the garret it took him in his throat till he couldna get breath.

He motioned for me to sit doon beside him. There was nae chair, so I e'en gat doon on my knees. The lass stood white an' quait at the far side o' the bed. He turned his een on me, blue an' bonnie as a bairn's; but wi' a licht in them that telled he had eaten o' the tree o' knowledge, and that no' seldom.

'O Sandy,' he whispered, 'what a mess I've made o't, haven't I? You'll see my mither when ye gang back to Deeside. Tell her it's no' been so bad as it has whiles lookit. Tell her I've aye loved her, even at the warst—an'an'—an' my faither too!' he said, with a kind o' grip in his words.

'Walter,' says I, 'I'll pit up a prayer, as I'm on my knees onyway.' I'm no' giftit like some, I ken; but, Robert, I prayed for that laddie gaun afore his Maker as I never prayed afore or since. And when I spak' about the forgiein' o' sin, the laddie juist steekit his een an'

said 'Amen!'

That nicht as the clock was chappin' twal' the lassie cam' to my door (an' the landlady wasna that weel pleased at bein' raised, eyther), an' she askit me to come an' see Walter, for there was naeboddy else that had kenned him in his guid days. So I took my stave an' my plaid an' gaed my ways wi' her intil the nicht—a' lichtit up wi' lang raws o' gas-lamps, an' awa' doon by the water-side whaur the tide sweels black aneath the brigs. Man, a big lichtit toun at nicht is far mair lanesome than the Dullarg muir when it's black as pit-mirk. When we got to the puir bit hoosie, we fand that the doctor was there afore us. I had gotten him brocht to Walter the nicht afore. But the lassie was nae sooner within the door than she gied an unco-like cry, an' flang hersel' distractit on the bed. An' there I saw, atween her white airms and her tangled yellow hair, the face o' Walter Anderson, the son o' the manse o' Deeside, lyin' on the pillow wi' the chin tied up in a napkin!

'Never a sermon like that, Robert Adair!' said Saunders M'Quhirr solemnly, after he had paused a moment.

Saunders and Robert were now turning off the wind-swept muir-road into the sheltered little avenue which led up to the kirk above the white and icebound Dee Water. The aged gravedigger, bent nearly double, met them where the roads parted. A little farther up the newly elected minister of the parish kirk stood at the manse door, in which Walter Anderson had turned the key forty years ago for conscience' sake.

Very black and sombre looked the silent company of mourners who now drew together about the open grave—a fearsome gash on the white spread of the new-fallen snow. There was no religious service at the minister's grave save that of the deepest silence. Ranked round the coffin, which lay on black bars over the grave-mouth, stood the elders, but no one of them ventured to take the posts of honour at the head and the foot. The minister had left not one of his blood with a right to these positions. He was the last Anderson of Deeside.

'Preserve us! wha's yon they're pittin' at the fit o' the grave? Wha can it be ava?' was whispered here and there back in the crowd. 'It's Jean Grier's boy, I declare—him that the minister took oot o' the puirhoose, and schuled and colleged baith. Weel, that cowes a! Saw ye ever the like o' that?'

It was to Rob Adair that this good and worthy thought had come. In him more than in any of his fellow-elders the dead man's spirit lived. He had sat under him all his life, and was sappy with his teaching. Some would have murmured had they had time to complain, but no one ventured to say nay to Rob Adair as he pushed the modest, clear-faced youth into the vacant place.

Still the space at the head of the grave was vacant, and for a long moment the ceremony halted as if waiting for a manifestation. With a swift, sudden startle the coil of black cord, always reserved for the chief mourner, slipped off the coffin-lid and fell heavily into the grave.

'He's there afore his faither,' said Saunders M'Quhirr.

So sudden and unexpected was the movement, that, though the fall of the cord was the simplest thing in the world, a visible quiver passed through the bowed ranks of the bearers. 'It was his ain boy Wattie come to lay his faither's heid i' the grave!' cried Daft Jess, the parish 'natural,' in a loud sudden voice from the 'thru'ch' stone near the kirkyaird wall where she stood at gaze.

And there were many there who did not think it impossible.

As the mourners 'skailed' slowly away from the kirkyaird in twos and threes, there was wonderment as to who should have the property, for which the late laird and minister had cared so little. There were very various opinions; but one thing was quite universally admitted, that there would be no such easy terms in the matter of rent and arrears as there had been in the time of 'him that's awa'.' The snow swept down with a biting swirl as the groups scattered and the mourners vanished from each other's sight, diving singly into the

eddying drifts as into a great tent of many flapping folds. Grave and quiet is the Scottish funeral, with a kind of simple manfulness as of men in the presence of the King of Terrors, but yet possessing that within them which enables every man of them to await without unworthy fear the Messenger who comes but once. On the whole, not so sad as many things that are called mirthful.

So the last Anderson of Deeside, and the best of all their ancient line, was gathered to his fathers in an equal sleep that snowy January morning. There were two inches of snow in the grave when they laid the coffin in. As Saunders said, 'Afore auld Elec could get him happit, his Maister had hidden him like Moses in a windin'-sheet o' His ain.' In the morning, when Elec went hirpling into the kirkyaird, he found at the grave-head a bare place which the snow had not covered. Then some remembered that, hurrying by in the rapidly darkening gloaming of the night after the funeral, they had seen some one standing immovable by the minister's grave in the thickly drifting snow. They had wondered why he should stand there on such a bitter night.

There were those who said that it was just the lad Archibald Grier, gone to stand a while by his benefactor's grave.

But Daft Jess was of another opinion.

SAINT LUCY OF THE EYES

[Taken from the Journals of Travel written by Stephen Douglas, sometime of Culsharg in Galloway.]

CHAPTER ONE THE WOMAN OF THE RED EYELIDS

It was by Lago d'Istria that I found my pupil. I had come without halt from Scotland to seek him. For the first time I had crossed the Alps, and from the snow-flecked mountain-side, where the dull yellow-white patches remained longest, I saw beneath me the waveless plain of Lombardy.

The land of Lombardy—how the words had run in my dreams! Surely some ancestor of mine had wandered northwards from that gracious plain. On one side of me, at least, I was sib to the vineyards and the chestnut groves. For strange yearnings thrilled me as I beheld white-garlanded cities strung across the plain, the blue lakes grey in the haze, like eyes that look through tears.

Yet hitherto a hill-farm on the moors of Minnigaff had been my abiding-place. There I had played with the collies and the grey rabbits. There I had listened to the whaup and the peewits crying in the night; and save the cold, grey, resonant spaces of Edinburgh, whither I had gone to study, this was all my eyes had yet known. But when Giovanni Turazza, exile from the city of Verona, paused in his reading of the sonorous Italian to rebuke my Scots accent, and continued softly to give me illustrations of the dialects of north and south, something moved within me that sickened me to think of the Lombard plain sleeping in the gracious sunshine—which I might never see.

Yet I saw it. I trod its ways and stood by its still waters. And already they are become my life and my home.

Now, I who write am Stephen Douglas, of the moorland stock of the northern Douglasses—kin to Douglaswater, and on the wrong side of the blanket to

Drumdarroch himself. It has been the custom that one of the Douglasses should in every generation be sent to the college to rear for the kirk.

For the hand of the Douglas has ever been kind to kin; and since patronage came back—in law or out law, the Douglasses have managed to put their man into Drumdarroch parish and to have a Douglas in the white manse by the Waterside. And so it is like to be when, as they say, the rights of patron shall again pass away.

Now, I was in process or manufacture for this purpose, though threatening to turn out somewhat over tardy in development to profit by the act of patronage. But the Douglas dourness stood me in good stead, as it has done all the Douglasses that ever lived since the greatest of the race charged to the death, with the point of his spear dropped low and the heart of his lord thrown before him, among the Paynim hordes.

The lad to undertake whose tutelage I went abroad was a Fenwick of Allerton in the Border country—the scion of a reputable stock, sometime impoverished by gambling in the times of the Regent, and before that with whistling ‘Owre the water to Charlie’; but now, by the opening-up of the sea-coal pits, again gathering in the canny siller as none of the Fenwicks had done in the palmiest days of the moss-trooping.

Well I knew when I set out that I had my work before me, and that I should earn my two hundred pounds a year or all were done. For I had but a couple of years more than my pupil to boast myself upon; and he, having grown up on the Continent, chiefly in Latin cities and German watering-places, was vastly superior to me in the knowledge which comes not easily to the lads from the moors, who at all times know better how to loup a moss-hag than how to make a courtly bow.

Yet for all that I did not mean to be far behind any Border Fenwick when it came to making bows. Nor, as it happened, was I when all was done. This confidence was partly owing to full feeding on fine porridge and braxy, but more to that inbred belief of Galloway in itself which the ill-affected and envious

nominate its conceit.

Henry Fenwick was abiding in this city of Vico Averso, as I had been informed by his uncle and guardian, for the baths. He had been advised of my coming, and, like the kindly lad that he proved to be, I found him waiting for me when the diligence arrived.

We met with few words on either side, but I think with instant hearty liking. My pupil was tall and dark, his hair a little long, yet not falling to his shoulders—somewhat feminine in type of feature and Italianate in complexion. But the mouth shewed breeding, the eyes kindness; and, after all, these are the main features. I was especially glad to find myself taller than he by a span of inches.

He took me to the hotel where a room had been ordered for me—not one of the common Italian inns, but a hotel built for the accommodation of foreigners. As we went up the steps, we passed a lady sitting in the shade with a book. She was a large fair woman, with sleepy eyes and a mane of bronzed gold hair. She had been looking at us as we came, I will be bound; but when we passed she became absorbed and unconscious upon her book.

As Henry raised his hat she bowed slightly to him, lifting at the same time her heavy eyelids and glancing at me. I had once seen that look before—in a spectacle of wild beasts when I happened to stand close to a drowsing tigress that twitched an eyelid and flashed a yellow eye at me. In that eye-shot on the verandah of the hotel in Vico Averso, the crossing of glances was like a challenge, and thrilled me as when one is called to fight. I think we hated one another on the spot; yet for the life of me I could not tell why, save that the woman of the tiger's glance had a red edge to her heavy eyelids, and no eyelashes that I could see—which things are not the marks of a good woman, as I take it. Yet there was no real cause for the bitter and sudden dislike, for, as it chanced, she came but little into our adventures. For youth, for the sake of change, turns as readily away from evil as from good.

So eager was I to be down and out of doors, that I had hardly time to make disposition of my goods in the

room which had been reserved for me. I threw open the casement. I hung half out of the window, and satisfied myself with looking upon the still, calm blue of Lago d'Orta beneath, flecked with heavy-bodied craft with deep yellow sails. My heart all the while was crying out hungrily, 'At last! at last!'

The precipices of hills, coloured like amethysts, fronted us, where the southern Alps threw themselves downwards to the lake-shore. Half-a-dozen hotels with white walls and green blinds clung about the outside of the little town, and specially about the baths, which ever since the time of the Romans had given the place its reputation. Few English people went there, but many Italians, some Austrians, especially women—German men, and cosmopolitan Russians, to whom all outside their native country was a Fatherland.

'Come,' said Henry as soon as we had become a little familiar, 'let us go to the baths.'

Entering a low stone door, we ran up a flight of steps and found ourselves in a circular building of ancient marble. It was to me the strangest sight. We looked down on a great number of people up to their necks in a kind of thick, coffee-coloured fluid, which steamed and gave off strange odours. Men and women were there, old and young. All were clad in full suits of light material, and comported themselves towards each other as in a drawing-room. The sight of so many heads all bobbing about on the coffee-coloured mud, like a hundred John the Baptists on one large charger, was to me exceedingly diverting.

Little tables were floating about on the muddy water, and some pairs in quiet corners played chess and even cards. But there was a constant circulation among the throng. Introductions were effected in form, save that no one shook hands, at least above the water; only the detached heads bowed ceremoniously. It was a new canto of the *Inferno*—the condemned playing dully at human society in the bubbling caldrons of the place of evil shades. Henry proposed to go down and take a bath, but my stomach rose against the fumes and the slimy brown stuff.

'It is not nearly so bad when you are once in!' he

said, for he had tried it. But though I had reason to believe that to be true, I had no heart to make the test for myself.

As we came out, Henry made me an introduction to the Lady of the Red Eyelids.

'Madame von Eisenhagen!' So that is your name, thought I; and I wonder what may be your intentions! I had never seen the breed before, but the side of me that was sib to the South seemed to leap to a comprehension.

As Madame and I crossed our glances again, I am sure we both knew that it was to the knife. For Henry Fenwick, being a lad, had laid his boy's heart in her hands. Yet not seriously, but as a boy will when a woman twice his age thinks it worth her while to spread a net for him, flattering him with her eyes.

So for a while we sat on the terrace, and a kind of scentless, spineless whitethorn wept sprays of flowers upon us. We spoke French, in which my pupil, as I found, had greatly the advantage of me, and thought extremely well of himself in consequence. But within me I said, 'My friend, wait till I have you a week at Greek!'

And this indeed came to pass, for over the intricacies of that language I made him presently to sweat consumedly.

Of the matter of our talk there is not much to say. Henry spoke freely and well, Madame interjecting leading questions, and holding him with her eyes. I, on the contrary, spoke little, being occupied with the scenes going on beneath me—the men in the piazza piling the fine grain for the making of macaroni—the changing and chaffering groups about the kerchiefed market-women—the dark-faced, gypsy-like men with beady eyes. The murmur of the conversation came to me only at intervals, like voices in a dream; and sometimes for whole sentences together I lost its meaning completely.

Indeed, I had more pleasure in looking at the houses in Vico Averso, which were tangled together without the semblance of a plan. Each house, or part of a house, struggled upward to occupy its own patch of

sky-line, in a hundred different heights and breadths. Each had a scrap of garden clinging to it along the lake-side, in which the green of the magnolias contrasted with the grey aspens and the warmer oleanders. There was a bright and laughing charm about the whole which drew my heart, and I longed to spend a lifetime in these white and foliage-fringed places.

But I found very soon that the face of Vico Averso was her fortune. For the side of our hostel which was turned to a dark and narrow Street of Smells took away my desire to dwell there. There came out clear in my mind the thought and sight of our hill-farm of Culsharg, set on the edge of its miles of heather, the free airs blowing about it, and all the wild birds crying. My mother would be coming to the door to look for my grandfather as he came off the hill from the sheep. A disgust at the bubbling devil's-caldron, a horror of the smiling, monosyllabic Woman of the Red Eyelids, filled my heart. I resolved to battle it out with Henry that very night, and to leave Vico Averso at once. If he would not do so much for me, I knew that I might take the diligence back again the way I came, and report my failure. But, for all that, I did not mean thus lamely to fail or go home with my finger in my mouth.

That night I drew from the lad his heart. He had been here for two months—indeed, ever since his Swiss tutor, Herr Gunther, had departed for Zurich suddenly, having been ignominiously thrashed by his own pupil. I gathered from him that he had intended to perform the like for me, but had given up the idea after seeing me leap from the top of the diligence.

Yet he was not unwilling to be taught that there are better things out under the free sunshine than to dream away good days with a woman like Madame Von Eisenhagen, who after all had perhaps done nothing worse than encourage the lad to philander and to waste his time. Then I cunningly painted the joys of a walking tour. We should take our packs on our backs, only a few pounds' weight; and, our staves in our hands, like student lads of clerkly learning in the ancient times, we should go forth to seek our

adventures—a new one every hour, a new roof to sleep under every night, and maids fairer than dreams waving hands to us over every vineyard wall. Thus cunningly I baited my trap.

So had I gone many a time in mine own country, and so I meant to lead my pupil now. Henry Fenwick rose joyously at the thought. Madame had made his service a little hard, and, what is worse, a little monotonous. He was but a boy, and needed not, she thought, the binding distractions which usually accompany such allegiances.

CHAPTER TWO
THE WORD OF THE LITTLE PEOPLE

Betimes in the morning we were afoot—long before Madame was awake; and having committed our heavier luggage to the care of our Swiss landlord, we set each a knapsack on our backs, and with light foot passed through the market-place among the bright and chattering throng of Italian folk, whose greetings of '*Buone feste, buon principio, e buona fine*' told of the birth of another day of joy for them under the blue of their sky.

Before we were clear of the town, Henry turned, and as he glanced at the green valanced windows of the Hotel Averso he drew a long breath which was not quite a sigh. And this was all his farewell to the allegiance of half a score of weeks. For my part, I was not easy till we swung out of sight along the dusty road, and had skirted the first two or three miles of old wall and vineyard terrace, where the lizards were already flashing and darting in the sun.

But indeed it takes much to chain a young man's fancy, when the road of life runs enticingly before him, dappled with laurel and carpeted with primrose.

It was our vagabond year, and, as I had foretold, a fair maid stood at every door, smiling at us and leading us on. We did not keep long by the dusty road. Presently we turned up byways, over which the prickly-pear and red valerian broke in profuse and unprecise beauty—fleshy-leaved creepers, too, as of a house-leek turned passion-flower, over-crowned all with scarlet blotches of cunningly placed colour.

We wandered into woodland paths and across fields. A peasant or small farmer ran out to stay us. Something was forbidden, it appeared. We were trampling his artichokes or other precious crop. We understood him not over well, nor indeed tried to. But a touchingly insignificant piece of silver induced him to think more kindly of our error, and he showed us a sweet path, by the side of which a brook tinkled down from the cliffs above. It led us into another scene—and, I am of opinion, upon another man's property. For at

the door of a low, square-roofed house stood a man with his hands clasped behind him. He frowned, for he had seen his neighbour of the itching palm lead us to his gate and there leave us. And of the silver that lay within that palm he had not partaken.

The sun was broad and high. Here were flats of hay, greyish-green, blue in parts—but with none of that moist and emerald velvet which would have flashed upon the burnside meadows at home. Again by the water we brushed against the asters, which had no business to be growing here in the spring. Among the young wheat the poppies were flaming—red-coat officers of the Sower of Tares, with flaunting feather leading on to the inquisition of fires, when the reapers edge their keen sickles and fall-to, and the tares are separated from the wheat.

For pence judiciously tendered, we had the young Pan himself for leader—an Italian boy of sixteen, fair as a god of Greece. He went before with the most innocent grace in the world, and looked at us over his shoulder. He called his sister to come also, and as a stimulant he held up his penny. But she hung back, smit with sudden maidenly modesty at the sight of two such proper young men; and so her brother danced on without her.

Looking back, we saw that she had called her mother, and now peeped out wistfully from behind the shelter of the skirt maternal. Perhaps she regretted that she had not gone with us, for there, far ahead, was her brother skipping upon his quest. And suddenly there was no interest in the dull farmyard and the cattle. For that is a way of women—to be willing too late.

As we go, we talk with the young Pan—Henry Fenwick freely, I slowly, yet with comprehension greater than speech.

Will Pan sit down and eat with us? we ask.

Surely! There is no doubt whatever that he will, and that gladly. But we must wait till we come to a spring of hill-water, so that we may have the true and only apostolic baptism for our red wine.

There presently we arrive. The place is verily an

inspiration. It is a natural well in the shadow of a great rock. Overhead is the virgin cup rudely cut in the stone. A shelf for sitting on while you drink, and the rocky laver brimming with clear and icy water. Little grains of fine white sand dance at the bottom, where from its living source the pure brew wells up. It is indeed a proper place to break bread.

Here, with Pan talking to us in a speech soft as the Italian air, we eat and are refreshed. Pan himself willingly opens his heart, and tells us of the changes that are coming—an Italy free from lagoon to triangle—which is to say, from Venice to Messina. But there is much dying to be done before then. The tears must fall from many mothers' eyes—from his own, who knows? Will he fight? Ay, surely he will fight! And the face of Pan hardens, till one understands how he could have been so cruel one day to the reeds which grew in the river.

But the distance beckons us, and the sun draws himself upward to his strength. We have on us the English itch for change. The breeze comes and goes as we plunge among the groves of Virgilian ilex, and through the interstices of the trees we see on a hill-slope above us thirty great horned oxen, etched black against the sky.

Here Pan leaves us, saying farewell with tears in his woman's eyes; with silver also in his pocket, which, to do him justice, does not comfort him wholly. Before he goes, for love and gratitude he tells us of a rhyme with which to please the children and to cause the good wives to give us a lodging.

At the next village we try its efficacy upon a company by the well—a group with those oriental suggestions which are common to all villages south of the Alps. The effect is instantaneous. The shy maidens draw nearer, the boys gather from their noisy game, the bambinos stretch to us from many a sisterly shoulder. We sit down, a couple of wayfarers, dusty and hot. But no sooner is the rhyme said than, lo! a tin is dipped for our drinking, and the Rebekah of the well herself expects her kiss, nor, spite of a possible knife, is she disappointed. For the rhyme's sake we are

friends of the fairies and can put far the evil eye. It is good to entertain us. Thanks be to Pan! We shall offer him a garland of enduring ivy, or it may be half a kid. The cry that was heard over the waters was not true! Pan is not dead. Perhaps he too but sleeps a while, and in the likeness of young goatherds the god of the earlier time, reborn in dew, comes out still to tell his secrets to wandering lads who, asking no favour, go a-wayfaring with strong hearts as in the ancient days.

Round the corner peeps a laughing face. An urchin of surpassing impishness, one who has come too late to hear our password, taunts us in evil words.

'Ha, Giuseppe, beware of the Giant Caranco! Behold, he has the great teeth of the English. At the water-trough this morning I saw him sharpening them to eat thee, thou exceeding plump one! In the bag at his back he carries the bones of sixteen just as fat as thou art!'

And the rascal flees with a cry of pretended fear. So contagious is terror, that more than half our band flees away a dozen paces, halting there upon one foot, balancing our evil and our good.

But we have wiles as well as rhymes, and great in all places of the earth is the fascination of ready money.

'The Giant Caranco! forsooth,' we say; 'what lack of sense! Does the Giant Caranco know the good word of the Gentle Folk whose song brings luck? Can the Giant Caranco tell the tale that only the fairies know? Has the Giant Caranco those things in his wallet which are loved of lads and maids? Of a surety, no! Was ever such nonsense heard!'

In vain rings the shout of the maligner on the rocks above, as the circle gathers in again closer than ever about us.

'Beware of his thrice-sharpened teeth, Giuseppe! I saw him bite a fair half-moon out of the iron pipe by the fountain trough this morning!' he cries.

It is worse than useless now. Not only does the devil's advocate lack his own halfpenny; but with a swirl of the hand and a cunning jerk at the side, a stone whizzes after this regardless railer upon honest

giants. Wails and agony follow. It is a dangerous thing to sit in the scorner's chair, specially when the divinity has the popular acclaim, with store of sweetmeats and *soldi* as well.

Most dangerous of all is it to interfere with a god in the making, for proselytism is hot, and there are divine possibilities.

CHAPTER THREE

THE STORY OF THE SEVEN DEAD MEN

And the stories! There were many of them. The young faces bent closer as we told the story of Saint Martin dividing his cloak among the beggars. Then came our own Cornish giant-killer, adapted for an Italian audience, dressed to taste in a great brigand hat and a beltful of daggers and pistols. Blunderbore in the Italian manner was a distinguished success. It was Henry who told the tales, but yet I think it was I who had the more abundant praise. For they heard me prompt my Mercurius, and they saw him appeal to me in a difficulty. Obviously, therefore, Henry was the servant of the chief magician, who like a great lord only communicated his pleasure through his steward.

Then with a tale of Venice that was new to them we scared them out of a year's growth—frightening ourselves also, for then we were but young. It was well that the time was not far from high noon. The story told in brief ran thus. It was the story of the 'Seven Dead Men.'

There were once six men that went fishing on the lagoons. They brought a little boy, the son of one of them, to remain and cook the polenta. In the night-time he was alone in the cabin, but in the morning the fishermen came in. And if they found that aught was not to their taste, they beat him. But if all was well, they only bade him to wash up the dishes, yet gave him nothing to eat, knowing that he would steal for himself, as the custom of boys is.

But one morning they brought with them from their fishing the body of a dead man—a man of the mainland whom they had found tumbling about in the current of the Brenta. For he had looked out suddenly upon them where the sea and the river strive together, and the water boils up in great smooth, oily dimples that are not wholesome for men to meddle with.

Now, whether these six men had not gone to confession or had not confessed truly, so that the priest's absolution did them no good, the tale ventures not to say. But this at least is sure, that for their sins

they set this dead thing that had been a man in the prow of the boat, all in his wet clothes. And for a jest on the little boy they put his hand on his brow, as though the dead were in deep cogitation.

As this story was in the telling, the attention of the children grew keen and even painful. For the moment each was that lonely lad on the islet, where stood the cabin of the Seven Dead Men.

So as the boat came near in the morning light, the boy stood to greet them on the little wooden pier where the men landed their fish to clean, and he called out to the men in the boat—

‘Come quickly,’ he cried; ‘breakfast is ready—all but the fish to fry.’

He saw that one of the men was asleep in the prow; yet, being but a lad, he was only able to count as many as the crows—that is, four. So he did not notice that in the boat there was a man too many. Nor would he have wondered, had he been told of it. For it was not his place to wonder. He was only sleepy, and desired to lie down after the long night alone. Also he hoped that they had had a good catch of fish, so that he would escape being beaten. For indeed he had taken the best of the polenta for himself before the men came—which was as well, for if he had waited till they were finished, there had been but dog's leavings for him. He was a wise boy, this, when it came to eating. Now, eating and philosophy come by nature, as doth also a hungry stomach; but arithmetic and Greek do not come by nature. To which Henry Fenwick presently agreed.

The men went in with a good appetite to their breakfast, and left the dead man sitting alone in the prow with his hand on his brow.

So when they sat down, the boy said—

‘Why does not the other man come in? I see him sitting there. Are you not going to bring him in to breakfast also?’ (For he wished to show that he had not eaten any of the polenta.)

Then, for a jest upon him, one of the men answered—

‘Why, is the man not here? He is indeed a heavy sleeper. You had better go and wake him.’

So the little boy went to the door and called, shouting loud, 'Why cannot you come to breakfast? It has been ready this hour, and is going cold!'

And when the men within heard that, they thought it the best jest in a month of Sundays, and they laughed loud and strong.

So the boy came in and said—'What ails the man? He will not answer though I have called my best.'

'Oh' said they, 'he is but a deaf old fool, and has had too much to drink over-night. Go thou and swear bad words at him, and call him beast and fool!'

So the men put wicked words into the boy's mouth, and laughed the more to hear them come from the clean and innocent lips of a lad that knew not their meaning. And perhaps that is the reason of what followed.

So the boy ran in again.

'Come out quickly, one of you,' said the lad, 'and wake him, for he does not heed me, and I am sure that there is something the matter with him. Mayhap he hath a headache or evil in his stomach.'

So they laughed again, hardly being able to eat for laughing, and said—

'It must be cramp of the stomach that is the matter with him. But go out again, and shake him by the leg, and ask him if he means to keep us waiting here till doomsday.'

So the boy went out and shook the man as he was bidden.

Then the dead man turned to him, sitting up in the prow as natural as life, and said—

'What do you want with me?'

'Why in the name of the saints do you not come?' said the boy; 'the men want to know if they are to wait till doomsday for you.'

'Tell them,' said the man, 'that I am coming as fast as I can. For this is Doomsday!' said he.

The boy ran back into the hut, well pleased. For a moment his voice could not be heard, because of the noisy laughter of the men. Then he said—

'It is all right. He says he is coming.'

Then the men thought that the boy was trying in

his turn to put a jest on them, and would have beaten him. In a moment, however, they heard something coming slowly up the ladder, so they laughed no more, but all turned very pale and sat still and listened. And only the boy remembered to cross himself.

The footsteps came nearer. The door was pushed stumblingly open, as by one that fumbles and is not sure of his way. Then the man that had been dead and drowned, of whom they had made their sport, came in and sat down at the boy's place, the seventh at the table. Whereupon there was a great silence. None spoke, but all looked; for none, save the boy only, could withdraw his eyes from those of the dead man. Colder and chillier flowed the blood in their veins, till it ceased to flow at all, and froze about their hearts.

Whereat the boy flung himself shrieking into a boat and rowed away by the power of his own saint, Santa Caterina of Siena. He met some fishermen in a sailing boat, but it was the third day before any dared row to the lonely Casa on the mud bank. When they did go, three men climbed up the posts at different sides, for the ladder had fallen away. They went not in, but only looked through the window. They saw indeed six men, who sat round the platter of cold polenta. But the seventh, who sat at the bottom in the boy's place, shone as though he had been on fire, leaning back in his chair as one that laughed and made merry at a jest. But the six were fallen silent and very sober.

So the three men that looked fell back from off the platform into the water as dead men; and had not their companions been active men of Malamocco, they too had been drowned. So there to this day in the lonely Casa of the Seven Dead Men the six are sitting, and the fiery seventh at the table-foot, in the boy's place—until the Day comes that is Doomsday, which is the last day of all.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE SINFUL VILLAGE OF SPELLINO

This was the story we told, and there was not a face among the audience that did not blanch, and in that village there were undoubtedly some who that night did not sleep.

Now, the success of the story of the Seven Dead Men was great, surprising, embarrassing. For as soon as we ceased the children ran off to their homes to bring their mothers, who also had to hear. So we had to tell as before, without the alteration of a word.

Then home from the meadow pastures where they had been mowing, past the ripening grain, the fathers came, ill-pleased to find the dinner still not ready. Then these in their turn had to be fetched, and the story told from the beginning. Yea, and did we vary so much as the droop of a hair on the wet beard of the drowned man as he tumbled in the swirl of the lagoon where the Brenta meets the tide, a dozen voices corrected us, and we were warned to be careful. A reputation so sudden and tremendous is, at its beginning, somewhat brittle.

The group about the well now included almost every able-bodied person in the village, and several of the cripples, who cried out if any pushed upon them. Into the midst of this inward-bent circle of heads the village priest elbowed his way, a short and rotund father, with a frown on his face which evidently had no right there.

'Story-tellers!' he exclaimed. 'There is no need for such in my village. We grow our own. Thou, Beppo, art enough for a municipality, and thou, Andrea. But what have we here?'

He paused open-mouthed. He had expected the usual whining, mumping beggar; and lo, here were two well-attired *forestieri* with their packs on their backs and their hats upon their heads. But we stood up, and in due form saluted the father, keeping our hats in our hands till he, pleased at this recognition and deference before his flock, signed to us courteously to put them on again.

After this, nothing would do but we must go with him to his house and share with him a bottle of the noble wine of Montepulciano.

‘It is the wine of my brother, who is there in the cure of souls,’ he said. ‘Ah, he is a judge of wine, my brother. It is a fine place, not like this beast of a village, inhabited by bad heretics and worse Catholics.’

‘Bad Protestants—who are they?’ I said, for I had been reared in the belief that all Protestants were good—except, perhaps, they were English Episcopalians. Specially all Protestants in the lands of Rome were good by nature.

The priest looked at us with a question in his eye.

‘You are of the Church, it may be?’ asked he, evidently thinking of our reverence at the well-stoop.

We shook our heads.

‘It matters not,’ said the easy father; ‘you are, I perceive, good Christians. Not like these people of Spellino, who care neither for priest nor pastor.’

‘There he goes,’ said the priest, pointing out of the window at a man in plain and homely black who went by—the sight of whom, as he went, took me back to the village streets of Dullarg when I saw the minister go by. I had a sense that I ought to have been out there with him, instead of sitting in the presbytery of the Pope’s priest. But the father thought not of that, and the Montepulciano was certainly most excellent. ‘A bad, bad village,’ said the father, looking about him as if in search of something.

‘Margherita!’ he cried suddenly.

An old woman appeared, dropping a bleared courtesy, unlike her queenly name.

‘What have you for dinner, Margherita?’

‘Enough for one; not enough for three, and they hungry off the road,’ she said. ‘If thou, O father, art about to feed the *lazzaroni* of the north and south thou must at least give some notice, and engage another servant!’

‘Nay, good Margherita,’ answered the priest very meekly, ‘there is enough boiled fowl and risotto of liver and rice to serve half a score of appetites. See to it,’ he said.

Margherita went grumbling away. What with beggars and leaping dogs, besides children crawling about the steps, it was ill living in such a presbytery—one also which was at any rate so old that no one could keep it clean, though they laboured twenty-four hours in the day—ay, and rose betimes upon the next day.

As the lady said, the place was old. Father Philip told us that it had been the wing of a monastery.

‘See,’ he said, ‘I will show you.’

So saying, he led us through a wide, cool, dusky place, with arched roof and high windows, the walls blotched and peeling, with the steam of many monkish dinners. The doors had been mostly closed up, and only at one side did an open window and archway give glimpses of pillared cloisters and living green. We begged that we might sit out here, which the priest gladly allowed, for the sight of the green grass and the tall white lilies standing amid was a mighty refreshment in the hot noontide. Sunshine flickered through the mulberry and one grey cherry-tree, and sifted down on the grass.

Then the priest told us all the sin of the villagers of Spellino. It was not that a remnant of the Waldenses was allowed to live there. The priest did not object to good Waldensians. But the people of Spellino would neither pay priest nor pastor. They were infidels.

‘A bad people, an accursed people!’ he repeated. ‘I have not had my dues for ten years as I ought. I send my agent to collect; and as soon as he appears, every family that is of the religion turns heretic. Not a child can sign the sign of the Cross, not though I baptized every one of them. All the men belong to the church of Pastor Gentinetta, and can repeat his catechism.’

The priest paused and shook his head.

‘A bad people! a bad people!’ he said over and over again. Then he smiled, with some sense of the humour of the thing.

‘But there are many ways with bad people,’ he said; ‘for when my good friend, Pastor Gentinetta, collects his stipend, and the blue envelopes of the Church are sent round, what a conversion ensues to Holy Church! Lo, there is a crucifix in every house in

Spellino, save in one or two of the very faithful, who are so poor that they have nothing to give. Each child blesses himself as he goes in. Each *bambino* has the picture of its patron saint swung about its neck. The men are out at the *festa*, the women not home from confession, and there is not a *soldo* for priest or pastor in all this evil village of Spellino!

Father Philip paused to chuckle in some admiration at such abounding cleverness in his parish.

'How then do you live, either of you?' I asked, for the matter was certainly curious.

The father looked at us.

'You are going on directly?' he said, in a subdued manner.

'Immediately,' we said, 'when we have tired out your excellent hospitality.'

'Then I shall tell you. The manner of it is this. My friend Gentinetta;—he is my friend, and an excellent one in this world, though it is likely that our paths may not lie together in the next, if all be true that the Pope preaches. We two have a convention, which is private and not to be named. It is permitted to circumvent the wicked, and to drive the reluctant sheep by innocent craft.

'Now, Pastor Gentinetta has the advantage of me during the life of his people. It is indeed a curious thing that these heretics are eager to partake of the untransformed and unblessed sacraments, which are no sacraments. It is the strangest thing! I who preach the truth cannot drive my people with whips of scorpions to the blessed sacraments of Holy Church. They will not go for whip or cord. But these heretics will mourn for days if they be not admitted to their table of communion. It is one of the mysterious things of God. But, after all, it is a lucky thing,' soliloquised Father Philip; 'for what does my friend do when they come to him for their cards of communion, but turns up his book of stipend and statute dues. Says he—'My friend, such and such dues are wanting. A good Christian cannot sit down at the sacrament without clearing himself with God, and especially with His messenger.' So there he has them, and they pay up,

and often make him a present besides. For such threats my rascals would not care one black and rotten fig.'

'But how,' said I in great astonishment, 'does this affect you?'

'Gently and soothly,' said the priest. 'Wait and ye shall hear. If the pastor has the pull over me in life, when it comes to sickness, and the thieves get the least little look within the Black Doors that only open the one way—I have rather the better of my friend. It is my time then. My fellows indeed care no button to come to holy sacrament. They need to be paid to come. But, grace be to God for His unspeakable mercy, Holy Church and I between us have made them most consumedly afraid of the world that is to come. And with reason!'

Father Philip waited to chuckle.

'But Gentinetta's people have everything so neatly settled for them long before, that they part content without so much as a 'by your leave' or the payment of a death-duty. Not so, however, the true believer. He hath heard of Purgatory and the warmth and comfort thereof. Of the other place, too, he has heard. He may have scorned and mocked in his days of lightsome ease, but down below in the roots of his heart he believes. Oh, yes, he believes and trembles; then he sends for me, and I go!

'Confession—it is well, my son! extreme unction, the last sacraments of the Church—better and better! But, my son, there is some small matter of tithes and dues standing in my book against thy name. Dost thou wish to go a debtor before the Judge? Alas! how can I give thee quittance of the heavenly dues, when thou hast not cleared thyself of the dues of earth?' Then there is a scramble for the old canvas bag from its hiding-place behind the ingle-nook. A small remembrance to Holy Church and to me, her minister, can do no harm, and may do much good. Follows confession, absolution—and, comforted thus, the soul passes; or bides to turn Protestant the next time that my assessor calls. It matters not; I have the dues.'

'But,' said I, 'we have here two things that are

hard to put together. In a time of health, when there is no sickness in the land, thou must go hungry. And when sickness comes, and the pastor's flock are busy with their dying, they will have no time to go to communion. How are these things arranged?'

'Even thus,' replied Father Philip. 'It is agreed upon that we pool the proceeds and divide fairly, so that our incomes are small but regular. Yet, I beseech thee, tell it not in this municipality, nor yet in the next village; for in the public places we scowl at one another as we pass by, Pastor Gentinetta and I.'

'And which is earning the crust now?' said I.

The jovial priest laughed, nodding sagely with his head.

'Gentinetta hath his sacraments on Tuesday, and his addresses to his folk have been full of pleasant warnings. It will be a good time with us.'

'And when comes your turn?' cried Henry, who was much interested by this recital.

'There cometh at the end of the barley harvest, by the grace of God, a fat time of sickness, when many dues are paid; and when the addresses from the altar of this Church of Saint Philip are worth the hearing.'

The old priest moved the glass of good wine at his elbow, the fellow of the Montepulciano he had set at ours.

'A bad town this Spellino,' he muttered; 'but I, Father Philip, thank the saints—and Gentinetta, he thanks his mother, for the wit which makes it possible for poor servants of God to live.'

The old servant thrust her head within.

'Tonino Scala is very sick,' she said, 'and calleth for thee!'

The priest nodded, rose from his seat, and took down a thick leather-bound book.

'Lire thirty-six,' he said— 'it is well. It begins to be my time. This week Gentinetta and his younglings shall have chicken-broth.'

So with heartiest goodwill we bade our kind Father Philip adieu, and fared forth upon our way.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE COUNTESS CASTEL DEL MONTE

After leaving Spellino we went downhill. There was a plain beneath, but up on the hillside only the sheep were feeding contentedly, all with their broad-tailed sterno turned to us. The sun was shining on the white diamond-shaped causeway stones which led across a marshy place. We came again to the foot of the hill. It had indeed been no more than a dividing ridge, which we had crossed over by Spellino.

We saw the riband of the road unwind before us. One turn swerved out of sight, and one alone. But round this curve, out of the unseen, there came toward us the trampling of horses. A carriage dashed forward, the coachman's box empty, the reins flying wide among the horses' feet. There was but little time for thought; yet as they passed I caught at their heads, for I was used to horses. Then I hung well back, allowing myself to be jerked forward in great leaps, yet never quite losing my hold. It was but a chance, yet a better one than it looked.

At the turn of the road towards Spellino I managed to set their heads to the hill, and the steep ascent soon brought the stretching gallop of the horses to a stand-still.

It seemed a necessary thing that there should be a lady inside. I should have been content with any kind of lady, but this one was both fair and young, though neither discomposed nor terrified, as in such cases is the custom.

'I trust Madame is not disarranged,' I said in my poor French, as I went from the horses' heads to the carriage and assisted the lady to alight.

'It serves me right for bringing English horses here without a coachman to match,' she said in excellent English. 'Such international misalliances do not succeed. Italian horses would not have startled at an old beggar in a red coat, and an English coachman would not have thrown down the reins and jumped into the ditch. Ah, here we have our Beppo'—she turned to a flying figure, which came labouring up hill. To him

the lady gave the charge of the panting horses, to me her hand.

'I must trouble you for your safe-conduct to the hotel,' she said. Now, though her words were English, her manner of speech was not.

By this time Henry had come up, and him I had to present, which was like to prove a difficulty to me, who did not yet know the name of the lady. But she, seeing my embarrassment, took pity on me, saying—

'I am the Countess Castel del Monte,' looking at me out of eyes so broadly dark, that they seemed in certain lights violet, like the deeps of the wine-hearted Greek sea.

By this time Beppo had the horses well under control, and at the lady's invitation we all got into the carriage. She desired, she said, that her brother should thank us.

We went upwards, turning suddenly into a lateral valley. Here there was an excellent road, better than the Government highway. We had not driven many miles when we came in sight of a house, which seemed half Italian *palazzo* and half Swiss cottage, yet which had nevertheless an undefined air of England. There were balconies all about it, and long rows of windows.

It did not look like a private house, and Henry and I gazed at it with great curiosity. For me, I had already resolved that if it chanced to be a hotel, we should lodge there that night.

The Countess talked to us all the way, pointing out the objects of interest in the long row of peaks which backed the Val Bergel with their snows and flashing Alpine steeps. I longed to ask a question, but dared not. 'Hotel' was what she had said, yet this place had scarcely the look of one. But she afforded us an answer of her own accord.

'You must know that my brother has a fancy of playing at landlord,' she said, looking at us in a playful way. 'He has built a hostel for the English and the Italians of the Court. It was to be a new Paris, was it not so? And no doubt it would have been, but that the distance was over great. It was indeed almost a Paris in the happy days of one summer. But since then I have

been almost the only guest.'

'It is marvellously beautiful,' I replied. 'I would that we might be permitted to become guests as well.'

'As to that, my brother will have no objections, I am sure,' replied the Countess, 'specially if you tell your countrymen on your return to your own country. He counts on the English to get him his money back. The French have no taste for scenery. They care only for theatres and pretty women, and the Italians have no money—alas! poor Castel del Monte!'

I understood that she was referring to her husband, and said hastily—

'Madame is Italian?'

'Who knows?' she returned, with a pretty, indescribable movement of her shoulders. 'My father was a Russian of rank. He married an Englishwoman. I was born in Italy, educated in England. I married an Italian of rank at seventeen; at nineteen I found myself a widow, and free to choose the world as my home. Since then I have lived as an Englishwoman expatriated—for she of all human beings is the freest.'

I looked at her for explanation. Henry, whose appreciation of women was for the time-being seared by his recent experience of Madame of the Red Eyelids, got out to assist Beppo with the horses. In a little I saw him take the reins. We were going slowly uphill all the time.

'In what way,' I said, 'is the Englishwoman abroad the freest of all human beings?'

'Because, being English, she is supposed to be a little mad at any rate. Secondly, because she is known to be rich, for all English are rich. And, lastly, because she is recognised to be a woman of sense and discretion, having the wisdom to live out of her own country.'

We arrived on the sweep of gravel before the door. I was astonished at the decorations. Upon a flat plateau of small extent, which lay along the edge of a small mountain lake, gravelled paths cut the green sward in every direction. The waters of the lake had been carefully led here and there, in order apparently that they might be crossed by rustic bridges which

seemed transplanted from an opera. Little windmills made pretty waterwheels to revolve, which in turn set in motion mechanical toys and models of race-courses in open booths and gaily painted summer-houses.

'You must not laugh,' said the Countess gravely, seeing me smile, 'for this, you must know, is a mixture of the courts of Italy and Russia among the Alps. It is to my brother a very serious matter. To me it is the Fair of Asnières and the madhouse at Charenton rolled into one.'

I remarked that she did the place scant justice.

'Oh,' she said, 'the place is lovely enough, and in a little while one becomes accustomed to the tomfoolery.'

We ascended the steps. At the top stood a small dark man, with a flash in his eyes which I recognised as kin to the glance which Madame the Countess shot from hers, save that the eyes of the man were black as jet.

'These gentlemen,' said the Countess, 'are English. They are travelling for their pleasure, and one of them stopped my stupid horses when the stupider Beppo let them run away, and jumped himself into the ditch to save his useless skin. You will thank the gentlemen for me, Nicholas.'

The small dark man bowed low, yet with a certain reserve.

'You are welcome, messieurs,' he said in English, spoken with a very strong foreign accent. 'I am greatly in your debt that you have been of service to my sister.'

He bowed again to both of us, without in the least distinguishing which of us had done the service, which I thought unfair.

'It is my desire,' he went on more freely, as one that falls into a topic upon which he is accustomed to speak, 'that English people should be made aware of the beauty of this noble plateau of Promontonio. It is a favourable chance which brings you here. Will you permit me to show you the hotel?'

He paused as though he felt the constraint of the circumstances. 'Here, you understand, gentlemen, I am a hotel-keeper. In my own country—that is another

matter. I trust, gentlemen, I may receive you some day in my own house in the province of Kasan.'

'It will make us but too happy,' said I, 'if in your capacity as landlord you can permit us to remain a few days in this paradise.'

I saw Henry look at me in some astonishment; but his training forbade him to make any reply, and the little noble landlord was too obviously pleased to do more than bow. He rang a bell and called a very distinguished gentleman in a black dress-coat, whose spotless attire made our rough outfit look exceedingly disreputable, and the knapsacks upon our backs no less than criminal. We decided to send at once to Vico Averso for our baggage.

But these very eccentricities riveted the admiration of our distinguished host, for only the mad English would think of tramping through the Val Bergel in the heart of May with a donkey's load on their backs. Herr Gutwein, a mild, spectacled German, and the manager of this cosmopolitan palace, was instructed to show us to the best rooms in the house. From him we learned that the hotel was nearly empty, but that it was being carried on at great loss, in the hope of ultimate success.

We found it indeed an abode of garish luxury. In the great salon, the furniture was crimson velvet and gold. All the chairs were gilt. The very table-legs were gilded. There were clocks chiming and ticking everywhere, no one of them telling the right time. In the bedrooms, which were lofty and spacious, there were beautiful canopies, and the most recent improvements for comfort. The sitting-rooms had glass observatories built out, like swallows' nests plastered against the sides of the house. Blue Vallauris vases were set in the corners and filled with flowers. Turkey carpets of red and blue covered the floor. Marvellous gold-worked tablecloths from Smyrna were on the tables. Everywhere there was a tinge of romance made real—the dream of many luxuries and civilisations transplanted and etherealised among the mountains.

Then, when we had asked the charges for the rooms and found them exceedingly reasonable, we

received from the excellent Herr Gutwein much information.

The hotel was the favourite hobby of Count Nicholas. It was the dream of his life that he should make it pay. While he lived in it, he paid tariff for his rooms and all that he had. His sister also did the same, and all her suite. Indeed, the working expenses were at present paid by Madame the Countess of Castel del Monte, who was a half-sister of Count Nicholas, and much younger. The husband of Madame was dead some years. She had been married when no more than a girl to an Italian of thrice her age. He, dying in the second year of their marriage, had left her free to please herself as to what she did with her large fortune. Madame was rich, eccentric, generous; but to men generally more than a little sarcastic and cold.

At dinner that night Count Nicholas took the head of the table, while Dr. Carson, the resident English physician, sat at his left hand, and Madame at his right. I sat next to the Countess, and Henry Fenwick next to the doctor. We made a merry party. The Count opened for us a bottle of Forzato and another of Sassella, of the quaint, untranslatable bouquet which will not bear transportation over the seas, and to taste which you must go to the Swiss confines of the Valtellina.

'Lucia,' said Count Nicholas, 'you will join me in a bottle of the Straw wine in honour of the stopping of the horses; and you will drink to the health of these gentlemen who are with us, to whom we owe so much.' Afterwards we drank to Madame, to the Count himself, and to the interests of science in the person of the doctor. Then finally we pledged the common good of the hotel and kursaal of the Promontonio.

The Countess was dressed in some rose-coloured fabric, thickly draped with black lace, through whose folds the faint pink blush struggled upward with some suggestion of rose fragrance, so sheathed was she in close-fitting drapery. She looked still a very girl, though there was the slower grace of womanhood in the lissom turn of her figure, slender and *svelte*. Her blue-black hair had purple lights in it. And her great dark violet

eyes were soft as La Vallière's. I know not why, but to myself I called her from that moment, 'My Lady of the Violet Crown.' There was a passion-flower in her hair, and on her pale face her lips, perfectly shaped, lay like the twin petals of a geranium flower fallen a little apart.

Dinner was over. The lingering lights of May were shining through the hill gaps, glorifying the scant woods and the little mountain lake. Henry Fenwick and the Count were soon deep in shooting and breechloaders. Presently they disappeared in the direction of the Count's rooms to examine some new and beautiful specimens more at their leisure.

In an hour Henry came rushing back to us in great excitement.

'I have written for all my things from Lago d'Istria,' he said, 'and I am getting my guns from home. There is some good shooting, the Count says. Do you object to us staying here a little time?'

I did not contradict him, for indeed such a new-born desire to abide in one place was at that moment very much to my mind. And though I could not conceive what, save rabbits, there could be to shoot in May on a sub-Alpine hillside, I took care not to say a word which might damp my pupil's excellent enthusiasms.

CHAPTER SIX
LOVE ME A LITTLE—NOT TOO MUCH

I stood by the wooden pillars of the wide piazza and watched the stars come out. Presently a door opened and the Countess appeared. She had a black shawl of soft lace about her head, which came round her shoulders and outlined her figure.

I knew that this must be that mantilla of Spain of which I had read, and which I had been led to conceive of as a clumsy and beauty-concealing garment, like the *yashmak* of the Turks. But the goodness of the picture was such that in my own country I had never seen green nor grey which set any maid one-half so well.

‘Let us walk by the lake,’ she said, ‘and listen to the night.’

So quite naturally I offered her my arm, and she took it as though it were a nothing hardly to be perceived. Yet in Galloway of the hills it would have taken me weeks even to conceive myself offering an arm to a beautiful woman. Here such things were in the air. Nevertheless was my heart beating wildly within me, like a bird's wings that must perforce pulsate faster in a rarer atmosphere. So I held my arm a little wide of my side lest she should feel my heart throbbing. Foolish youth! As though any woman does not know, most of all one who is beautiful. So there on my arm, light and white as the dropped feather of an angel's wing, her hand rested. It was bare, and a diamond shone upon it.

The lake was a steel-grey mirror where it took the light of the sky. But in the shadows it was dark as night. The evening was very still, and only the Thal wind drew upward largely and contentedly.

‘Tell me of yourself!’ she said, as soon as we had passed from under the shelter of the hotel.

I hesitated, for indeed it seemed a strange thing to speak to so great a lady concerning the little moorland home, of my mother, and all the simple people out there upon the hills of sheep.

The Countess looked up at me, and I saw a light

shine in the depths of her eyes.

'You have a mother—tell me of her!' she said.

So I told her in simple words a tale which I had spoken of to no one before—of slights and scorns, for she was a woman, and understood. It came into my mind as I spoke that as soon as I had finished she would leave me; and I slackened my arm that she might the more easily withdraw her hand. But yet I spoke on faithfully, hiding nothing. I told of our poverty, of the struggle with the hill-farm and the backward seasons, of my mother who looked over the moorland with sweet tired eyes as for some one that came not. I spoke of the sheep that had been my care, of the books I had read on the heather, and of all the mystery and the sadness of our life.

Then we fell silent, and the shadows of the sadness I had left behind me seemed to shut out the kindly stars. I would have taken my arm away, but that the Countess drew it nearer to herself, clasping her hands about it, and said softly—

'Tell me more—' and then, after a little pause, she added, 'and you may call me Lucia! For have you not saved my life?'

Like a dream the old Edinburgh room, where with Giovanni Turazza I read the Tuscan poets, came to me. An ancient rhyme was in my head, and ere I was aware I murmured—

'Saint Lucy of the Eyes!'

The Countess started as if she had been stung.

'No, not that—not that,' she said; 'I am not good enough.'

There was some meaning in the phrase to her which was not known to me.

'You are good enough to be an angel—I am sure,' I said—foolishly, I fear.

There was a little silence, and a waft of scented air like balm—I think the perfume of her hair, or it may have been the roses clambering on the wall. I know not. We were passing some.

'No,' she said, very firmly, 'not so, nor nearly so—only good enough to desire to be better, and to walk here with you and listen to you telling of your mother.'

We walked on thus till we heard the roar of the Trevisa falls, and then turned back, pacing slowly along the shore. The Countess kept her head hid beneath the mantilla, but swayed a little towards me as though listening. And I spoke out my heart to her as I had never done before. Many of the things I said to her then, caused me to blush at the remembrance of them for many days after. But under the hush of night, with her hands pressing on my arm, the perfume of flowers in the air, and a warm woman's heart beating so near mine, it is small wonder that I was not quite myself. At last, all too soon, we came to the door, and the Countess stood to say good-night.

'Good-night!' she said, giving me her hand and looking up, yet staying me with her great eyes; 'good-night, friend of mine! You saved my life today, or at least I hold it so. It is not much to save, and I did not value it highly, but you were not to know that. You have told me much, and I think I know more. You are young. Twenty-three is childhood. I am twenty-six, and ages older than you. Remember, you are not to fall in love with me. You have never been in love, I know. You do not know what it is. So you must not grow to love me—or, at least, not too much. Then you will be ready when the True Love that waits somewhere comes your way.'

She left me standing without a word. She ran up the steps swiftly. On the topmost she poised a moment, as a bird does for flight.

'Good-night, Douglas!' she said. 'Stephen is a name too common for you—I shall call you Douglas. Remember, you must love me a little—but not too much.'

I stood dull and stupid, in a maze of whirling thought. My great lady had suddenly grown human, but human of a kind that I had had no conception of. Only this morning I had been opening the stores of very chill wisdom to my pupil, Henry Fenwick of Allerton. Yet here, long ere night was at its zenith, was I, standing amazed, trying under the stars to remember exactly what a woman had said, and how she looked when she said it.

'To love her a little—yet not to love her too much.'
That was the difficult task she had set me. How to perform I knew not.

At the top of the steps I met Henry.

'Do you think that we need go on tomorrow morning?' he said. 'Do you not think we are in a very good quarter of the world, and that we might do worse than stop a while?'

'If you wish it, I have no objections,' I said, with due caution.

'Thank you!' he said, and ran off to give some further directions about his guns.

CHAPTER SEVEN THE NEW DAY

It need not be wondered at that during the night I slept little. It seemed such a strange thing which had happened to me. That a great lady should lean upon my arm—a lady of whom before that day I had never heard—seemed impossible to my slow-moving Scots intelligence.

I sat most of the night by my window, from which I looked down the valley. The moonlight was filling it. The stars tingled keen and frosty above. Lucent haze of colourless pearl-grey filled the chasm. On the horizon there was a flush of rose, in the midst of which hung a snowy peak like a wave arrested when it curves to break, and on the upmost surge of white winked a star.

I opened the casement and flung it back. The cool, icy air of night took hold on me. I listened. There came from below the far sound of falling waters. Nearer at hand a goat bleated keenly. A dull, muffled sound, vast and mysterious, rose slumberously. I remembered that I was near to the great Alps. Without doubt it was the rumble of an avalanche.

But more than all these things,—under this roof, closed within the white curtains, was the woman who with her well-deep, serene eyes had looked into my life.

‘Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow!’ I said to myself, seeing the possibilities waver and thicken before me. So I went to my bed, leaving the window open, and after a time slept.

But very early I was astir. The lake lay asleep. The shadows in its depths dreamed on untroubled. There was not the lapse of a wavelet on the shore. The stars diminished to pin-points, and wistfully withdrew themselves into the coming mystery of blue. Behind the eastern mountains the sun rose—not yet on us who were in the valley, but flooding the world overhead with intense light. On the second floor a casement opened and a blind was drawn aside. There was nothing more—a serving-maid, belike. But my heart beat tumultuously.

Nova dies indeed, but I fear me not *nova quies*.

But when ever to a man was love a synonym for quietness? Quietness is rest. Rest is embryonic sleep. Sleep is death's brother. But, contrariwise, love to a man is life—new life. Life is energy—the opening of new possibilities, the breaking of ancient habitudes. Sulky self-satisfactions are hunted from their lair. Sloth is banished, selfishness done violence to with swiftest poniard-stroke.

Again, even to a passionate woman love is rest. That low sigh which comes from her when, after weary waiting, at last her lips prove what she has long expected, is the sigh for rest achieved. There is indeed nothing that she does not know. But, for her, knowledge is not enough—she desires possession. The poorest man is glorified when she takes him to her heart. She desires no longer to doubt and fret—only to rest and to be quiet. A woman's love when she is true is like a heaven of Sabbaths. A man's, at his best, like a Monday morn when the work of day and week begins. For love, to a true man, is above all things a call to work. And this is more than enough of theory.

Once I was in a manufacturing city when the horns of the factories blew, and in every street there was the noise of footsteps moving to the work of the day. It struck me as infinitely cheerful. All these many men had the best of reasons for working. Behind them, as they came out into the chill morning air, they shut to the doors upon wife and children. Why should they not work? Why should they desire to be idle? Had I, methought, such reasons and pledges for work, I should never be idle, and therefore never unhappy. For me, I choose a Monday morning of work with the whistles blowing, and men shutting their doors behind them. For that is what I mean by love.

All this came back to me as I walked alone by the lake while the day was breaking behind the mountains.

As though she had heard the trumpet of my heart calling her, she came. I did not see her till she was near me on the gravel path which leads to the ch[^]alet by the lake. There was a book of devotion in her hand. It was marked with a cross. I had forgotten my prayers that morning till I saw this.

Yet I hardly felt rebuked, for it was morning and the day was before me. With so much that was new, the old could well wait a little. For which I had bitterly to repent.

She looked beyond conception lovely as she came towards me. Taller than I had thought, for I had not seen her—you must remember—since. It seemed to me that in the night she had been recreated, and came forth fresh as Eve from the Eden sleep. Her eyelashes were so long that they swept her cheeks; and her eyes, that I had thought to be violet, had now the sparkle in them which you may see in the depths of the southern sea just where the sapphire changes into amethyst.

Did we say good morning? I forget, and it matters little. We were walking together. How light the air was!—cool and rapturous like snow-chilled wine that is drunk beneath the rose at thirsty Teheran. The ground on which we trod, too, how strangely elastic! The pine-trees give out how good a smell! Is my heart beating at all, or only so fine and quick that I cannot count its pulsings?

What is she saying—this lady of mine? I am not speaking aloud—only thinking. Cannot I think?

She told me, I believe, why she had come out. I have forgotten why. It was her custom thus to walk in the prime. She had still the mantilla over her head, which, as soon as the sun looked over the eastern crest of the mountains, she let drop on her shoulders and so walked bareheaded, with her head carried a trifle to the side and thrown back, so that her little rounded chin was in the air.

'I have thought,' she was saying when I came to myself, 'all the night of what you told me of your home on the hills. It must be happiness of the greatest and most perfect, to be alone there with the voices of nature—the birds crying over the heather and the cattle in the fields.'

'Good enough,' I said, 'it is for us moorland folk who know nothing better than each other's society—the bleating sheep to take us out upon the hills and the lamp-light streaming through the door as we return homewards.'

'There is nothing better in this world!' said the Countess with emphasis.

But just then I was not at all of that mind.

'Ah, you think so,' said I, 'because you do not know the hardness of the life and its weary sameness. It is better to be free to wander where you will, in this old land of enchantments, where each morning brings a new joy and every sun a clear sky.'

'You are young—young,' she said, shaking her head musingly, 'and you do not know. I am old. I have tried many ways of life, and I know.'

It angered me thus to hear her speak of being old. It seemed to put her far from me I remembered afterwards that I spoke with some sharpness, like a petulant boy.

'You are not so much older than I, and a great lady cannot know of the hardness of the life of those who have to earn their daily bread.'

She smiled in an infinitely patient way behind her eyelashes.

'Douglas,' she said, 'I have earned my living for more years than the difference of age that is between us.'

I looked at her in amazement, but she went on—

'In my brother's country, which is Russia, we are not secure of what is our own, even for a day. We may well pray there for our daily bread. In Russia we learn the meaning of the Lord's Prayer.'

'But have you not,' I asked, 'great possessions in Italy?'

'I have,' the Countess said, 'an estate here that is my own, and many anxieties therewith. Also I have, at present, the command of wealth—which I have never yet seen bring happiness. But for all, I would that I dwelt on the wide moors and baked my own bread.'

I did not contradict her, seeing that her heart was set on such things; nevertheless, I knew better than she.

'You do not believe!' she said suddenly, for I think from the first she read my heart like a printed book. 'You do not understand! Well, I do not ask you to believe. You do not know me yet, though I know you.'

Some day you will have proof!

'I believe everything you tell me,' I answered fervently.

'Remember,' she said, lifting a finger at me—'only enough and not too much. Tell me what is your idea of the place where I could be happy.'

This I could answer, for I had thought of it.

'In a town of clear rivers and marble palaces,' I answered, 'where there are brave knights to escort fair ladies and save them from harm. In a city where to be a woman is to be honoured, and to be young is to be loved.'

'And you, young seer, that are of the moorland and the heather,' she said, 'where would you be in such a city?'

'As for me,' I said, 'I would stand far off and watch you as you passed by.'

'Ah, Messer Dante Alighieri, do not make a mistake. I am no Beatrice. I love not chill aloofness. I am but Lucia, here today and gone tomorrow. But rather than all rhapsodies, I would that you were just my friend, and no further off than where I can reach you my hand and you can take it.'

So saying, because we came to the little bridge where the pines meet overhead, she reached me her hand at the word; and as it lay in mine I stooped and kissed it, which seemed the most natural thing in the world to do.

She looked at me earnestly, and I thought there was a reproachful pity in her eyes.

'Friend of mine, you will keep your promise,' she said. I knew well enough what promise it was that she meant.

'Fear not,' I replied; 'I promise and I keep.'

Yet all the while my heart was busy planning how through all the future I might abide near by her side.

We turned and walked slowly back. The hotel stood clear and sharp in the morning sunshine, and a light wind was making the little waves splash on the pebbles with a pleasant clapping sound.

'See,' she said, 'here is my brother coming to meet us. Tell me if you have been happy this morning?'

'Oh,' I said quickly, 'happy!—you know that without needing to be told.'

'No matter what I know,' the Countess said, with a certain petulance, swift and lovable—'tell it me.'

So I said obediently, yet as one that means his words to the full—

'I have been happier than ever I thought to be this morning!'

'Lucia!' she said softly— 'say Lucia!'

'Lucia!' I answered to her will; yet I thought she did not well to try me so hard.

Then her brother came up briskly and heartily, like one who had been afoot many hours, asking us how we did.

CHAPTER EIGHT THE CRIMSON SHAWL

Henry Fenwick and the Count went shooting. He came and asked my leave as one who is uncertain of an answer. And I gave it guiltily, saying to myself that anything which took his mind off Madame Von Eisenhagen was certainly good. But there leaped in my heart a great hope that, in what remained of the day, I might again see the Countess.

I was grievously disappointed. For though I lounged all the afternoon in the pleasant spaces by the lake, only the servants, of the great empty hotel passed at rare intervals. Of Lucia I saw nothing, till the Count and Henry passed in with their guns and found me with my book.

'Have you been alone all the afternoon?' they said, innocently enough. And it was some consolation to answer 'Yes,' and so to receive their sympathy.

Henry came again to me after dinner. The Count was going over the hills to the Forno glacier, and had asked him; but he would not go unless I wished it. I bade him take my blessing and depart, and again he thanked me.

There was that night a band of thirty excellent performers to discourse music to the guests at the table—being, as the saw says, us four and no more. But the Count was greatly at his ease, and told us tales of the forests of Russia, of wolf-hunts, and of other hunts when the wolves were the hunters—tales to make the blood run cold, yet not amiss being recounted over a bottle of Forzato in the bright dining-room. For, though it was the beginning of May, the fire was sparkling and roaring upwards to dispel the chill which fell with the evening in these high regions.

There is talk of mountaineering and of the English madness for it. The Count and Henry Fenwick are on a side. Henry has been over long by himself on the Continent. He is at present all for sport. Every day he must kill something, that he may have something to show. The Countess is for the hills, as I am, and the *élan* of going ever upward. So we fall to talk about

the mountains that are about us, and the Count says that it is an impossibility to climb them at this season of the year. Avalanches are frequent, and the cliffs are slippery with the daily sun-thaw congealing in thin sheets upon the rocks. He tells us that there is one peak immediately behind the hotel which yet remains unclimbed. It is the Piz Langrev, and it rises like a tower. No man could climb that mural precipice and live.

I tell them that I have never climbed in this country; but that I do not believe that there is a peak in, the world which cannot in some fashion or another be surmounted—time, money, and pluck being provided wherewith to do it.

'You have a fine chance, my friend,' says the Count kindly, 'for you will be canonised by the guides if you find a way up the front of the Langrev. They would at once clap on a tariff which would make their fortunes, in order to tempt your wise countrymen, who are willing to pay vast sums to have the risk of breaking their necks, yet who will not invest in the best property in Switzerland when it is offered to them for a song.'

The Count is a little sore about his venture and its ill success.

The Countess, who sits opposite to me tonight, looks across and says, 'I am sure that the peak can be climbed. If Mr. Douglas says so, it can.'

'I thank you, Madame,' I say, bowing across at her.

Whereat the other two exclaim. It is (they say) but an attempt on my part to claim credit with a lady, who is naturally on the side of the adventurous. The thing is impossible.

'Countess,' say I, piqued by their insistency, 'if you will give me a favour to be my *drapeau de guerre*, in twenty-four hours I shall plant your colours on the battlements of the Piz Langrev.'

Certainly the Forzato had been excellent.

The Countess Lucia handed a crimson shawl, which had fallen back from her shoulders, and which now hung over the back of her chair, across the table

to me.

'They are my colours!' she said, with a light in her eye as though she had been royalty itself.

Now, I had studied the Piz Langrev that afternoon, and I was sure it could be done. I had climbed the worst precipices in the Dungeon of Buchan, and looked into the nest of the eagle on the Clints of Craignaw. It was not likely that I would come to any harm so long as there was a foothold or an armhold on the face of the cliff. At least, my idiotic pique had now pledged me to the attempt, as well as my pride, for above all things I desired to stand well in the eyes of the Countess.

But when we had risen from table, and in the evening light took our walk, she repented her of the giving of the gage, and said that the danger was too great. I must forget it—how could she bear the anxiety of waiting below while I was climbing the rocks of the Piz Langrev? It pleased me to hear her say so, but for all that my mind was not turned away from my endeavour.

It was a foolish thing that I had undertaken, but it sprang upon me in the way of talk. So many follies are committed because we men fear to go back upon our word. The privilege of woman works the other way. Which is as well, for the world would come to a speedy end if men and women were to be fools according to the same follies.

The Countess was quieter tonight. Perhaps she felt that her encouragement had led me into some danger. Yet she had that sense of the binding nature of the 'passed word,' which is perhaps strongest in women who are by nature and education cosmopolitan. She did not any more persuade me against my attempt, and soon went within. She had said little, and we had walked along together for the most part silent. Methought the stars were not so bright tonight, and the glamour had gone from the bridge under which the water was dashing white.

I also returned, for I had my arrangements to make for the expedition. The weather did not look very promising, for the Thal wind was bringing the heavy

mist-spume pouring over the throat of the pass, and driving past the hotel in thin hissing wisps on a chill breeze. However, even in May the frost was keen at night, and tomorrow might be a day after the climber's heart.

I sought the manager in his sanctum of polished wood—a *comptoir* where there was little to count. Managers were a fleeting race in the Kursaal Promontonio. The Count was a kind master. But he was a Russian, and a taskmaster like those of Egypt, in that he expected his managers to make the bricks of dividends without the straw of visitors. With him I covenanted to be roused at midnight.

Herr Gutwein was somewhat unwilling. He had not so many visitors that he could afford to expend one on the cliffs of the Piz Langrev.

I looked out on the lake and the mountains from the window of my room before I turned in. They did not look encouraging.

Hardly, it seemed, had my head touched the pillow, when 'clang, clang' went someone on my door. 'It is half-past twelve, Herr, and time to get up!'

I saw the frost-flowers on the window-pane, and shivered. Yet there was the laughter of Henry and the Count to be faced; and, above all, I had passed my word to Lucia.

'Well, I suppose I may as well get up and take a look at the thing, anyway. Perhaps it may be snowing,' I said, with a devout hope that the blinds of mist or storm might be drawn down close about the mountains.

But, pushing aside the green window-blind, I saw all the stars twinkling; and the broad moon, a little worm-eaten about the upper edge, was flinging a pale light over the Forno glacier and the thick pines that hide Lake Cavalocchia.

'Ah, it is cold!' I flung open the hot-air register, but the fires were out and the engineer asleep, for a draft of icy wind came up—direct from the snowfields. I slammed it down, for the mercury in my thermometer was falling so rapidly that I seemed to hear it tap-tapping on the bottom of the scale.

Below there was a sleepy porter, who with the utmost gruffness produced some lukewarm coffee, with stale, dry slices of over-night bread, and flavoured the whole with an evil-smelling lamp.

‘Shriekingly cold, Herr; yes, it is so in here!’ he said in answer to my complaints. ‘Yes—but, it is warm to what it will be up there outside.’

The pack was donned. The double stockings, the fingerless woollen gloves were put on, and the earflaps of the cap were drawn down. The door was opened quietly, and the chill outer air met us like a wall.

‘A good journey, my Herr!’ said the porter, a mocking accent in his voice—the rascal.

I strode from under the dark shadow of the hotel, wondering if Lucia was asleep behind her curtains over the porch.

CHAPTER NINE
THE PIZ LANGREV

Past the waterfall and over the bridge—our bridge—ran the path. As I turned my face to the mountain, there was a strange constricted feeling about one corner of my mouth, to which I put up a mittened hand. A small icicle fell tinkling down. My feet were now beginning to get a little warm, but I felt uncertain whether my ears were hot or cold. There was a strange unattached feeling about them. Had I not been reading somewhere of a mountaineer who had some such feeling? He put his hand to his ear and broke off a piece as one breaks a bit of biscuit. A horrid thought, but one which assuredly stimulates attention.

Then I took off one glove and rubbed the ear vigorously with the warm palm of my hand. There was a tingling glow, as though some one were striking lucifer matches all along the rim; soon there was no doubt that the circulation was effectually restored. *En avant!* Ears are useless things at the best.

I kept my head down, climbing steadily. But with the tail of my eye I could see that the hills had a sprinkling of snow—the legacy of the Thal wind which last night brought the moisture up the valley. Only the crags of the Piz Langrev were black above me, with a few white streaks in the crevices where the snow lies all the year. The cliffs were too steep for the snow to lie upon them, the season too far advanced for it to remain on the lower slopes.

The moon was lying over on her back, and the stars tingled through the frosty air. The lake lay black beneath on a grey world, plain as a blot of ink on a boy's copybook.

Yet I had only been climbing among the rocks a very few moments when every nerve was thrilling with warmth and all the arteries of the body were filled with a rushing tide of jubilant life. 'This is noble!' I said to myself, as if I had never had a thought of retreat. A glow of heat came through my woollen gloves from the black rocks up which I climbed.

But I had gradually been getting out of the clear

path on the face of the rocks into a kind of gully. I did not like the look of the place. There was a ground and polished look about the rocks at the sides which did not please me. I have seen the like among the Clints of Minnigaff, where the spouts of shingle make their way over the cliff. In the cleft was a kind of curious snow, dry like sand, creaking and binding together under foot—amazingly like pounded ice.

In the twinkling of an eye I had proof that I was right. There was a kind of slushy roaring above, a sharp crack or two as of some monster whip, and a sudden gust filled the gully. There was just time for me to throw myself sideways into a convenient cleft, and to draw feet up as close to chin as possible, when that hollow which had seemed my path, and high up the ravine on either side, was filled with tumbling, hissing snow, while the rocks on either side echoed with the musketry spatter of stones and ice-pellets.

I felt something cold on my temple. As the glove came down from touching it, there was a stain on the wool. A button of ice, no larger than a shilling, spinning on its edge, had neatly clipped a farthing's-worth out of the skin—as neatly as the house-surgeon of an hospital could do it.

At this point the story of a good Highland minister came up in my mind inopportunately, as these things will. He was endeavouring to steer a boat-load of city young ladies to a landing-place. A squall was bursting; the harbour was difficult. One of the girls annoyed him by jumping up and calling anxiously, 'O, where are we going to? Where are we going to?' 'If you do not sit down and keep still, my young leddy,' said the minister-pilot succinctly, 'that will verra greatly depend on how you was brocht up!'

The place at which I remembered this might have been a fine place for an observatory. It was not so convenient for reminiscence. Here the path ended. I was as far as Turn Back. I therefore tried more round to the right. The rocks were so slippery with the melted snow of yesterday that the nails in my boots refused to grip. But presently there, remained only a snow-slope, and a final pull up a great white-fringed bastion of

rock. Here was the summit; and even as I reached it, over the Bernina the morning was breaking clear.

I took from my back the pine-branch which had been such a difficulty to me in the narrow places of the ascent; and with the first ray of the morning sun, from the summit of Langrev the pennon of the Countess Lucia streamed out. I thought of Manager Gutwein down there on the look-out, and I rejoiced that I had pledged him to secrecy.

Gutwein—there was a sound as of cakes and ale in the very name.

A little way beneath the summit, where the Thal wind does not vex, I sat me down on the sunny eastern side to consult with the Gutwein breakfast. A bottle of cold tea—‘Hum,’ said I; ‘that may keep till I get farther down. It will be useful in case of emergency—there is nothing like cold tea in an emergency. *Imprimis*, half a bottle of Forzato—our old Straw wine. How thoughtless of Gutwein! He ought to have remembered that that particular sort does not keep. We had better take it now!’ There was also half a chicken, some clove-scented Graubündenfleisch, four large white rolls, crisp as an Engadine cook can make them, half a pound of butter in each—O excellent Gutwein—O great and judicious Gutwein!

But no more—for the sun was climbing the sky, and I must go down with a rush to be in time for the late breakfast of the hotel.

The rocks came first—no easy matter with the sun on them for half an hour; but they at last were successfully negotiated. Then came the long snow-slope. This we went down all sails set. I hear that the process is named glissading in this country. It is called hunker-sliding in Scotland among the Galloway hills—a favourite occupation of politicians. It added to the flavour that we might very probably finish all standing in a crevasse. Snow rushed past, flew up one's nose and froze there. It did not behave itself thus when we slid down Craig Ronald and whizzed out upon the smooth breast of Loch Grannoch. I was reflecting on this unwarrantable behaviour of the snow, when there came a bump, a somersault, a slide, a scramble. ‘Dear

me!' I say; 'how did this happen?' Ears, eyes, mouth, nose were full of fine powdered snow—also, there were tons down one's back. Cold as charity, but no great harm done.

The table was set for the *déjeuner* in the dining-room of the hotel. The Count was standing rubbing his hands. Henry, who had been shooting at a mark, came in smelling of gun-oil; and after a little pause of waiting came the Countess.

'Where,' said the Count, 'is our Alpinist?' Henry had not seen him that day. He was no doubt somewhere about. But Herr Gutwein smiled, and also the waiter. They knew something. There was a crying at the door. The porter, full of noisy admiration, rang the great bell as for an arrival. Gutwein disappeared. The Count followed, then came Lucia and Henry. At that moment I arrived, outwardly calm, with my clothes carefully dusted from travel-stains, all the equipment of the ascent left in the wayside *châlet* by the bridge. I gave an easy good-morning to the group, taking off my hat to Madame. The Count cried disdainfully that I was a slug-a-bed. Henry asked with obvious sarcasm if I had not been up the Piz Langrev. The Countess held out her hand in an uncertain way. Certainly I must have been very young, for all this gave me intense pleasure. Especially did my heart leap when I took the Countess to the window a little to the right, and, pointing with one hand upwards, put the Count's binocular into her hands. The sun of the mid-noon was shining on a black speck floating from the topmost cliff of the Piz Langrev. As she looked she flung out her hand to me, still continuing to gaze with the glass held in the other. She saw her own scarlet favour flying from the pine-branch. That cry of wonder and delight was better to me than the Victoria Cross. I was young then. It is so good to be young, and better to be in love.

CHAPTER TEN THE PURPLE CHÂLET

Our life at the Kursaal Promontonio was full of change and adventure. For adventures are to the adventurous. In the morning we read quietly together, Henry and I, beginning as soon as the sun touched our balcony, and continuing three or four hours, with only such intermission as the boiling of our spirit-lamp and the making of cups of tea afforded to the steady work of the morning.

Then at breakfast time the work of the day was over. We were ready to make the most of the long hours of sunshine which remained. Sometimes we rowed with Lucia and her brother on the lake, dreaming under the headlands and letting the boat drift among the pictured images of the mountains.

Oftener the Count and Henry would go to their shooting, or away on some of the long walks which they took in company.

One evening it happened that M. Bourget, the architect of the hotel, a bright young Belgian, was at dinner with us, and the conversation turned upon the illiberal policy of the new Belgian Government. Most of the guests at table were landowners and extreme reactionaries. The conversation took that insufferably brutal tone of repression at all hazards which is the first thought of the governing classes of a despotic country, when alarmed by the spread of liberal opinions.

I could see that both the Count and Lucia put a strong restraint upon themselves, for I knew that their sympathies were with the oppressed of their own nation. But the excitement of M. Bourget was painful to see. He could speak but little English (for out of compliment to us the Count and the others were speaking English); and though on several occasions he attempted to tell the company that matters in his country were not as they were being represented, he had not sufficient words to express his meaning, and so subsided into a dogged silence.

My own acquaintance with the political

movements in Europe was not sufficient to enable me to claim any special knowledge; but I knew the facts of the Belgian dispute well enough, and I made a point of putting them clearly before the company. As I did so, I saw the Count lean towards me, his face whiter than usual and his eyes dark and intense. The Countess, too, listened very intently; but the architect could not keep his seat.

As soon as I had finished he rose, and, coming round to where I sat, offered me his hand.

'You have spoken well,' he said; 'you are my brother. You have said what I was not able to say myself.'

On the next day the architect, to show his friendship, offered to take us all over a *châlet* which had been built on the cliffs above the *Kursaal*, of which very strange tales had gone abroad. The Count and Henry had not come back from one of their expeditions, so that only the Countess Lucia and myself accompanied M. Bourget.

As we went he told us a strange story. The *châlet* was built and furnished to the order of a German countess from Mannheim, who, having lost her husband, conceived that the light of her life had gone out, and so determined to dwell in an atmosphere of eternal gloom.

To the outer view there was nothing extraordinary about the place—a *châlet* in the Swiss-Italian taste, with wooden balconies and steep outside stairs.

M. Bourget threw open the outer door, to which we ascended by a wide staircase. We entered, and found ourselves in a very dark hall. All the woodwork was black as ebony, with silver lines on the panels. The floor was polished work of parquetry, but black also. The roof was of black wood. The house seemed to be a great coffin. Next we went into a richly furnished dining-room. There were small windows at both ends. The hangings here were again of the deepest purple—so dark as almost to be black. The chairs were upholstered in the same material. All the woodwork was ebony. The carpet was of thick folds of black pile

on which the feet fell noiselessly. M. Bourget flung open the windows and let in some air, for it was close and breathless inside. I could feel the Countess shudder as my hand sought and found hers.

So we passed through room after room, each as funereal as the other, till we came to the last of all. It was to be the bedroom of the German widow. M. Bourget, with the instinct of his nation, had arranged a little *coup de théâtre*. He flung open the door suddenly as we stood in one of the gloomy, black-hung rooms. Instantly our eyes were almost dazzled. This furthest room was hung with pure white. The carpet was white; the walls and roof white as milk. All the furniture was painted white. The act of stepping from the blackness of the tomb into this cold, chill whiteness gave me a sense of horror for which I could not account. It was like the horror of whiteness which sometimes comes to me in feverish dreams.

But I was not prepared for its effects upon the Countess.

She turned suddenly and clung to my arm, trembling violently.

'O take me away from this place!' she said earnestly.

M. Bourget was troubled and anxious, but I whispered that it was only the closeness of the rooms which made Madame feel a little faint. So we got her out quickly into the cool bright sunshine of the Alpine pastures. The Countess Lucia recovered rapidly, but it was a long while before the colour came back to her cheeks.

'That terrible, terrible place!' she said again and again. 'I felt as though I were buried alive—shrouded in white, confined in mort-cloths!'

CHAPTER ELEVEN THE WHITE OWL

To distract her mind I told her tales of the grey city of the North where I had been colleged. I told of the bleak and biting winds which cut their way to the marrow of the bones. I described the students rich and poor, but mostly poor, swarming into the gaunt quadrangles, reading eagerly in the library, hasting grimly to be wise, posting hotfoot to distinction or to death. She listened with eyes intent. 'We have something like that in Russia,' she said; 'but then, as soon as these students of ours become a little wise, they are cut off, or buried in Siberia.' But I think that, with all her English speech and descent, Lucia never fully understood that these students of ours were wholly free to come or go, talk folly or learn sense, say and do good and evil, according to the freedom of their own wills. I told of our debating societies, where in the course of one debate there is often enough treason talked to justify Siberia—and yet, after all, the subject under discussion would only be, 'Is the present Government worthy of the confidence of the country?'

'And then what happens? What does the Government say?' asked Lucia.

'Ah, Countess!' I said, 'in my country the Government does not care to know what does not concern it. It sits aloft and aloof. The Government does not care for the chatter of all the young fools in its universities.'

So in the tranced seclusion of this Alpine valley the summer of the year went by. The flowers carpeted the meadows, merging from pink and blue to crimson and russet, till with the first snow the Countess and her brother announced their intention of taking flight—she to the Court of the South, and he to his estates in the North.

The night before her departure we walked together by the lake. She was charmingly arrayed in a scarlet cloak lined with soft brown fur; and I thought—for I was but three-and-twenty—that the turned-up collar threw out her chin in an adorable manner. She looked like a girl. And indeed, as it proved, for that

night she was a girl.

At first she seemed a little sad, and when I spoke of seeing her again at the Court of the South she remained silent, so that I thought she feared the trouble of having us on her hands there. So in a moment I chilled, and would have taken my hand from hers, had she permitted it. But suddenly, in a place where there are sands and pebbly beaches by the lakeside, she turned and drew me nearer to her, holding me meantime by the hand.

'You will not go and forget?' she said. 'I have many things to forget. I want to remember this—this good year and this fair place and you. But you, with your youth and your innocent Scotland—you will go and forget. Perhaps you already long to go back thither.'

I desired to tell her that I had never been so happy in my life. I might have told her that and more, but in her fierce directness she would not permit me.

'There is a maid who sits in one of the tall grey houses of which you speak, or among the moorland farms—sits and waits for you, and you write to her. You are always writing—writing. It is to that girl. You will pass away and think no more of Lucia!'

And I—what could or did I reply? I think that I did the best, for I made no answer at all, but only drew her so close to me that the adorable chin, being thrown out farther than ever, rested for an instant on my shoulder.

'Lucia,' I said to her— 'not Countess any more—little Saint Lucy of the Eyes, hear me. I am but a poor moorland lad, with little skill to speak of love; but with my heart I love you even thus—and thus—and thus.'

And I think that she believed, for it comes natural to Galloway to make love well.

In the same moment we heard the sound of voices, and there were Henry and the Count walking to and fro on the terrace above us in the blessed dark, prosing of guns and battues and shooting.

Lucia trembled and drew away from me, but I put my finger to her lip and drew her nearer the wall, where the creepers had turned into a glorious wine-red.

There we stood hushed, not daring to move; but holding close the one to the other as the feet of the promenaders waxed and waned above us. Their talk of birds and beasts came in wafts of boredom to us, thus standing hand in hand.

I shivered a little, whereat the Countess, putting a hand behind me, drew a fold of her great scarlet cloak round me protectingly as a mother might. So, with her mouth almost in my ear, she whispered, 'This is delightful—is it not so? Pray, just hearken to Nicholas: 'With that I fired.' 'Then we tried the covert.' 'The lock jammed.' 'Forty-four brace.' Listen to the huntsmen! Shall we startle them with the horn, tra-la?' And she thrilled with laughter in my ear there in the blissful dark, till I had to put that over her mouth which silenced her.

'Hush, Lucy, they will hear! Be sage, littlest,' I said in Italian, like one who orders, for (as I have said) Galloway even at twenty-three is no dullard in the things of love.

'Poor Nicholas!' she said again.

'Nay, poor Henry, say rather!' said I, as the footsteps drew away to the verge of the terrace, waxing fine and thin as they went farther from us.

'Hear me,' said she. 'I had better tell you now. Nicholas wishes me greatly to marry one high in power in our own country—one whose influence would permit him to go back to his home in Russia and live as a prince as before.'

'But you will not—you cannot—' I began to say to her.

'Hush!' she said, laughing a little in my ear. 'I certainly shall if you cry out like that—for the footsteps were drawing nearer again. We leaned closer together against the parapet in the little niche where the creepers grew. And the dark grew more fragrant. She drew the great cloak about us both, round my head also. Her own was close to mine, and the touch of her hair thrilled me, quickening yet more the racing of my heart, and making me light-headed like unaccustomed wine.'

'Countess!' I said, searching for words to thrill

her heart as mine was thrilled already.

'Monsieur!' she replied, and drew away the cloak a little, making to leave me, but not as one that really intends to go.

'Lucia,' I said hastily, 'dear Lucy—'

'Ah!' she said, and drew the cloak about us again. And what we said after that, is no matter to any.

But we forgot, marvel at it who will, to hearken to the footsteps that came and went. They were to us meaningless as the lapse of the waves on the shore, pattering an accompaniment above the soft sibilance of our whispered talk, making our converse sweeter.

Yet we had done well to listen a little.

'... I think it went in there,' said the voice of the Count, very near to us and just above our heads. 'I judge it was a white owl.'

'I shall try to get it for the Countess!' said Henry.

Then I heard the most unmistakable, and upon occasion also the most thrilling, of sounds—the clicking of a well-oiled lock. My heart leapt within me—no longer flying in swift, light fashion like footsteps running, but bounding madly in great leaps.

Silently I swept the Countess behind me into the recess of the niche, forcing her down upon the stone seat, and bending my body like a shield over her.

In a moment Henry's piece crashed close at my ear, a keen pain ran like molten lead down my arm; and, spite of my hand upon her lips, Lucia gave a little cry. 'I think I got it that time!' I heard Henry's voice say. 'Count, run round and see. I shall go this way.'

'Run, Lucy,' I whispered, 'they are coming. They must not find you.'

'But you are hurt?' she said anxiously.

'No,' I said, lying to her, as a man does so easily to a woman. 'I am not at all hurt. Have I hurt you?'

For I had thrust her behind me with all my might.

'I cannot tell yet whether you have hurt me or not,' she said. 'You men of the North are too strong!'

'But they come. Run, Lucy, beloved!' I said.

CHAPTER TWELVE A NIGHT ASSAULT

And she melted into the night, swiftly as a bird goes. Then I became aware of flying footsteps. It seemed that I had better not be found there, lest I should compromise the Countess with her brother, and find myself with a duel upon my hands in addition to my other embarrassments. So I set my toes upon the little projections of the stone parapet, taking advantage of the hooks which confined the creepers, and clutching desperately with my hands, so that I scrambled to the top just as the Count and Henry met below.

'Strike a light, Count,' I heard Henry say; 'I am sure I hit something. I heard a cry.'

A light flamed up. There was the rustling noise of the broad leaves of the creeper being pushed aside.

'Here is blood!' cried Henry. 'I was sure I hit something that time!'

His tone was triumphant.

'I tell you what it is, Monsieur,' said the calm voice of the Count: 'if you go through the world banging off shots on the chance of shooting white owls which you do not see, you are indeed likely to hit something. But whether you will like it after it is hit, is another matter.'

Then I went indoors, for my arm was paining me. In my own room I eagerly examined the wound. It was but slight. A pellet or two had grazed my arm and ploughed their way along the thickness of the skin, but none had entered deeply. So I wrapped my arm in a little lint and some old linen, and went to bed.

I did not again see the Countess till noon on the morrow, when her carriage was at the door and she tripped down the steps to enter.

The Count stood by it, holding the door for her to enter—I midway down the broad flight of steps.

'Goodbye,' she said, holding out her hand, from which she deftly drew the glove. 'We shall meet again.'

'God grant it! I live for that!' said I, so low that the Count did not hear, as I bent to kiss her hand. For in these months I had learned many things.

At this moment Henry came up to say farewell, and he shook her hand with boyish affectation of the true British indifference, which at that time it was the correct thing for Englishmen to assume at parting.

'Nice boy!' said the Countess indulgently, looking up at me. The Count bowed and smiled, and smiled and bowed, till the carriage drove out of sight.

Then in a moment he turned to me with a fierce and frowning countenance.

'And now, Monsieur, I have the honour to ask you to explain all this!'

I stood silent, amazed, aghast. There was in me no speech, nor reason. Yet I had the sense to be silent, lest I should say something maladroit.

A confidential servant brought a despatch. The Count impatiently flung it open, glanced at it, then read it carefully twice. He seemed much struck with the contents.

'I am summoned to Milan,' he said, 'and upon the instant. I shall yet overtake my sister. May I ask Monsieur to have the goodness to await me here that I may receive his explanations? I shall return immediately.'

'You may depend that I shall wait,' I said.

The Count bowed, and sprang upon the horse which his servant had saddled for him.

But the Count did not immediately return, and we waited in vain. No letter came to me. No communication to the manager of the hostel. The Count had simply ridden out of sight over the pass through which the Thal wind brought the fog-spume. He had melted like the mist, and, so far as we were concerned, there was an end. We waited here till the second snow fell, hardened, and formed its sleighing crust.

Then we went, for some society to Henry, over to the mountain village of Bergsdorf, which strings itself along the hillside above the River Inn.

Bergsdorf is no more than a village in itself, but, being the chief place of its neighbourhood, it supports enough municipal and other dignitaries to set up an Imperial Court. Never was such wisdom—never such

pompous solemnity. The Burgomeister of Bergsdorf was a great elephant of a man. He went abroad radiating self-importance. He perspired wisdom on the coldest day. The other officials imitated the Burgomeister in so far as their corporeal condition allowed. The *curé* only was excepted. He was a thin, spare man with an ascetic face and a great talent for languages. One day during service he asked a mother to carry out a crying child, making the request in eight languages. Yet the mother failed to understand till the limping old apparator led her out by the arm.

There is no doubt that the humours of Bergsdorf lightened our spirits and cheered our waiting; for it is my experience that a young man is easily amused with new, bright, and stirring things even when he is in love.

And what amused us most was that excellent sport—now well known to the world, but then practised only in the mountain villages—the species of adventure which has come to be called ‘tobogganing.’ I fell heir in a mysterious fashion to a genuine Canadian toboggan, curled and buffalo-robed at the front, flat all the way beneath; and upon this, with Henry on one of the ordinary sleds with runners of steel, we spent many a merry day.

There was a good run down the road to the post village beneath; another, excellent, down a neighbouring pass. But the best run of all started from high up on the hillside, crossed the village street, and undulated down the hillside pastures to the frozen Inn river below—a splendid course of two miles in all. But as a matter of precaution it was strictly forbidden ever to be used—at least in that part of it which crossed the village street. For such projectiles as laden toboggans, passing across the trunk line of the village traffic at an average rate of a mile a minute, were hardly less dangerous than cannon-balls, and of much more erratic flight.

Nevertheless, there was seldom a night when we did not risk all the penalties which existed in the city of Bergsdorf, by defying all powers and regulations whatsoever and running the hill-course in the teeth of danger.

I remember one clear, starlight night with the snow casting up just enough pallid light to see by. Half a dozen of us—Henry and myself, a young Swiss doctor newly diplomaed, the adventurous advocate of the place, and several others—went up to make our nightly venture. We gave half a minute's law to the first starter, and then followed on. I was placed first, mainly because of the excellence of my Canadian ice ship. As I drew away, the snow sped beneath; the exhilarating madness of the ride entered into my blood. I whooped with sheer delight... There was a curve or two in the road, and at the critical moment, by shifting the weight of my body and just touching the snow with the point of the short iron-shod stick I held in my hand, the toboggan span round the curve with the delicious clean cut of a skate. It seemed only a moment, and already I was approaching the critical part of my journey. The stray oil-lights of the village street began to waver irregularly here and there beneath me. I saw the black gap in the houses through which I must go. I listened for the creaking runners of the great Valtelline wine-sledges which constituted the main danger. All was silent and safe. But just as I drew a long breath, and settled for the delicious rise over the piled snow of the street and the succeeding plunge down to the Inn, a vast bulk heaved itself into the seaway, like some lost monster of a Megatherium retreating to the swamps to couch itself ere morning light.

It was the Burgomeister of Bergsdorf.

'Acht—u—um—m!' I shouted, as one who, on the Scottish links, should cry 'Fore!' and be ready to commit murder.

But the vision solemnly held up its hand and cried 'Halt!'

'Halt yourself!' I cried, 'and get out of the way!' For I was approaching at a speed of nearly a mile a minute. Now, there is but one way of halting a toboggan. It is to run the nose of your machine into a snow-bank, where it will stick. On the contrary, you do not stop. You describe the curve known as a parabola, and skin your own nose on the icy crust of the snow. Then you 'halt,' in one piece or several, as the case may

be.

But I, on this occasion, did not halt in this manner. The mind moves swiftly in emergencies. I reflected that I had a low Canadian toboggan with a soft buffalo-skin over the front. The Burgomeister also had naturally well-padded legs. *Eh bien*—a meeting of these two could do no great harm to either. So I sat low in my seat, and let the toboggan run.

Down I came flying, checked a little at the rise for the crossing of the village street. A mountainous bulk towered above me—a bulk that still and anon cried 'Halt!' There was a slight shock and a jar. The stars were eclipsed above me for a moment; something like a large tea-tray passed over my head and fell flat on the snow behind me. Then I scudded down the long descent to the Inn, leaving the village and all its happenings miles behind.

I did not come up the same way. I did not desire to attract immodest attention. Unobtrusively, therefore, I proceeded to leave my toboggan in its accustomed out-house at the back of the Osteria. Then, slipping on another overcoat, I took an innocent stroll along the village street, in the company of the landlord.

There was a great crowd on the corner by the Rathhaus. In the centre was Henry, in the hands of two officers of justice. The Burgomeister, supported by sympathising friends, limped behind. There is no doubt that Henry was exercising English privileges. His captors were unhappy. But I bade him go quietly, and with a look of furious bewilderment he obeyed. Finally we got the hotel-keeper, a staunch friend of ours and of great importance in these parts, to bail him out.

On the morrow there was a deliciously humorous trial. The young advocate was in attendance, and the whole village was called to give evidence. But, curiously enough, I was not summoned. I had been, it seemed, in the hotel changing my clothes. However, I was not missed, for everybody else had something to say. There were excellent plans of the ground, showing where the miscreant assaulted the magistrate. There, plain to be seen, was the mark in the snow where Henry, starting half a minute after me, and observing a vast prostrate

bulk on the path, had turned his toboggan into the snow-bank, duly described his parabola, disarticled his nose—in fact, fulfilled the programme to the letter. Clearly, then, he could not have been the aggressor. The villain has remained, up to the publication of this veracious chronicle, unknown. No matter: I am not going back to Bergsdorf.

But something had to be done to vindicate the offended majesty of the law. So they fined Henry seventeen francs for obstructing the police in the discharge of their duty.

‘Never mind,’ said Henry, ‘that’s just eight francs fifty each. I got in two, both right-handers.’

And I doubt not but the officers concerned considered that he had got his money’s worth.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN CASTEL DEL MONTE

It was March before we found ourselves in the Capital of the South. The Countess was still there, but the Count, her brother, had not appeared, and the explanation to which he referred remained unspoken. Here Lucia was our kind friend and excellent entertainer; but of the tenderness of the Hotel Promontorio it was hard for me to find a trace. The great lady indeed outshone her peers, and took my moorland eyes as well as the regards of others. But I had rather walked by the lake with the scarlet cloak, or stood with her and been shot at for a white owl in the niche of the terrace.

In the last days of the month there came from Henry's uncle and guardian, Wilfred Fenwick, an urgent summons. He was ill, he might be dying, and Henry was to return at once; while I, in anticipation of his return, was to continue in Italy. There was indeed nothing to call me home.

Therefore—and for other reasons—I abode in Italy; and after Henry's departure I made evident progress in the graces of the Countess. Once or twice she allowed me to remain behind for half an hour. On these occasions she would come and throw herself down in a chair by the fire, and permit me to take her hand. But she was weary and silent, full of gloomy thoughts, which in vain I tried to draw from her. Still, I think it comforted her to have me thus sit by her.

One morning, while I was idly leaning upon the bridge, and looking towards the hills with their white marble palaces set amid the beauty of the Italian spring, one touched me on the shoulder. I turned, and lo—Lucia! Not any more the Countess, but Lucia, radiant with brightness, colour in her cheek for the first time since I had seen her in the Court of the South, animation sparkling in her eye.

'So I have found you, faithless one,' she said. 'I have been seeking for you everywhere.'

'And I, have I not been seeking for you all these weeks—and never have found you till now, Lucia!'

I thought she would not notice the name.

'Why, Sir Heather Jock,' she returned, 'did you not part with me last night at eleven of the clock?'

'Pardon me,' I replied, letting the love in my heart woo her through my eyes, and say what I dared not—at least, not here upon the open bridge over which we slowly walked. 'Pardon me, it is true that I parted at eleven of the clock last night with Madame the Countess of Castel del Monte. But, on the contrary, this morning I have met Lucia—my little Saint Lucy of the Eyes.'

'Who in Galloway taught you to make such speeches?' she said. 'It is all too pretty to have been said thus trippingly for the first time.'

'Love,' I made answer. 'Love, the Master, taught me; for never before have I known either a Countess or a Lucia!'

'Douglas, Douglas, tender and true,' does not your song say?' said she. 'Will you ever be true, Douglas?'

'Lucy, will you ever be cruel? I dare you to say these things tonight when I come to see you. 'Tis easy to dare to say them in the face of the streets.'

'Ah, Douglas, you will not see me tonight! I have come to bid you farewell—farewell!' said she, as tragically as she dared, yet so that I alone would hear her. Her eyes darted here and there, noting who came near; and a smile flickered about her mouth as she calculated precisely the breaking strain of my patience, and teased me up to that point. I can easily enough see her elvish intent now, but I did not then.

'I go this afternoon,' she said. 'I have come to bid you farewell—Farewell! The anchor's weighed! Remember me!'

'Is that why you are so happy today, because you are going away?' I asked, putting a freezing dignity into my tones.

She nodded girlishly, and I admit, as a critic, adorably.

'Yes,' she said, 'that is just the reason.'

We were now in the Public Gardens, and walking along a more quiet path.

‘Goodbye, then,’ I said, holding out my hand.

‘No, indeed!’ she said; ‘I shall not allow you to kiss my hand in public!’

And she put her hands behind her with a small, petulant gesture. ‘Now, then!’ she said defiantly.

With the utmost dignity I replied— ‘Indeed, I had no intention of kissing your hand, Madame; but I have the honour of wishing you a very good day.’

So lifting my hat, I was walking off, when, turning with me, Lucia tripped along by my side. I quickened my pace.

‘Stephen,’ she said, ‘will you not forgive me for the sake of the old time? It is true I am going away, and that you will not see me again—unless, unless—you will come and visit me at my country house. Stephen, if you do not walk more slowly, I declare I shall run after you down the public promenade!’

I turned and looked at her. With all my heart I tried to be grave and severe, but the mock-demure look on her face caused me weakly to laugh. And then it was good-bye to all my dignity.

‘Lucy, I wish you would not tease me,’ I said, still more weakly.

‘Poor Toto! give it bon-bons! It shall not be teased, then,’ she said.

Before we parted, I had promised to come and see her at her country house within ten days. And so, with a new brightness in her face, Saint Lucy of the Eyes came back to my heart, and came to stay.

It was mid-April when I started for Castel del Monte. It was spring, and I was going to see my love. The land about on either side, as I went, was faintly flushed with peach-blossom shining among the hoary stones. By the cliff edge the spiny cactus threw out strange withered arms. A whitethorn without spike or spine gracefully wept floods of blonde tears.

At a little port by the sea-edge I left the main route, and fared onward up into the mountains. A mule carried my baggage; and the muleteer who guided it looked like a mountebank in a garb rusty like withered leaves. Like withered leaf, too, he danced up the hillside, scaling the long array of steps which led

through the olives toward Castel del Monte. Some of his antics amused me, until I saw that none of them amused himself, and that through all the contortions of his face his eyes remained fixed, joyless, tragic.

Castel del Monte sat on the hill-top, eminent, far-beholding. Vine-stakes ran up hill and down dale, all about it. White houses were sprinkled here and there. As we ascended, the sea sank beneath, and the shining dashes of the wave-crests diminished to sparkling pin-points. Then with oriental suddenness the sun went down. Still upward fared the joyless *farceur*, and still upon the soles of my feet, and with my pilgrim staff in my hand, I followed.

Sometimes the sprays of fragrant blossom swept across our faces. Sometimes a man stepped out from the roadside and challenged; but, on receiving a word of salutation from my knave, he returned to his place with a sharp clank of accoutrement.

White blocks of building moved up to us in the equal dusk of the evening, took shape for a moment, and vanished behind us. The summit of the mountain ceased to frown. The strain of climbing was taken from the mechanic movement of the feet. The mule sent a greeting to his kind; and some other white mountain, larger, more broken as to its sky-line, moved in front of us and stayed.

'Castel del Monte!' said the muleteer, wrinkling all the queer puckered leather of his visage in the strong light which streamed out as the great door opened. A most dignified Venetian senator, in the black and radiant linen of the time, came forth to meet me, and with the utmost respect ushered me within. In my campaigning dress and broad-brimmed hat, I felt that my appearance was unworthy of the grandeur of the entrance-hall, of the suits of armour, the vast pictures, and the massive last-century furniture in crimson and gold.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN AN ERROR IN JUDGMENT

I had expected that Lucia would have come to greet me, and that some of the other guests would be moving about the halls. But though the rooms were brightly lit, and servants moving here and there, there abode a hush upon the place strangely out of keeping with my expectation.

In my own room I arrayed me in clothes more fitted to the palace in which I found myself, though, after all was done, their plainness made a poor contrast to the mailed warriors on the pedestals and the scarlet senators in the frames.

There was a rose, fresh as the white briar-blossom in my mother's garden, upon my table. I took it as Lucia's gage, and set it in my coat.

'My lady waits,' said the major-domo at the door.

I went downstairs, conscious by the hearing of the ear that a heart was beating somewhere loudly, mine or another's I could not tell.

A door opened. A rush of warm and gracious air, a benediction of subdued light, and I found myself bending over the hand of the Countess. I had been talking some time before I came to the knowledge that I was saying anything.

Then we went to dinner through the long lit passages, the walls giving back the merry sound of our voices. Still, strangely enough, no other guests appeared. But my wonder was hushed by the gladness on the face of the Countess. We dined in an alcove, screened from the vast dining-room. The table was set for three. As we came in, the Countess murmured a name. An old lady bowed to me, and moved stiffly to a seat without a word. Lucia continued her conversation without a pause, and paid no further heed to the ancient dame, who took her meal with a single-eyed absorption upon her plate.

My wonder increased. Could it be that Lucia and I were alone in this great castle! I cannot tell whether the thought brought me more happiness or discontent. Clearly, I was the only guest. Was I to remain so, or

would others join us after dinner? My heart beat faint and tumultuously. At random I answered to Lucia's questionings about my journey. My slow-moving Northern intelligence began to form questions which I must ask. Through the laughing charm of my lady's face and the burning radiance of her eyes, there grew into plainness against the tapestry the sad, pale face of my mother and her clear, consistent eyes. I talked—I answered—I listened—all through a humming chaos. For the teaching of the moorland farm, the ethic of the Sabbath nights lit by a single candle and sanctified by the chanted psalm and the open Book, possessed me. It was the domination of the Puritan base, and most bitterly I resented, while I could not prevent, its hold upon me.

Dinner was over. We took our way into a drawing-room, divided into two parts by a screen which was drawn half-way. In the other half of the great room stood an ancient piano, and to this our ancient lady betook herself.

The Countess sat down in a luxurious chair, and motioned me to sit close by her in another, but one smaller and lower. We talked of many things, circling ever about ourselves. Yet I could not keep the old farm out of my mind—its simple manners, its severe code of morals, its labour and its pain. Also there came another thought, the sense that all this had happened before—the devil's fear that I was not the first who had so sat alone beside the Countess and seen the obsequious movement of these well-trained servants.

'Tell me, Douglas,' at last the Countess said, glancing down kindly at me, 'why you are so silent and *distrain*. This is our first evening here, and yet you are sad and forgetful, even of me.'

What a blind fool I was not to see the innocence and love in her eyes!

'Countess—' I began, and paused uncertain.

'Sir to you!' she returned, making me a little bow in acknowledgment of the title.

'Lucia,' I went on, taking no notice of her frivolity, 'I thought—I thought—that is, I imagined—that your

brother—that others would be here as well as I—'

I got no further. I saw something sweep across her face. Her eyes darkened. Her face paled. The thin curved nostrils whitened at the edges. I paused, astonished at the tempest I had aroused by my faltering stupidities. Why could I not take what the gods gave?

'I see,' she said bitterly: 'you reproach me with bringing you here as my guest, alone. You think I am bold and abandoned because I dreamed of an Eden here with friendship and truth as dwellers in it. I saw a new and perfect life; and with a word, here in my own house, and before you have been an hour my guest, you insult me—'

'Lucia, Lucia,' I pleaded, 'I would not insult you for the world—I would not think a thought—speak a word—dishonouring to you for my life—'

'You have—you have—it is all ended—broken!' she said, standing up—'all broken and thrown down!'

She made with her hands the bitter gesture of breaking.

'Listen,' she said, while I stood amazed and silent. 'I am no girl. I am older than you, and know the world. It is because I dreamed I saw that which I thought truer and purer in you than the conventions of life that I asked you to come here—'

'Lucia, Lucia, my lady, listen to me,' I pleaded, trying to take her hand. She put me aside with the single swift, imperious movement which women use when their pride is deeply wounded.

'That lady'—she pointed within to where the silent dame of years was tinkling unconcernedly on the keys—'is my dead husband's mother. Surely she abundantly supplies the proprieties. And now you—you whom I thought I could trust, spoil my year—spoil my life, slay in a moment my love with reproach and scorn!'

She walked to the door, turned and said—'You, whom I trusted, have done this!' Then she threw out her hands in an attitude of despair and scorn, and disappeared.

I sat long with my head on my hands, thinking—

the world about me in ruins, never to be built up. Then I went up to my room, paused at the wardrobe, changed my black coat to that in which I had arrived, and went softly down-stairs again. The waning moon had just risen late, and threw a weird light over the ranges of buildings, the gateways and towers.

I walked swiftly to the outer gate, and, there leaping a hedge of flowering plants, I fled down the mountain through the vineyards. I went swiftly, eager to escape from Castel del Monte, but in the tangle of walls and fences it was not easy to advance. At the parting of three ways I paused, uncertain in which direction to proceed. Suddenly, without warning, a dark figure stepped from some hidden place. I saw the gleam of something bright. I knew that I was smitten. Waves of white-hot metal ran suddenly in upon my brain, and I knew no more.

When I awoke, my first thought was that I was back again in the room where Lucia and I had talked together. I felt something perfumed and soft like a caress. It seemed like the filmy lace that the Countess wore upon her shoulder. My head lay against it. I heard a voice say, as it had been in my ear, through the murmuring floods of many waters—'My boy! my boy! And I, wicked one that I was, sent you to this!'

All the time she who spoke was busy binding something to the place on my side where the pain burned like white metal. And as she did so she crooned softly over me, saying as before—'My poor boy! my poor boy!' It was like the murmuring of a dove over its nestling. Again and again I was borne away from her and from myself on the floods of great waters.

The universe alternately opened out to infinite horrors of vastness, and shrank to pinpoint dimensions to crush me. Through it all I heard my love's voice, and was content to let my head bide just where it lay.

Ever and anon I came to the surface, as a diver does lest he die. I heard myself say—'It was an error in judgment!' ... Then after a pause—'nothing but an error in judgment.'

And I felt that on which my head rested shake with a little earthquake of hysterical laughter. The

strain had been too great, yet I had said the right word.

'Yes,' she said softly, 'my poor boy, it has been indeed an error in judgment for both of us!'

'But a blessed error, Lucia,' I said, answering her when she least expected it.

A dark shape flitted before my dazzled eyes.

The Countess looked up. 'Leonardi!' she called, 'tell me, has one of your people done this?'

'Nay,' said the man, 'none of the servants of the Bond nor yet of the Mafia. Pietro the muleteer hath done it of his own evil heart for robbery. Here are the watch and purse!'

'And the murderer—where is he?' said again Lucia. 'Let him be brought!'

'He has had an accident, Excellency. He is dead,' said Leonardi simply.

Then they took me up very softly, and bore me to the door from which I had fled forth. Lucia walked with me. In the dusk of the leaves, while the bearers were fumbling with the inner doors, which would swing in their faces, Lucia put her hot lips to my hand, which she had held kindly in hers all the way.

'Pardon me, Douglas,' she said, and there was a break in her voice. I felt the ocean of tears rising about me, and feared that I could not find the words fittingly to answer. For the pain had made me weak.

'Nay,' I said at last, just over my breath, 'it was my folly. Forgive me, little Saint Lucy of the Eyes! It was—it was—what was it that it was?—I have forgotten—'

'An error in judgment!' said Saint Lucy of the Eyes, and forgave me, though I cannot remember more about it.

I suppose I could take the title if I chose, for these things are easily arranged in Italy; but Lucia and I think it will keep for the second Stephen Douglas.

'ICE-RUNNING' (From 'The Raiders')

It was a chill morning in the shortest days when I took my fighting harness on my back, girt my sword by my side, kissed my lass, and swung into stirrup with a sinking heart within me and wet eyes behind me. Right often did I vow that if only I were once safe home again in the old tower of Rathan (from the chimney of whose kitchen I could see the blue reek go up so homely and friendly yet so far away), I would never wear leather jerkin more, nor yet belt the weary broadsword on again.

Never did soldier more unwillingly ride to battle than I for the first three miles. But when I met with long Samuel Tamson, accoutred with sword and pistol like the best—unmounted, but moving his legs as fast as a horse could trot, I somehow changed my mind. I saw a strange glint in his eye, and I thought of the little Marion whom only I had seen, and only May Maxwell had spoken to, since she was lost on the Silver Flow of Buchan so long ago. I was mustered into Will Maxwell's company, and fell in behind him in the front rank with Kennedy. Three or four young lads, pretty fellows with good horses that were brisk jumpers at fences, went on before as vedettes.

It was a cold, dim, raw day, with a thick yellow haze in the air, and a grim grip of black frost underfoot. The horses' feet fell on the hard road as on a pavement, and sounds carried far. There was a sough of snow in the air. The wind came in little gusts and swirls, flicking the blood into our cheeks as though they had been switched with the ravelled lash of a whip.

I had risen late after a long night's rest, for none knew when we might sleep again, with so much wild work before us; and now, when I was fairly on the road, I found strapped to my saddle-bow, within a soldier's blue military cloak that an Earl had worn, many things good and pleasant, which proved comfortable to a hungry man in a winter campaign.

It was mighty touching to me to think of one of the very last things May said to me through her tears—

'See an' keep your feet dry. There's a pair of socks in your left pistol holster.'

And that was as precious to me as many endearments.

We were now riding westward to meet the men of Lower Minnigaff at the bridge of Cree. As we went the air became extraordinarily bitter. The wind indeed dropped as we passed Cassencary, where in the estuary the tide rolled full—a turbid yellowish brown. As we rode clanking into Cree Bridge the small snow began to swirl about us. I believed that we were in for a great fall, and gave my word like a faint heart to turn back, or at least to shelter for the night. But the movements had all been concerted, and to pause meant nothing less than putting off the attack indefinitely. Moreover, Will argued very truly that it was a question whether we should ever be able to get so many men and horses to come together for the same purpose again.

So we went on, and after a little I was not so very sorry, for the thought of having to go through the parting with May (and also the screwing up of my courage) all over again, lay very heavy on my heart, so that I became as eager as any to go through with it at once.

It was arranged that we were to leave our horses at the Lodge of Eschonchan near Loch Trool, where my Lord Galloway had a post, and kept his men at all times of the year—paying, of course, mail to the Marshalls to escape skaith, and in name of protection. Here we would leave a guard and push northward to cast the die once and for all.

We counted upon having the young moon, but it now seemed that a moon we should certainly not have to light us on our way, though she ought to have been in the sky by seven o'clock.

The snow flew thicker but in a curious, uncertain way, as though little breezes were blowing it back from the ground. A flake would fall softly down till it neared the earth, then suddenly reel and swirl, rising again with a tossing motion as when a child blows a feather into the air.

As we went along the pale purple branches of the trees grew fuzzy with rime, which thickened till every tree was a wintry image of itself carved in whitest marble.

In truth I liked not the day, and I liked it ever the worse as we went on, though I had said all that I could say with honour. For the yellow mist packed itself dense and clammy about us as we advanced. It had a wersh (raw), unkindly feel about it, and as we rose higher up the water of Trool it hung in fleecy waves and drifts against the brows of the hills. But what I liked least was the awesome darkness of the sky. The mist was almost white against it wherever there was a break, yet itself was dark and lowering. A dismal, uncanny light that I cared not to look upon pursued us and just enabled us to see. I cannot say that it cheered us.

The feelings of most of us were expressed by old Rab MacQuhirr who had long been herd on the Merrick and was now our guide.

'Guid save us an' sain us!' said Rab; 'I like not this day. This is a de'il's day! Nae day o' God's makkin' was ever like this!'

Which indeed may seem a foolish if not unreverent thing to say, but then had you been there and under the skarrow of that ugsome cloud, maybe a belief in the all-ordering Providence would not have served you quite so well either. It is easy to thole the boots when your neighbour is put to the question.

The Glen of Trool was dark and narrow as we went down into it along the waterside, and the loch itself lay black as night at the bottom of its precipices. It might have been the mouth of the pit of blackness itself. The faintly falling snow had not lain on its surface, which made me wish that I could unbind my father's Dutch ice-runners from the saddle-bow. He had brought them home with him from the Low Countries as curious things for folk to wonder at; and with them I used many a day to disport myself on the White Loch o' the Clonyard, or upon the Orraland mill-dam when I cared not to go so far from home.

I fetched them with me, knowing that when we

had to storm the fortress of the isle in Loch Enoch, my life might depend on my speed. Moreover, ice-running was an accomplishment seldom tried in Galloway at that time, and I hoped to come back having gained not a little honour and reputation thereby.

After a long and weary plod up hill and down dale the Lodge of Eschonchan rose before us close by the waterside, a place which the Lords of Galloway had used for a hunting lodge ever since they came to be overlords of that part of the Forest of Buchan—for of old only Cassillis and the Kennedies bore the rule there. It is not a large, but it is a strong-built house—though with hardly any articles of furniture, except bowls and platters of the roughest, because it is not wise to trust aught of value to the gypsies, even under the protection of the payment of mail. So my Lord the Earl keeps not his muniment boxes and treasure chests at the Lodge of Eschonchan by the water of Trool. Here, therefore, we had some refreshment, and rested an hour. Then, leaving a guard with the horses just sufficient to protect them in case of attack, we pressed on with most of the younger men.

Our way lay up the same Gairland Burn by which May, Silver Sand, and I came down in such pain that morning long ago. Yet I think I was heavier of heart to go up it under that gloomy winter sky, for now every step took me farther away from all I loved.

I tried to think that it must be for the best, which was no doubt true; but somehow the thought did not seem to affect the state of my courage, which had (as usual) sunk down into the pit of my stomach. It was, in truth, cold comfort.

We marched in close array with skirmishers flung far up the slope to touch any hidden enemy, while the rest came by the narrow path by the waterside, where the burn roared and swirled about the great gray stones.

We were soon deep among the hills, and yet not a shot had been fired at us. Not a dry red bracken had waved. The rime lay close and thick, and the brown heather kept the feet quiet. Only a scabbard rang now and then on a jutting point of granite, or a nail in some

brogan screamed stridently against a stone, harsh and slippery with frost. No whaup or peewit cried. Only on a rock high on the Glints of the Nether Hill of Buchan, a black corbie croaked his dismal anticipative song.

It was not cheering, all this, yet I felt some real elevation to think that we were soon to come to grips.

We were just at the corner of the burn where, under a great black face of rock it is hemmed in a deep defile, when our scouts on the hillside set up a great crying, the cause of which we could not at the time understand.

'Come up!' they cried. 'The water's broken lowsel!'

Our herd guide and I took the hill at once, and so did many who were acquainted with the wild lochs and precipices about us, and with the nature of the wilder men whose lives were forfeit to the law.

Suddenly we heard before and above us a tremendous roaring noise, as though the bowels of creation were gushing out in some great convulsion. The hills gave back the echoes on every side. I found myself climbing the brae with some considerable verve and activity till I was fairly among the higher rocks. So active was I that I ran straightway into the embraces of a hairy savage with matted locks, whose weapon was in his hand—the long dirk of the Highlander. But he had not expected any one to come at him over a rock in so remarkable a manner. He took my inroad as a dangerous assault, conceiving that I must have men behind me to be so bold, for he instantly threw down his knife and up with his hands in an attitude of supplication.

'Hursel' be a puir Gregor lad, an' no doin' ony harm!' was his statement.

Behind me came our guide, Rab MacQuhirr and Kennedy Maxwell, at sight of whom my captive, taking heart of grace, plunged upwards weaponless among the rocks, and as it was a rough place, with many yirds or hiding-places between the boulders, he was out of sight in a moment. Of which I was glad, for had Will Maxwell come upon him and his dirk, that hour had been the last of 'hursel' the puir Gregor lad.'

But the MacGregor dirk I set in my belt as a

trophy.

The great roaring noise still continued. Indeed the whole of the foregoing since I took the hill passed in a brief tale of seconds. Suddenly we that were up on the side of the Gairy saw a wondrous sight. A great wall of water, glassy black, tinged at the top with brown and crowned with a surging crest of white with many dancing overlapping folds, sped down the glen. Our array was pent in the narrow passage—all those, that is, who had not taken the hill at the first alarm. As the wave came down upon them there was the wildest confusion. Men threw away their guns and took blindly to the hillside, running upward like rabbits that have been feeding in a bottom of old grass. From where we stood the water seemed to travel with great deliberation, but nevertheless not a few of our men were caught in the wash of it and spun downwards like corks in the inrush of the Solway tide.

The black, white-crested wave being passed, the great flood ran red again in a moment, with only a creamy froth over it, and we could hear the boulders grinding and plunging at the bottom of the burn.

Then upon us, scattered as we were in confusion over the brae face, there broke a storm of bullets from behind the rocks higher up the Gairy. It was the first sign of the enemy we had found, and we resented it exceedingly.

A strange sense of the unfairness of the proceeding took hold of me. We had come prepared to give battle and to deliver an assault; but we wanted to do it in our own way and on our own terms. We felt that it was most perfidious (indeed unfair and scoundrelly) thus to scatter us over a great area of ground, and then have at us when we were least prepared.

But Will Maxwell had some of the spirit of a general. Standing on a rock, he sounded his pipe, calling all down from the bare hillside, where each man was a mark for the guns of the outlaws into the closer cover of the burnside, thick sown with boulders. The flood was still running, but was evidently past its strength. The great roaring sped farther and farther

down the valley. We gathered off the hill, running like foxes about the stones, and taking advantage of the chance cover as we went. Bullets spatted uncomfortably among the rocks, but the fire of the hill men was not good, and the light was becoming uncertain, so that very few of our men were wounded.

As soon as he had us all collected in the valley, our captain began moving in loose skirmishing formation along the side of the burn towards the loch. The outlaws above us also kept parallel with our march, shots cracked, and on the hillside there was a noise of cheering. But we held on our way, and so far no one was seriously hurt, which showed that the aim of the enemy had been bad. But we knew not if our own were much better.

When we came to the southern side of Loch Valley, whence the Gairland Burn issues, we saw a strange and surprising sight. There was a deep trench, the upper part of which had been cut through recently by the hands of man, for the rubbish lay all about where the spades had been at work. The ends of a weir across the outlet of the loch were yet to be seen jutting into the rushing waters. This had evidently been constructed with considerable care and certainly with immense labour. But now it was cut clean through, and we could see where their sappers had first set their picks; the power of the flood had done the rest. So great had been the force of the water that the passage was clean cut as with a knife down to the bed rock. The deep knoll of sand and jingling stones, which lies like a barrier across the mouth of the loch, had been severed as one cuts sweet-milk cheese, and the black waters were yet pouring out from under the arch of ice that spanned the loch as out of a cave in some frozen Tartarus.

But as we looked over the black and glistening expanse of hollow ice which swept away to our left, bright cracks began to play like forked lightning across its whole surface. The water had been sucked from

beneath it, and it held up only by its own weight. The hills echoed the deep-voiced roaring as the cracks and rendings ran across and across. Gradually the play of this flashing and thundering turmoil centred at a point beneath our eyes, and fair in the middle of the loch. An intensely black spot began to yawn there, from which the white, roaring cracks rayed out like the spokes of a wheel from the hub. On the edge of the loch we stood as it were on the rim of a whirlpool, for the ice sloped down from our feet every way into the black centre. Had any one set foot upon the verge of it they had been carried down to the yawning hole, for the entire ice of the loch was giving way as the roof of a great cavern slopes and sways before it falls in.

Then with a crash that shook the ground the ice cave fell in upon the water in a thousand pieces, sending the white foam mixed with dark lumps of ice high into the air, while underneath the broken fragments tumbled and crunched against one another like bergs in a heavy sea (such as I have heard the whalers tell of). Then little by little, groaning and wheezing, the turmoil settled down; and Loch Valley, with its shivered covering of broken ice, went to sleep ten feet beneath its level of the morning.

Hardly elsewhere in Scotland had such a thing been possible; but the outlaws took advantage of the higher barrier of sand and shingle which had so long dammed back the waters of the deep rock-bound lake. It was a true stroke of generalship, and showed us that we had others than ignorant red-handed Marshalls and bloody Macatericks to deal with. It was so well thought on that it did not seem like the rough-and-ready knife-and-bullet method of the common catheran.

And, indeed, nothing more calculated to shake one's nerve could well be conceived. We were glad to draw together our scattered force, but there is no doubt that by this time most wished themselves well out of it. For me, at least, that six-foot breast of black water and the shining whirlpool of rending ice had taken away any desire for revenge.

Nevertheless, as the darkness settled deeper, we drew down to the old sheep rees by the Midburn, which

are solidly built of great granite stones like a fortress, based upon the unshaken ribs of the hills. There was room for us all here. By nature the place was strongly protected—on the one side by the roaring and dangerous Midburn, and on the other it is fenced in by a morass. Here we hoped to abide in some sort of peace, if little enough comfort, through the long winter night. We had all our plaids wrapped about us; and my friend Kennedy had carried strapped about him, half for the warmth and half for the good things of my Lady Grizel which it contained, the Earl's great military mantle. Both cloak and comforts we had agreed to share together.

But this consummation was not at all what I had expected. My chances of glory were few, and the raid seemed likely to end in disaster. To run uphill and take prisoner a shaggy catheran (who immediately escaped again), to be penned like one of a score of hogs in a granite sheep-ree, were not at all to my mind. But how could I better it?

The outlaws on the hill had given us no further trouble, and indeed their demonstration against us had been confined to the moment when the rush of the escaping waters of Loch Valley made us give back and scatter.

'The Carrick men should be coming on by now,' said Will Maxwell. 'Oh, if only we had some one to go up and see what they are doing!'

The old shepherd of the Merrick knew the country best, but he was stiff and old; and, besides, cared little about the matter. About as little cared I, save to burn the Shieling of Craignairny and get that accursed sea-chest out of my dreams. But I think the devil must have tempted me suddenly and successfully, for I called out among them all that I would put on my ice-runners and go. At which they cried admiration and astonishment. Yet I was grieved the next moment and silently called myself a fool for my pains, and that many times over; but my accursed pride would not let me take back the spoken word.

May Maxwell says now that that was the wickedest thing I ever did, because I forgot my plighted

word and promise to her—I might have let one of the others go. All which I own is true, but then no one of the others would have offered, and so we had all come home with our fingers in our mouths.

But all the lads of the raid cried out upon me, and said that I was the bravest of the brave, and other things which please a young man. So I took my ice-runners in my hand—which, as I have said, my father had brought from Holland. Kennedy Maxwell and four others, all proper young men with well-grown beards on their faces, whom for this cause I often envied, came to see me safely off, for I proposed first to circle Loch Neldricken on the ice, that I might be sure there were no enemies lurking about it. This I did, not because I thought that the outlaw men would encamp there, but that these young men, especially Colin Scrael and Kennedy Maxwell, who had formerly despised me, might see me start off alone into the night. Such a thick-skull was I, and so void of common understanding! For I ever loved to be admired and to be exclaimed upon for doing that from which others held back. And this same quaint kind of cowardice, for I had little real courage, has often carried me through with credit. I am of the faction of the old soldier who said, when complimented on his bravery in battle, 'We are all black afraid, only—we do not all show it!'

So I had enough sense to keep my fears to myself at that time. Now it does not matter, for I am a man of middle years, and such is the power of reputation that I cannot do away with this repute myself, so that even this plain confession of weakness will not be believed; which is perhaps, after all, the reason why I make it here. So apt is man at deceiving others—and himself.

But sally forth I did, binding my ice-runners of curved iron to my feet at the little inlet where the Midburn issues—too strong and fierce ever to freeze, save only at the edges where the frost and spray hung in fringes, reaching down cold fingers to clasp the rapid waters.

Away to the left stretched Loch Neldricken, the midmost of the three lochs of that wild high region — Valley, Neldricken and topmost Enoch. I set foot

gingerly on the smooth black ice, with hardly even a sprinkling of snow upon it, for the winds had swept away the little feathery fall, and the surface was smooth as glass beneath my feet. Each of the young men shook me silently by the hand. I suppose they thought me at once brave and mad, for I had lost no cattle and had a sweetheart at home to make a bride of. Yet there was I, setting off into the black night in the face of dangers unknown—dangers to which the close-packed well-fenced camp in the sheep-nerr was as one's own fireside.

I struck out from the edge with great strokes, moving my hands with each sway of my body as my father had taught me. In a moment the four lads sank behind me and I was alone on the black ice; yet I had that feeling of high defiance which all swift motion gives. The ice whirled behind. Following the southern edge, I was between the narrows in a minute. Here a jutting promontory of land—a mere tongue of sand and boulder—cut the loch almost in two. There was a fire kindled on the south shore nearest our camp, and on the opposite side as I sped by I seemed to see two men standing with muskets in their hands; but so dark was it that of this I could not be sure. If they saw me (which with the fire on the shore opposite to them and the passage through which I went not more than twenty yards wide, they could hardly fail to do) they must have thought me the evil one himself, flitting by as it were on the wings of the wind.

I sped away with the irons on my feet, cutting crisply through the thin-sprinkled snow, the immanent mass of the Black Gairy casting a gloomy shadow overhead. An odd flake or two of snow came into my face as I bent low to look sideways up the hill. I went slowly, moving only my body and hardly making a sound, as the night parted before and closed behind me.

It took but little time to make the circuit of the loch and come back to the narrows; but as I passed I put on speed, for I knew that it was dead earnest this time. The watchers would now be on the alert and might very properly bethink themselves that the devil

did not use iron runners, but wings like the bat. So I bent low and scudded through the strait with the dying fire on one side and the land closing in to trip me upon the other. I was just in the middle and running my best, when a couple of shots went off, and the bullets tore past behind me screaming like plovers whistling down the wind.

I was so excited with my escape and proud of my daring that I shouted as I flew; but I had better have held my tongue, for a moment after I saw that the force of my impulse was taking me out of the region of sprinkled ice among a low forest of dense green reeds. As swift as thought I turned, but my impetus was too great. I was carried among them, and there, not twenty yards before me, like a hideous black demon's eye looking up at me, lay the unplumbed depths of the Murder Hole, in which for the second time I came nigh to being my own victim. I remembered the tales told of it. It never froze; it was never whitened with snow. With open mouth it lay ever waiting like an insatiable beast for its tribute of human life; it never gave up a body committed to its depths, or broke a murderer's trust.

The thin ice swayed beneath me, but did not crack—which was the worse sign, for it was brittle and weakened by the reeds. The lip of the horrid place seemed to shoot out at me, and the reeds opened to show me the way. I had let myself down on all fours as I came among the rushes; now I laid hold of them as I swept along, and so came to a standstill but a little way from that black verge. Here I hardly dared to move, till, by slow degrees, pulling myself forward and pushing backward, I got once more upon safe ice; then I made directly for the shore, for the Murder Hole was more dreadful to me than a tribe of Faas armed to the teeth.

In a few moments I had unshipped my runners, gained the heather, and was making the best of my way over the Ewe Rig towards the great barrier of Craig Neldricken, behind which Loch Enoch lay. As I went I heard the moor-birds cry—the wild whirl of the whaup and the croak of the raven. Now I knew well that most of these must be the signals of my foes answering one another, because the gypsies can imitate any bird that

flies; besides which, the whaup is but seldom seen on these moors in winter and the snipe never. A thought struck me. I set my hands to my mouth in the way that I have already described, and made the whinny of the heatherbleat palpitate across the moor.

Instantly, as on the night of the blowing of the silver whistle, I was answered from either hand; my summons had aroused a whole colony. Only towards Loch Arrow, lying straight in front of me, there was not a single sound. So I called again more persistently and, as it were, querulously; and immediately set off running headlong upward in the direction of Loch Arrow, which I judged to be my best chance of safety.

More than once I had to crouch among the rocks to let a man run past me, so efficacious and imperative had my second call been. It was a blessing that almost everywhere over all that country there is a capable hiding-place within each half-dozen yards; else had I been ten times a dead man.

I skirted Loch Arrow without putting on my ice-runners, because it is little more than a mountain tarn, and I knew that if there were any guards in the direction I was travelling they would be up at the Nicks of Neldricken, or at the Slock of the Dungeon—the passes which are the usual roads to the tableland of Enoch. Without a moment's hesitation, therefore, I set my feet upon the rugged Glints, hoary with rime and slippery with frost.

Born by the shore of the Solway, with heuchs (cliffs) at my door, and gulls' eggs for my playthings, I was at home wherever there was a chance of holding by my arms. Dark or light did not make any great difference to me, and but that my fingers thrilled with cold as they caught the rocks, I cannot say that I was agitated by the perils of climbing the Glints of Neldricken.

Yet there was that in me as I went, which told me I should never again see the day fair and the sun shining on my own house at home. I had not so much

hope of success as a kind of anger against the pride that had carried me up here among the hills where I had no business. I might well have bided in my walled dwelling of Rathan, and, with the credit I had, have taken my wife into my bosom. But I must needs, for the pride of being spoken about, be climbing here on the rigging of creation like a tom-cat on the tiles. And for what? Just that the young men might wonder and wait, and the message flee athwart the country that none was so brave as Patrick Heron! Which, indeed, was no truth; for even now the heart within me loathed my own deed, and I had a most cowardly spirit—the spirit of a mouse, and even of a poor mean mouse.

Yet must I go on, because the hunters were behind me as well as before. I gripped the icy clints of the granite rock tighter, and set my face to the thick-sown bank of stars above me, for the night had blown clear. Or perhaps, since the cliff was so high, I may have risen above the frosty mist. At any rate it was a place of deadly cold, and my fingers became numb. Then they seemed to swell and thrill with heat so that I thought they were dropping off.

Presently I was on the topmost ledge of all, and crawling a few paces I looked down upon the desolate waste of Loch Enoch under the pale light of the stars. It is not possible that I should be able to tell what I saw, yet I shall try.

I saw a weird wide world, new and strange, not yet out of chaos—nor yet approven of God; but such a scene as there may be on the farther side of the moon, which no man hath seen nor can see. I thought with some woe and pity on the poor souls condemned, though it were by their own crimes, to sojourn there. I thought also that, had I been a dweller so far from ordinances and the cheerful faces of men, it might be that I had been no better than the outlaw men; and I blamed myself that I had been so slack and careless in my attendance on religion, promising (for the comfort of my soul as I lay thus breathing and looking) that when I should be back in Rathan, May and I should ride each day to church upon a good horse, she behind me upon a pillion—and the thought put marrow into

me. But whether grace or propinquity was in my mind, who shall say? At any rate I bethought me that God could not destroy a youth of such excellent intentions.

But this is what I saw, as clearly as the light permitted—a huge, conical hill in front, the Hill of the Star, glimmering snow-sprinkled, as it rose above the desolations of Loch Enoch and the depths of Buchan's Dungeon, To the right the great steep of the Merrick, bounding upward to heaven like the lowest steps of Jacob's ladder. Loch Enoch beneath, very black, set in a grey whiteness of sparse snow and sheeted granite. Then I saw in the midst of all the Island of Outlaws, and on it, methought, a glimmering light.

So I set me to crawl downward. I went now as though I had left fear behind me sticking to the frosty Glints of Neldricken. The space between me and the loch was hardly a bowshot, and I found myself putting on my runners on the edge of the ice behind a great logan-stone, or ever my heart had time to beat faster. Then I was not at all afraid, thinking that on the ice so black and polished I could distance all pursuers, for none had that art in Galloway save myself.

The ice sloped away from the edge, and there was a little quiver within me as I slid downwards, lest I should be slipping into such another chasm as I had seen open for me at the Murder Hole of Loch Neldricken.

But only the great flat met me, and I struck out softly. It was beautiful ice, smoother than I had ever seen, having frozen early, and by the first intention, as it were, being close up under the sky—with a skin on it like fine bottle glass. But withal so clear and still was now the air that, do as I would, I could not hinder the ringing of my ice-runners, and the whole loch twanged like a fiddle-string when one hooks it with the forefinger and then lets go. Yet as I swept along, swinging my arms nearly to the ice, and taking the sweeping strides of the Low Countrymen, I had a sense of pride that nothing in Galloway could come near me for speed.

So sure was I, that with a sweep like an albatross (as I told myself) I circled about to the island whereon

was the dying fire. As near as I could observe it the light was in a kind of turf-covered shelter—not a clay-built house with windows like that in which I had spent a night of terror on the slopes of Craignairny. There were men crouching around the fire, all looking out to the loch, from which no doubt there came the strange ringing of my ice-runners, the like of which was never heard there before. Suddenly these men seemed to take alarm, and like a brood of partridges dispersing when one sets random foot among them, they sped every way into the cover. I laughed within myself. But I laughed not long, for as I went I had that sense of being hunted, which comes so quickly and is so unnerving. I heard not, saw not my pursuer. I knew not whether the thing were man or beast, ghost or devil. But I was being followed, and that swiftly, silently. There was that behind me—I knew not what—something that my nature feared, perhaps just because it knew not what. In wild terror I clenched my hands and flew. My runners cut the smooth ice in long, crisp whistlings. The black shores sped backward. On my track I heard ever the patter of feet galloping as a horse gallops, yet noiselessly, as though shod in velvet. As I turned at the eastern end of the loch something grey and fierce and horribly bristling sprang past open-mouthed, straining to take me; but overshooting the mark with the impulse of extreme speed, the beast shot past with all four feet hissing taut on the glistening ice, yet looking back with fangs gleaming white.

So to and fro there was the rushing on the glassy ice of Enoch—the beast that hunted me gaining ever on the straight, and I at the turnings. After a time or two I regained my composure in some degree. It was a boy's game this, and I had played it before on the ice, though not with such a fearsome playmate; nor yet with savage men scrambling and watching among the stones at the edge, dirks in their hands and murder in their hearts.

But I clearly saw that I had only the advantage so long as I could keep up my speed. Did I slacken or trip but once, the fangs were at my throat.

Likewise, though the nights were long, the morning must come at last, and then I would be but a

poor hare waiting for the shot of the huntsmen, driven by the hounds to die. Yet this I did not mind so much, had there only been some one there to tell May Maxwell and the people of my country how I took my fate.

But very suddenly the end came, even as I darted between two isles that stand out of the middle of the loch—my runner scraped the edge of a long ridge of granite, and I pitched over on my face. In a moment I felt the horrible breath of the beast on my face, as it came rushing after and drove headlong upon me.

I had my knife out in a moment, and struck wildly again and again at nothing till my arm was seized as in a vice.

Then I heard the sound of men's voices, but faint and far away, as though I were hearing in a dream the light of a lantern shone upon me, and a band of men came clattering over the ice to me. But there was something that stood between me and the stars, something black and large and panting, which faced towards the men who came, standing across me like a lion that guards its prey. Yet had the beast done me no harm, so far as I could feel, saving (it might be) that my arm was a little stiff.

As the men came nearer the beast emitted many short, hoarse growls from deep within. Its body seemed to quiver with rage, but whether with rage at being interfered with in the disposition of its prey, I could not tell.

'Quharrie, good Quharrie, come here!' said a voice from the group which halted three yards away.

'Quharrie at Loch Enoch!' I thought, and it all came clear to me. If Quharrie were at Enoch, Silver Sand was also there, and I was betrayed! That was my thought. Yet I was not the more afraid. On the contrary, the conviction put into my heart a certain dumb and proud anger, and I began at once to compose, even as I lay on the ice, the speech that I would make when I met my false friend face to face. For this was my nature. It was a good speech and cutting, and it made me feel that it was a fine thing to die. I was ready to be a martyr, but I was resolved that every one should know how I had been brought to the

death—and more especially Silver Sand, who had been my friend. I was determined not to be dumb. I should speak my mind once.

The men about me kept calling to Quharrie—now threateningly, now as one that fleeches, coaxing with promises. But the great wolf-dog only growled the fiercer, standing across my body with a wide-arched stride.

One of the men wished, I think, to do the dog a mischief, but the others withheld him, putting their hands upon him to deprive him of his pistol. Then two came from opposite sides to snatch at me as I lay, a little stunned with my fall; but this so excited the fierce beast that he wheeled this way and that, roaring and snapping, and made such dangerous swift charges that they were compelled to desist.

Then two men came by themselves over the ice towards us from the island. As they entered within the shining circle of the lantern light I saw it was Silver Sand and another. The men made way for them. Silver Sand strode through them, and I thought he had never seemed so large and strong. I saw him coming long before he knew me, and I hugged myself at the thought of what I should say to him.

‘Give me the lantern,’ he said.

As he came, Quharrie left me and fell in behind wi’ his master. His work was done. I looked around and regained my knife. But not to strike. Silver Sand came up and shone the light of the lantern on my face, where I was now sitting up.

I took the dagger by the point, and offered it to him, saying, ‘Silver Sand, true friend, here is a knife; strike quickly at my heart, and make a swift end. Thou knowest where to strike, for thou hast lain against it many a time.’

This I thought mighty fine at the time, and original; but now I know that I had heard my father read somewhat like it out of an old book of stage plays.

Silver Sand looked at me, coolly and cruelly as I then thought, nobly and gently as I know now.

‘Patrick!’ was all he said.

‘Aye,’ said I, ‘the same—Patrick Heron of

Rathan—where the tent of Silver Sand has stood any time these seventeen years — and stands now ready for him—after—’ (I said, nodding my head) — ‘after’

‘Can you walk?’ he said, briefly.

I took off my ice-runners and stood ready.

So without word spoken we went back to the famous island on which I set foot for the first time. There on the grey-green grass were many turf huts and shelters. Into these we did not go, but only into the wider sod-built shelter, open to the sky, where the fire I had seen was yet smouldering.

As we went Silver Sand said to me neither good or bad. I thought I knew that his conscience was busy within him, and I rejoiced like a chidden child who says he will die, and then his mother will be sorry.

The dusky followers crouched around, talking together in whispers, casting meantime deadly enough looks at me. I sat on a stone and warmed my fingers at the embers. I was so full of getting, as I thought, the upper hand of Silver Sand who had been my friend, that (though I knew that I was as good as dead) I acted a part at that fire among the outlaws as willingly as in a stage play.

Then one sprang up and made a speech, pointing often at me, and as I imagined denouncing me. I knew not what he was saying, much of the talk being gypsy gibberish. But I knew that the gist was that it was I who had been in the Hut of Craignairny— I who had been their undoing.

Another and another spoke their minds, and Silver Sand was yet silent. The dark man who had come with him over the ice whispered to him.

Then the outlaw that had spoken first, the lout of the kitchen, took his knife and came over to me as if to make an end. Suddenly the fashion of the countenance of Silver Sand was changed. He sprang to his feet, and stood before them straight and proud as I had never seen him stand.

‘To me, Faas!’ he cried. ‘Back, or I will blast you with the black curse of Little Egypt, Roderick Macaterick!’

The man slunk back; but, as it seemed, dourly

and unconvinced before the threatening finger.

Of the men that stood by, some ten gathered themselves about Silver Sand. The others clubbed the closer together, crouching with their heads forward in a bunch.

'Who are you,' said their spokesmen, 'to come among us after these years, when you have taken no part in the danger, and to think to lord it over us now?'

'Silence, hound!' said Silver Sand, with consuming vehemence. 'Well you know who I am. I am John Faa, of the blood royal of Egypt. Well you remember why I left you: because I am not of them that do murder. Well you know that I have kept free not from the danger, but from the plunder. Now that the plunder is done with, and the danger come, I am here. Is it not so?'

There was no answer, but his own followers gathered closer about him.

'I am here,' he cried again, 'and here is this lad—Patrick Heron of the Rathan. It is true what he says, that I have eaten his bread for seventeen years, and my tent stands now with the peeled rod before it by the side of the water on Rathan Isle.'

'And you would break the clan to save this lad that comes to spy on us and destroy us!' cried another voice from the thick of the adverse crowd, with great bitterness, and, I am bound to admit, with some measure of reason.

But Silver Sand had this of the royal blood in him, that he took the true attitude of the man of action. He commanded; he never explained.

'Down, dog!' he cried; 'who dares to thwart John Faa—by the king's belting, Lord and Earl of Little Egypt? Not you that are no Egyptians, but scattermouches and unwashed ruffians from the four seas? I will hunt you with the Loathly Beasts. I will press on you with the Faa's curse. I will dwine your flesh on your bones, for I am your king, John Faa, and the power is mine, alone and without bound among this people of Egypt.'

The man who had hitherto faced him would have uttered something, but the power was not given to him.

His words withered on his lips.

'Roderick Macaterick,' said Silver Sand, solemnly, 'on the grave of him that ye slew by the Loch of Neldricken when he was forwandered in the moss, stand the white wraith that curses and the Grey Dog that waits. I deliver your soul to them!'

The man fell moaning on the ground. Then Silver Sand took to speaking in the language which I could not understand, but chiefly, as it seemed, to his own people. Me he took by the arm and drew me away. So in a body those that clave to him moved off from the island and out upon the ice. Some of the others started up to follow.

Silver Sand turned and faced them.

'Him that sets his feet on the ice to follow us shall be blasted quick and sure. He shall never see good days more. You had best scatter and save yourselves, for a heavier hand than the Lowlanders' shall rail before tomorrow upon you for your murders and iniquities.'

The men stood still, hesitating and afraid, and we went our way. It was towards the Hill of the Star that we went, Silver Sand leading. When we came to the verge of the loch Silver Sand turned to his followers.

'Faas,' said he, 'and you, Hector, bide not here. There shall no assault be delivered by your enemies, but one more sure and terrible by the Almighty. The judgment for murder and crime comes swiftly. Go not back to take part in it, for I foresee that no one shall escape. Haste ye up Doon Water. Stay not for pursuer nor turn aside for foe, but scatter over the country as soon as ye have passed the marches!'

The men stood silent and irresolute.

'I know that ye obey me only because I am your master, John Faa, and your chief. Ye obey without question, like Egyptians of the pure blood. Ye have done well. Go now and be honest, or as honest as ye can, for never more shall you or I dwell in the dens of the Dungeon of Buchan. Fare ye well!'

'And who is to be chief?' said Hector Faa.

'I that speak am chief. As long as I live I cannot be other than chief, but I give to you my hand and my

authority, Hector; 'and he added, 'It is a poor throne, that of Little Egypt, and no wise man would covet it, but such as it is you stand next to it.'

So on the side of the Star Hill they parted from us, diving into the black night, and we were left standing alone—Silver Sand, who was John Faa, King of the Gypsies, Patrick Heron of the Rathan, and Quharrie, that had hunted me like vermin an hour ago, and afterwards fought for me like a blood brother.

'The Winter Snow' (From A Galloway Herd)

The winter snow was long in coming that year in Drumquhat. The banks of dark gray clouds had showed several times over the moors, and the long, bleak ridge of Ben Gairn had been white for a month; but now, in the middle of January, came the first big fall. It began just as the short daylight was fading away. The flakes fell slow and silent. There was no wind at first, and each flake settled upon the last like a curled feather, some of them as broad as the palm of Wattie's hand. He and Yarrow had a great time. Together with Donald, his belligerent black 'pet lamb,' lamb no longer, Wattie and his dog had been holding the highest of carnivals.

Donald had been a 'sucklie.' Mary M'Quhirr had begun to feed him on the coffee-pot with the muslin over the 'stroop,' and had made a great sheep of him. But he was slow to develop the gravity of his years and race. He was not gentle, he was anything but meek, and his activity was astonishing. An English cousin of Mary, who came once to Drumquhat for a day, and saw Donald climb a bare rock and a six feet wall apparently without the slightest effort, refused to believe that the creature was a sheep at all; and, indeed, Donald had small kin to the equable Southdowns. He did not associate with other sheep at all. He never even spoke to them, and if he had to go away from the farmyard he went with the cows; and not one of them, or even the short-legged hornless bull, dare say a cross word to Donald, who would instantly draw off to the side, and, charging in unexpectedly from flank or rear, with a dour head down among their legs, would bring the mighty down in a heap in a moment, which was a very surprising thing to the dull bovine capacity, though familiar enough to Donald. But Donald did not go out much with the cows. He hid till they were gone, for loafing about the farm was much more in his line.

The game at which Wattie and his two friends played was a very simple one. It was excellent exercise for a snowy night. Wattie stood on a little hump of rock (which has always seemed to him to be at least ten feet

high, till he went back this year and found it barely three), and, steadying himself with outstretched legs, he waited Donald's charge. That admirable animal entered thoroughly into the spirit of the game, and came behind him like a battering ram, first propelling Wattie into the air, and then sending him sprawling into the snow.

Thereafter Donald fled in pretended terror, with the dog Yarrow on his track, soon to be caught and overturned, with the dog's muzzle harmlessly filled with his wool. Sometimes there would be a grand triangular combat, and all three would arise from the snow dusty as the miller. Walter used both indifferently for riding horses for somewhat brief periods. The dog had one way of getting rid of his rider, the sheep another. Yarrow simply sat down, and Walter slid backwards upon the snow. Donald, on the other hand, put down his nose and elevated his hind quarters. Both methods were equally effective, but Donald would proceed to pound the fallen rider with his fore feet. This Wattie considered scoundrelly and unfair. It was on one of these occasions that he told Donald that he would make very good mutton, a remark for which he had afterwards to apologize.

Walter had his hands full that night. It was the first snow since he had been promoted to breeks. Kilts are unkindly wear in winter time for young legs, and discourage rolling in the snow. But with the enlarged possibilities of hodden grey knickers and roundabout so thick that with a little trouble and propping they would stand beside the bed by themselves when their tenant had gone to the breeless land, Wattie felt that life was a new thing. At six o'clock he was distinctly cheeky to his friend Aleck, to whom the mischief of a great-boned country lad was natural as capers to a young horse. In the house he lived a life of some repression, though Saunders was far too kind knowingly to discourage anything that was harmless. He smiled on any decent neighbour lads who came

about the farm town in the gloamings, and he had even a canny blind eye when his eldest went off to see the lasses at the neighbouring steading of Nether Neuk. Nether Neuk was plentifully stocked with daughters, and Aleck sometimes slipped over there to the grief of his mother—for mothers see things differently when it is their own sons who go a-courting.

'Hoot, Mary,' said her husband, with a look of the old time in his eye, 'what for div ye mourn about the lad gangin' ower by for a quiet blink? Ye ken it was i' the gloamin' that ye cam' to the loanin' yett at the Shirmers. Dinna flyte on the laddie; ye ken it'll do nae guid, an' the lad's a guid lad an' aye hame in time to supper the horse.' (They use the cavalry plural in Galloway).

But this is a subject trying to the most wise mother, and Mary M'Quhirr could not see the matter in this light.

'Saun'ers M'Whurr, I wunner to hear ye, an' you an elder in the kirk, uphaudin' thae heveral's o' Chrystie lasses—ay' an' evenin' them to yer ain mairriet wife. The last time that I was up at the Neuk, I declare if they werena milkin' the kye in their black goun's, the tawpies, an' a silly gomerall haudin' ilka coo's tail! Did ye ever see me milkin' the kye in my bettermous gown, or letting a great sumph o' a calf hand his minnie's tail to keep it oot o' my een? Na, Saunders, ye kenned better than to come to the byre when it was me that was milkin'—'

'Weel,' interjected Saunders, quietly, 'but aiblins I hae gotten a bit glisk o' ye frae the door cheek, an' as far as I can mind ye didna look across yer nose at me aither!'

'An' gin ye did, Saunders, ye saw me with the coo's tail atween my knee an' the pail like a decent wumman!'

Saunders tried again. There was a twinkle in his eye this time.

'Hoo was't, then, Mary, that the twa luggies was spilled at the corner o' the byre when ye were carryin' them to the milk-hoose—ay, an I that within ten yairds o' the back o' yer faither's decent blue coat wi' the

brass buttons on it?’

The mistress of Drumquhat was overcome. Saunders had made her smile, and the day was his own.

‘Juist because it was the back o’ my faither’s coat, I suppose,’ said Mary, with a girlish look of reminiscent shyness coming into her douce, matronly face.

There are chords which may be long silent in a woman’s heart, but which, when rightly touched, carry her back to her girlhood. All good women remain girls till the day of their death. Now, Saunders was a very wise man, and he said never a word more, but instead he placed his large hand on his wife’s shoulder and gave it a quiet and satisfied clap. Mary looked round in terror lest anyone should have witnessed the unseemly familiarity. Had another man done the same it would not have put her nearly so much about. Only, that man’s ear would have sung for a day or two. It was of Mary M’Quhirr that this tale was told in that countryside: A tramp who had watched all the household away to the fields, he himself lurking in the lee of a hayrick, entered one morning the kitchen where she was baking, and demanded ransom, with threats of dire intent. Mary M’Quhirr lifted up her voice, and to the would-be ruffian she said:

‘Man, did onybody see ye come in?’

‘No,’ said the tramp, anxious to prove that for her there was no hope of rescue; ‘no a body saw me come in.’

‘That’s weel,’ Mary answered, no ways abashed, ‘for naebody will see ye gang oot! Lassie, reek (reach) me the axe!’

But when the weapon of death was reached, and the mistress marched to the door with it over her shoulder, the very faint-hearted robber was making the best of time toward the flowers of the moorland. It was not the least bitter drop in his cup that he was pursued as he ran by peals of inextinguishable laughter. Mary was not a frequent laugher, but when she did laugh the neighbourhood heard, and came to inquire the joke. Then she laid aside the axe, and went about her work,

and had almost forgotten the circumstance when the men from the field came in to ask at 'lowsin' time what the fun had been.

It was shortly after her interview with Saunders that Wattie was brought in and admonished. Mary had perforce to show a little sternness to somebody to make up for her recent soft-heartedness to her husband; but Wattie was in no wise intimidated. With an eye to further ploys he took his porridge with most hypocritical gravity, planning how he would get out for another grand run in the snow before he went to bed. His wish was gratified in this wise.

The snow was coming down a steady cover, and when it was a couple of feet deep on the open, the swirl of the wind had driven it into the angle of the yard, till over a wide area it lay as deep as the height of a man. Through these wreaths the 'boys' were opening roads. With their great, wide-mouthed shovels they laid themselves into their work—not working any the less well that they were occasionally under the eyes of Walter's mother, who came to the door now and then to see how they were getting on.

None of them looked upon her as other than a goddess, and in a distant kind of a way they had all been in love with her in their time. They had never told her, or so much as owned it to themselves; but there came a time in the history of each one when they began to take stock of ribbon and belt, and the set of Nelly Anderson's rippling hair. They were eager to make the least message that might take them into the 'room.' And the experience did them good, and broke them in.

Nelly was not wholly unconscious, for all women know these things; and she made them fetch and carry for her. Though they slouched like louts when she took them in hand, they were well set up and strapping fellows before they graduated, and went off on errands of their own in the forenicht to the Nether Neuk and the other farm towns. Generally it was the other ones, for on going to the Neuk one evening, James and Rab, two younger sons, who generally hunted as a couple, found as they looked shyly round the corner of the byre door their brother Aleck in possession of the dun cow's

tail. They could not see which of the Chrystie lasses it was that was milking, and they never knew, for their brother dismissed them with one biting word of scorn.

He looked at them a moment, and, as they shrank from his eye, he uttered this withering word:

‘Followdick!’

What the apocalyptic mystery of this bitter taunt may be, the historian is unable to say; but it was certainly effective, for the youths vanished into the dark, and in the meanest and meekest way trickled round the corner, and so out into the waste of whiteness underfoot and blackness above. Aleck never referred to the matter, and next day James and Rab tried to persuade themselves that it had never happened.

So it was with some goodwill that these lads opened their shoulders and threw their white spadefuls higher than their heads when the bright glow of the lamp and fireside gushed warm upon the snow, and Nelly and Wattie came out to tread for a few moments the dainty white arcades. Nelly had a shawl about her head and shoulders, and Aleck vaguely wondered why Nancy up at the Neuk could not wear a shawl like that. He supposed that the folks wore them in that way in France. On the other hand, nobody had ever come to take Nancy Chrystie away, and in his slow-thinking, country way he was glad. But when Nelly had gone her way to the stable door, and before she had come lightly stepping back, he had the grace to be ashamed of his thoughts.

When his mother went in, Wattie slipped aside and did not follow her. He went into the cart shed and put his fingers into his ears lest he should hear her call him. Had he heard he would have gone, for he had a great idea of obedience.

The ‘boys’ were in gamesome humour, Aleck especially. He was thinking of a good thing that he came near saying to Nancy Chrystie, and he slapped his thigh and would have guffawed on the strength of it. Indeed, he opened his mouth for the purpose; but his brother Rab, who was the wag of the family, having a neat snowball in his hand, popped it in as accurately

as he would have dropped a ball of worsted into a bonnet when at school the caps were arrayed for the game royal of 'Bonnet-ba.' Aleck, after a gasp or two, gave chase, and there was a battle in which snow was pushed into various uncomfortable places, mainly down each other's backs and sleeves. After they had settled this little matter, it came into Rab's head to say to Wattie:

'Wattie, I'll gie ye a saxpance if ye'll gang frae the hoose-door by yersel', across the yaird through the barn, an' shut the back barn door.'

'Let the boy alane!' said Aleck; 'ye ken what my mither'll say.'

But Rab was excited with his tussle, and full of mischief as he could be.

'Ay, he's feared, nae doot!' said Rab, knowing that this was the way to make Wattie quite determined.

'Ay, but I daur!' said Wattie; 'whaur's yer sixpence, Rab?'

Wattie could not take Rab's financial position on trust. He had been cheated too often.

'Oh,' returned Rab, affronted at the implied doubt, 'ye'll get yer sixpence!'

'Doon wi't then,' said Wattie, practically.

Rab reluctantly searched in the depths of his 'hook-book,' getting as near as possible to the blindless window through which the lamp was shining in order to see more clearly, and somewhat reluctantly passed over a coin to Alec, whose integrity made him always stake-holder.

'Dinna gie me half a sovereign, Rab!' cried Jamie from the milk hoose, with bitter irony. Jamie was fond of cream.

'Come oot o' the milk-bine, or I'll tell my mither!' retorted Rab, and all the three young men passed into the outer lobby, leaving Walter alone outside to prove the manhood of his breeks by his quest perilous. As Aleck passed him, he forced a stout cudgel into his hand, and whispered:

'Gin ye see onything, hit it!'

This was hardly reassuring, but Wattie gripped his rung, and took his way across the yard. He thought

of going back and opening the door. He would have given far more than the sixpence for a ray of light from the open doorway; but he knew that this would be looked upon as a proof of cowardice, and he strode manfully onward. The snow had ceased falling, and the sky was glittering with keen frost. The cold entered into his marrow, and the stillness made him shiver. He heard the cattle champing their food and rattling the iron of their chains in their stalls, and he felt befriended. He went onward with new courage. He reached the great barn-door, which gaped upon him like the great, black mouth of a sepulchre. His heart came quick and faint, and there was a curious constriction about his throat. But he manfully entered, and, standing an awful listening moment before venturing further, he heard the 'rattens' rustling among the straw. Otherwise the stillness was absolute. He felt a thousand miles away from any one, and it did not seem to him that he could even be the same boy who had played with Donald on the rocks in the gloaming.

He stooped and felt the edge of the door at the further side. He was looking into a sort of small stackyard, and between the corn stacks which rose imminent over him the stars were glimmering cold and blue. His nearest friend seemed to live in one of these—so lonely did the boy feel in spite of his breeks. The door was barred, and well barred too, for he determined to have no doubt about his right to that sixpence. He turned and took one step towards the great gray gulf of the main door. The blood of all his little body surged to his head, and his heart stopped. There was Something in the doorway—something that had dull, gleaming eyes and horns—something that crawled on the ground, and turned its horrid, shapeless head from side to side with a low, moaning noise. For an awesome moment Wattie stood without power to move, and then, thinking that the time of his death had come amid a whirl of other things, Aleck's advice stood suddenly clear, and he resolved to strike one last good stroke. So, clutching his short blackthorn in both hands, he struck the moving, moaning horror

fair between its glazy eyes of death, and, leaping over it, he fled with shriek on shriek for the door. As it was opened, the boy sank fainting on the doorstep. An agitated throng stood round him, and someone stooping over took up the slight form of the hero. Then the tall form of the master of Drumquhat filled up the doorway.

'Gin this is ony o' your loon's tricks,' he said, 'I'll break every bone in your bodies!'

Rab slept that night in the barn, with a lump on his forehead as large as the ball of his thumb. He had wrapped the skin of a bullock killed that day about him, and had crawled in the dark of the wall to intercept the boy as he came out. He had not meant any harm, though he had thoughtlessly done what might have endangered the child's reason. He heard his father's words, and recognized that, cold night though it was, the barn would be the most comfortable sleeping-place that night for him. He watched the group in the kitchen as Wattie 'came to,' and after seeing him so far recover as to demand the sixpence from Aleck, he might have ventured to dare his father's hazel stick, but he could not face Nelly Anderson's eyes. So he went back to the barn.

'The Sixteen Drifty Days' (From *The Raiders*)

Without, the hurricane drove ever from the south. It was the first of the famous Sixteen Drifty Days which are yet remembered over all the face of the hill country, when of sheep and cattle the dead far outnumbered the living. The snow drove hissing round the corner of the Aughty and faced against the entrance in a forty foot wreath. Looking down in the breaks of the storm we could see only the wild whirl of drifting whiteness in the gulf of the Dungeon of Buchan.

But it was warm and pleasant within. The fire drew peacefully with a gentle draught up the side of the rock, and the heather couches on the floor were dry and pleasant. Even the House of Rathan had hardly been more homelike than the cave called the Aughty, on the eastern face of the precipice of the Star which overlooks the Dungeon.

It was here that Silver Sand, that was John Faa, belted Earl and Gypsy, told his story.

'There was never,' he said, 'I think, any man so strangely driven as I of the gypsy blood, who am yet an earl of this realm of Scotland; I who am of the reiver kin have ridden with the king's men and worn the dragoon's coat; I that have looked on at many a killing of the poor Whig folk, have kin at Peden's hip in the caves by the Crichope Water—a true-blue Whig mysel! I that was Richard Cameron's man and proscrivit by the Government of the Stuarts, have likewise lain under ban by the Government of the Whigs for the riding and reiving of my clan. King's man or Hill Whig, Society man or Lag's rider—the Faa has ever been at the tow's end; and never, save as puir Silver Sand that makes his living by the keel and the scythe sand, has he ever rested sound in his bed.'

'I was but a young lad when the riding time began, an' there was screevin' and chasin' over a' the Westland after the Whigs. All this to a gypsy of the blood royal was but the squattering and quackin' of ducks upon a mill-dam—a matter for themselves. But I was in Dumfries on a day, and standin' on the brig-end o' Devorgill, wha should come by up the Vennel but the

red-wud Laird o' Lag.'

'There's a proper lad that should be nae Whig,' he cried, as soon as ever he saw me standing there; 'I ken by the cock o' his beaver bonnet and the gawsy feather intil't.'

'The troop that was riding with him, three files of King's troopers, and some young blades o' the country lairds that cam' themselves wi' twa-three led horses to ride wi' Lag—maistly lads that hated the Kirk for meddlin' wi' their gentrice richt o' free fornication, cried oot for me to mount an' ride wi' them.

'Wull ye tak' service wi' the King, His Excellent Majesty, an' wull ye curse the Whigs?' they said.

'That last I was fain to do; indeed I love them little, for they had held my father's sept down wi' an iron hand all through the thirty years of their greatness. But to ride wi' the trooping men and bite bread wi' them, was just as little to the stomach of a Faa.

'But needs must when the devil drives.

'Fess him on till the bonny braes o' Maxwelltoon!' cried the laird; 'he can mount an' hunt, or he can bide an' blood when we get him there.'

'So they carried me across till we came to a wide grassy place where the broom was growing and the wind blowing. It was fresh and free, and the innocent birds were singing.

'Lag halted his troop.

'Noo, bonny lad,' says he, 'we hae little time to pit aff wi' the likes o' you, but ye can hae the free choice. Here's a silver merk, for the King's arles, and here's Sergeant Armstrong's file wi' twal unce o' the best lead bullets. Three meenites to tell us whatna yin ye'll hae.'

The birdies whistled on the yellow whins, and the wind waved the branches they sat on. The summer airs blew soft. The green leaves laughed drily. They were beech-leaves, and their talk is aye a wee malicious.

'In three minutes I was mounted on a grey horse o' the wild laird's, and that nicht they drank me fu' in the auld Lag's Too'er, where to this day that same laird, that has his hand black with blood, sleeps in his silken bed under the safe conduct o' the Government—while I

that have been under a dozen Governments nor done ill to yin o' them, am a broken man and the King's enemy to this day. But then I am but John Faa and an Egyptian.

'But sae we rade an' better rade at the tail o' the wicked laird, an' as for his ill-doin' and ill-speakin' there was nayther beginnin' or end to it.

'He wad ride up to a farmhouse an' chap on the door wi' the basket hilt o' his broadsword.

'Is the guidman in?' says he.

'Deed, he is that!' says the mistress; 'he's gettin' his parritch.'

'Haste him fast, then,' says Lag, 'for the Archangel Gawbriel' (nae less) is waitin' to tak' his fower-'oors wi' him, an' it's a kittle thing to keep the likes o' him waitin'!

'Then in ten minutes that wife's a weedow, an' gatherin' up her man's harns in a napkin!

'Ridin' under the cloud o' nicht to droon the psalm wi' the rattle o' the musket shot; oot on the wide uplands, where there are but the burn bees an' the heatherbleats, stelling up a raw o' five or six decent muirland men on their knees, as yince I saw at Kirkconnel, some wi' the white napkins roond their broos, an' some lookin' intil the gun muzzle, it was waesome wark—waesome wark! An' the curse o' God Almichty has lain on a' that had a hand in it—savin' that de'il's knight, Sir Robert himself, wha's iniquities the Almichty is most surely reckoning at compound interest, for he sits snug an' hearty to this day in his hoose at Lag's Too'er, while in muckle Hell the de'il banks his fires and heats his irons for him.'

'But there was yae mornin' that I gat my fill—heathen gypsy though I was. We had lain a' nicht at Morton Castle, an' it was daybreak or we set hip to saddle leather. There was a bairn that we cam' on by the gully o' the Crichope—a laddie o' ten. He was sittin' by his lane in a bit bouroch when we cam' up till him, whistlin' like a lintie. He had a can o' the guid sweet milk an' a basketfu' o' bannocks. He was close by the mouth o' the Linn. It behoved, then, that he was takkin' them to some cave whaur the outlawed minister

was hiding.'

'It was just like the laird to get the lad to inform. It was sic a bit o' de'il's wark that pleased him weel an' also David Graham that they had made Sherra o' Gallowa' in the place o' the Agnews o' Lochnaw. They war a bonny pair. They feared the bit boy, half daffin, half in earnest, till the wean was blae wi' fricht.'

'Lag gruppit him by the collar and shook him by the coat-neck ower the Linn, like a bit whaulpie that ye nicht lift by the cuff o' the neck.'

'Tell,' he says, 'whaur lies auld Tam Glen, or ower ye gang.'

'The bit laddie lookit doon, an'—O Paitrick! me that is an auld man can see the terror glint in the e'e o' him as he saw the great trees nae bigger than berry busses at the bottom. Syne he lookit up at us that sat oor horses ahint the laird and the sherra.

'Hae nane o' ye ony wee laddies at hame that ye should let a bairn dee?'

'He had a voice like a wean I yince kenned, and at the word o' him, I that was but a youngster, an' no lang frae the mither's milk mysel', burst out in a kin o' gowl o' anger.

'Lag turned quick, the de'il's dead-white thumb marks on ilka side o' his nose.

'What cursed Whig's that?' says he, in his death voice.

'Then I canna tell whether the bairn's bit coatie rave oot o' his hand, or whether Lag let him drap; but when we lookit again there was Lag's hand empty, an' up the Linn cam' a soun' like a bairn greetin' in the dark his lane.

'Lag stood maybes three heart-loups in a swither. I think he hadna juist bargained for that, but he turns an' cries wi' a wave o' his ruffled lace band—

'The corbies will hae sweet pickin' aff that whalp's bones!'

'But I had had aneuch an' mair—a bellyfu' to settle me for yince an' a'.

'I was aff my horse an' doon amang the busses on the Linn side wi' a great clatter o' stanes.

'Wha's that?' cries Lag, ower his shooter, for he

was turned to ride awa'.

'Gypsy Jock,' says yin, 'deserted.'

'Give him a volley, lads. I never thocht the loon a true man!' cried Lag.

'But the riders had little stomach for the shootin'. The wee bit laddie lay on their hearts, and in especial his words, for most o' them had bairns o' their ain, though some no juist owned wi'. So but few shot after me, an' them mostly Hielan' men that kenned no English except 'Present! Fire!' whilk they had heard often aneuch in a' conscience since they rade wi' Lag.

I was doon at the laddie afore the troop had ridden away. But he was bye wi't. A bonny bit laddie as ever ye saw. I carried him till his mither, strippin' aff the regimentals as I gaed, but keepin' the sword, the musket, an' the brass mounted pistols. His mither met us at the gable end. The bairn had the empty can claspit in his wee bit hand. O sirce me! sirce me! Patrick! gin I could forget it.'

And Silver Sand set down his head on the rude shelf in the Aughty and sobbed till I feared he might do himself a hurt.

'An' his mither took him oot o' my airms, that am but a rude man; an' she said never word, neither did the tear rin doon her cheek, but bade me come ben as ceevil as gin I had been a minister. She set before me to eat, but ye may ken what heart I had for victual. I juist roared an' grat, but she pat her hand on my shoother, an' hushed me as gin I had been the mourner. Syne she laid him on the bed.

'My wee Willie,' says she, as she smoothed his bonny broo an' kaimed his hair that was lang and yellow an' fell on the sheet in wavy ringlets.

'Even so' she said, 'Lord, I had thocht ye might hae spared this bit boy to me for company, seein' he was the last. But it's no to be. Yin at Drumclog, yin at Kirkconnel, an' yin by the bonny links o' the Cluden. I thocht the Lord wad hae spared the widow's yae bit hindmost lamb. The wull o' the Lord be dune.'

'She turned sharp to me.

'Hoo died he?' she asked, as calm as a What's-o'-the clock?

I tried to tell her, between the sabs—her waitin' till I cam' to myself an' giein' me a bit clap on my shoother—me that am but a sinfu' man, as if I had been her ain bairn himsel'.

'Noo na—noo na,' says she, aye fleechin' like.

'O wae's me! wae's me!' Silver Sand cried, sinking his head on the table board. 'The Lord forgie the sins o' my youth.'

I was weeping too by this time, and I think the King himself had wept as well to hear the tale.

Silver Sand went on.

'She stood ower him a gye while, sortin' him an' touchin' him an' straikin' him.

'He was a carefu' boy,' she said, 'an' that guid to his mither, my bit boy Willie! Ye helpit her ilka day, an' ye sleepit in her bosom ever since her ain guid man won awa'. Aye, Willie, my wean, ye sail sleep this yae nicht in yer mither's airms, for they shall never meet about onything that is the desire o' her heart in this world mair. Even this yae nicht ye shall lie in the airms o' her that bore ye, an' that close gain her side, where she carried ye the black year she lost her man.'

'She turned to me with a kind o' anger.

'An' what for no?' she said, as if I had forbidden her. 'An' what for no, I wad like to ken? Pit your hand on him, man; he's warm an' bonny—no a mark on him that the yellow lint locks canna cover, an' that I can wash. What for shouldna he sleep by his ain mither? He will sleep sae soond. I'll no wakkin' him gin he be tired. This mornin' I raise on my bare feet that he should get a langer lie and a soond sleep—aye, an' a soond sleep he's got, my laddie, O my laddie!'

'An' ye were a kind boy to your mither, Willie—a kind, kind boy—an' I hae nae mair; it's a sin to mourn for them that the Lord has ta'en. But O he was a carefu' boy Willie, an' the maist thochtfu' for his mither. See man, see—he has brocht his mither's bit can safe hame in his hand. '

'O, waes me! waes me!' wailed Silver Sand, rocking himself to and fro, so that little Marion woke, and seeing us weeping, wept too, like a young child that knows not why.

Then there was a long pause, and the fire flickered and the wild storm raved outside the Aughty. And the storm within our bosoms sobbed itself out, and we watched little Marion silently till she slept again, our right hands being clasped each in the other.

‘So that day,’ continued Silver Sand, ‘made me a believing man—that is, so far as a gypsy and a Faa may be a believing man.

‘But it was a long time before I was trusted by the moormen, because I was known for a gypsy and a red-hand follower of the chief persecutor. I was even as Paul at Damascus to them; yet in time they believed, and treated me not as a spy but as a brand plucked from the burning. Yet it was my lot to be cast among the extremer sect, who were the followers of Richard Cameron.

‘As you may have heard, these received but scant justice at the Revolution, so that when all was over, and I went to what home I had, I found that they of my own clan had been attainted, and were under worse condemnation than ever, for their lawless deeds whilst I had been away from them.

‘It was not likely that I could take part with them now, for the order of the King's council caused them to become worse outlaws and reivers than ever— though, I think, no murderers.

‘Yet I could not live with them; nor, being a Faa, and the chief, could I betray them. Nor yet, for my father's sake and my name's sake, would I claim any indulgence that might not be extended to them. So I took to the hills and to the trade of selling the bonny scythe sand and the red keel for the sheep. And though I have not where to lay my head, I am a better and happier man, than the man who witnessed that sight by the Linn of Crichope ever deserved to be. But I have dwelt with my Maker and humbled myself before Him in secret wood and lonely fell. The men of the hills ceased their hiding in the mosses and moors near forty years ago—all but one, and he a persecutor, a

heathen man, and one whose hand had been dyed in the blood of God's saints. For forty years I have dwelt where God's folk dwelt, and striven with the devil and the flesh in many a strange place—often not sure whether indeed I had gotten me the victory.'

'And I fear me that in these later troubles I have taken too much to do with carnal things, for which I must be constant in prayer that the Lord will forgive me—an unworthy man and an aged. But I have not steeped my hands in taking of blood; and, so far as I may, I have both been faithful to my friends and to my name. But the task has not been light, and sometimes I have suffered from the unbelief of both.'

I stretched out my hand, and humbly asked him to forgive me my unjust words and unworthy suspicions.

'And I cannot call you aught but Silver Sand, and you will come and camp by the Water of Rathan?' I said.

Silver Sand assented with a sweet smile, and took my hands and kissed them; for a gypsy has strange ways.

But there were many things that I desired to have explained.

'Why did you, being the man you are,' I said, 'threaten warlock threats to the men down there the other night.'

Silver Sand smiled.

'In Rome I must do as the Romans,' he said; which, however, I did not think a very sound exposition or deduction.

'But could you indeed perform these things?' I asked, still doubtfully.

'They believed I could, which is the same thing. You see,' he went on, 'I have been forced to practise simple stratagems to keep myself safe between a wild clan and an unjust law, and there are many things that are easy to do and hard to make others understand. My arms which were twisted in the torture of the Star Chamber before James, Duke of York, have served me in that I can run like a beast, and when we hunt as the Loathly Dogs, Quharrie and I fear the foolish folk out of

their wits.'

'Indeed, I think you are no that canny mysel',' I said, with a kind of awe on my face.

'Weel,' said Silver Sand, 'I doubt not that gin some o' the landward presbyteries got me, I micht burn even at this day, as did Major Weir. Yet is all my magic of the simplest and most childish—even as simple as keel and scythe sand.'

I asked, had he ever applied for grace from Government.

He told me no; for that there were none in any Government who would believe that a Faa could be other than a sorner and a limmer. That grapes do not grow on thorns nor figs on thistles is good Government doctrine.

'An' to tell the truth,' said John Faa, 'I was none that anxious, for I am a man that has been so long at the horn, that I could not lie happy were I hand in glove wi' King's men and baron baillies. I love best the fowl o' the air that cackle and cry on the moorland, the spotted eggs o' the pee-wees an' the great marled eggs o' the whaup, the fish frae the burn an' the haddock frae the salt sea flats. All these and the taking o' them are marrow to the bones o' Silver Sand.'

I asked him again (but not continuously, for we had plenty of time for our converse, during the sixteen days and nights of the great storm) among other things, what he thought of the Freetraders. He gave me a queer look.

'I think verra much what your faither thocht,' said he, 'in his latter days. I dinna meddle wi' the stuff myself, but I lay no informations on them that hold otherwise. I hae nocht, for instance, to say about your freends the Maxwells—only (a word in your lug) gin I war you I wad pit my fit doon again them using the cellars o' Rathan for their caves o' storage.'

He nodded significantly.

'Ye dinna mean that they hae dune that!' I said, with indignation.

'An' what else?' said Silver Sand. 'They are as fu' as they can stick o' French brandy, and Vallen-ceens; an' gin ony o' Agnew's men were gaun snowkin' roond,

it micht cause misunderstandings atween them that's in poo'er an' you that's sic a grand King's man.'

'And are you quite content as you are, Silver Sand?' I said to him again, to pass the time. Little Marion, to whom the quiet of the cave was heaven, sat at our feet and played with the quaint toys which Silver Sand had made her.

'Content!' said Silver Sand; 'what for shouldna I be content? I ken nane that has mair cause to be. I look on the buik o' God a' the day under His wide, high lift for a rooftree, an' often a' nicht forbye gin the storms keep aff. I hae God's Word in my oxter forbye—see here!'

He pulled out two dumpy little red-covered Bibles, with the Old Testament divided at Isaiah, and the Psalms of David in metre, very clean, but thumbed yellowish like a banknote at the end.

'What mair could a man want?' he said.

'But sellin' the sand an' the keel can only tak' a sma' part o' your time—what do ye do wi' the rest when ye are awa' frae the Rathan?'

Silver Sand smiled and made a curious little noise in his throat, as May does when she calls the hens for their 'daich.'

'I play at bogle wi' the lasses,' he said, 'aboot the cornstacks.'

I looked at him, and was silent with surprise. He had just been telling me that his aim was to be a godly man according to his possible.

'Did ye never hear o' the Brownie?' he said, seeing my surprise.

'Aye,' said I; 'but I believe nothing in freets. There's nae siccan thing.' For being young I knew no better.

'The first starlicht nicht after we are back at the Rathan I'll show ye,' said he.

'Tell me noo,' I said, 'Guid kens there's plenty o' time in this auld Aughty.'

'Tell on,' said Marion, who was awaking quickly from her daze, and beginning to take an interest in many things.'

If I could have forgotten the great rambling house

where the women-folk waited—May and Eppie and the Lady Grizel—these days in the Aughty, with the wild men and the wild nature alike shut out, with the peril past (or so I thought) had been as happy and memorable as any in my life. I have often noticed that an unexpected experience of bodily comfort, as coming to a house wet and weary and finding a welcome, a warm fire and dry socks, clings to the heart longer than anything else, and is oftener recalled than many greater kindnesses.

So the Aughty comes to me whenever the winds howl and the shutters clatter. I think we were all happy in the Aughty, and certainly little Marion gained in beauty and fearlessness every day. At first it was sad to see her shrinking when any one moved suddenly near her. But this also gradually ceased.

To this day I can hear the soft wish of the snow against the flap of heather curtain, the roaring of the wind above, the crackle of the heather roots and broom branches on the fire. I can see the red loom of the peats at the back—indeed all things precisely as they were on these days of storm when the winds drifted the snow for sixteen days, till in many of the hollows the wreaths lay a hundred feet deep, and over half of Scotland one sheep out of every two died—as well as many men that were shepherds and wanderers. Once we heard a great roar as though the mountains were falling, and we all instinctively cowered and prayed that the Destroying Angel might pass over our heads.

‘That’s a most mighty hurl of stanes somewhere,’ said Silver Sand.

‘I wish the Star Hill bena comin’ doon on our heids,’ said I. But it was not the Star Hill. It was further off, somewhere about the Hill of the Dungeon.

We waited for a long time, but we could hear no more of it, and from the doorway we could only see the great tide of snow-flakes running steadily up the Dungeon o’ Buchan far below, and occasional swirls entering into the sheltered bend in which the mouth of the Aughty lay. The snow was not falling now, but blowing uninterruptedly north with the mighty wind, as level as ruled lines on a copybook.

So we let fall the flap, after having taken Marion to the door that she might wonder at the white driving world of snow.

'I think I could float in it like a feather,' she said—a feeling which I had myself.

It is but little to read the gypsy's strange relations, or for the matter of that to write them, in the bien comfort of one's own dwelling; but it was quite other to hear them told in the slow, level voice of Silver Sand himself, who was Johnny Faa, the bloody persecutor and Cameronian gypsy—for such things were never heard of before in broad Scotland. All this, too, while the greatest storm of the century raved without, and the winds of the Sixteen Drifty Days sped past outside like fiends that rode to the yelling of the damned.

It was comfortable too at meal-times to hear the bacon skirling in the pan, and smell the canty smell of the oatmeal fried among it. Sometimes Quharrie would rise from one side of the fireplace and walk solemnly round to the other, whither Marion would presently follow him, and lie down beside him with her head on his mighty flank. Then he would lift his head and look at her like a great benignant wolf (the first of that race) and because he loved her down in his rough-husked heart somewhere, he licked her on the point of her nose, which seemed to turn up a little on purpose.

Then at night it was pleasant to draw about the fire while Silver Sand read out of his book—often from John's Gospel, oftenest from the Apocalypse, which somehow appealed strongly to him. Then all kneeling upon the hearth, he poured out his soul in prayer—such a prayer as he had heard from Renwick and Shields in the last days of the sufferings when John Faa was yet on his probation. He would often fleech on me to take part in the exercises, but though my heart was very much attuned to do it, I never could come at the performance of it till I was in a house of my own.

'Ye want to hear mair about the Brownie?' said Silver

Sand. 'Aweel, ye are gye far ben wi' me, an' I'm gettin' ower auld to play sic tricks an' pliskies. Ye think, nae doot, that my life hasna been a verra usefu' life. I am o' a different opeenion.'

I had no such thought, and said so.

'Aweel, ye mind the year afore last. Wha was't, do ye think, that cut an' stookit the feck o' the Maxwell's corn in the short days so far in the year, when the lads had to gang awa' to the Isle o' Man for the first cargo for my Lord Stair?'

'I heard some word o' its bein' the fairies,' said I.

'And there ye show your penetration, Paitrick, but maybes ye didna discern, you that was so far-seein', that it was Silver Sand wi' his bit scythe an' his lang shauchelt airms. An' wha was't that gathered a' yer sheep intil the buchts the nicht afore the great storm o' February-was-a-year?'

'I aye jaloosed it was the Maxwells, but they never wad own wi't, but I thocht little o' that, for Kennedy thinks no more o' tellin' a whud (lie) than o' slappin' a cleg that nips him on the hench bane.'

'That he disnal' said Silver Sand, with conviction.

'But,' he continued, 'he tell'd the truth that time by accident whatever, for it was juist me an' Quharrie that buchtit the Rathan yowes, an' the neist nicht dippit them, rubbin' tar an' butter amang the oo' to make it grow flossy an' lang.'

And Silver Sand went on to tell us of nights out on the fells and in the green parks about the farm-towns. How he delved the old wives' kail-yards, as he said, for the pleasure of going round the next morning to hear their wonderings.

'Ye'll no be wantin' ony sand for yer heuk, Betty?' he would say to some old dame at her cottage door.

'Na, no the day, Silver Sand,' says Betty.

'Ony news, Betty?' he would say.

'News!' quo' she—'News! What think ye o' the gentle people bein' in my garden yestreen, nae farder gane, an' left it a' delved, an' no as muckle as the dent o' their feet!'

'And that,' said Silver Sand, 'was likely, seeing the trouble I was at to tak' the footmarks oot wi' an

iron-teethed rake.'

'It's maist wonderful indeed, Betty; but what wad Maister Forbes, honest man, say to yer hae'in' sic dealin's wi' the fairies? Think ye that's canny, Betty, my woman?'

'Canny here, canny there, as lang as I get my garden delved an' my tawties howkit for nocht, I'se seek nae Maister Forbes! Maister Forbes, indeed! It wad be a lang time or ever he howkit a dreel o' my tawties. He's fitter at eatin' them, great fushionless hoshen that he is!'

Thus Silver Sand carried us over the storm with wealth of tales. I listened eagerly, my toes cocked to the comfortable fire on the hearthstone (for there was a good hearthstone in the Aughty), and one ear bent to the outer moil of the storm as I nestled down with my right and left side time about to the fire.

'Then,' continued the story-teller, 'there were nichts on the corn rigs when the shearin' was at its height, and the farms lay sleepin' under the cool, clean air—nichts when it was juist heaven to work among the sheaves, and hear the crap! crap! of the short-bladed reaping-hook driving through the corn. Every sheaf was like a friend. Every stook added another to the weel-buskit army that made glad the heart and exercised the brain of the bit farmer body, when he cam' oot in the mornin' an' gaed dodderin' aboot the oothooses, an' syne cam' dawnerin' doon the field to plan the wark for the day.

'Hi, Rab!' he would cry to the cotman, as he saw my handiwork, 'come ye here.'

Then Rab would come oot, dighting his neb frae the byre, belike whaur he had been preenin' the sweet milk-can, or else the moo' o' the byre lass, wha kens—gye sheepish and shamefaced whatever.

'Rab! d'ye see that?' his maister wad say (me up in the muckle tree a' the time).

'Rab looks. Rab better looks. The fashion of his countenance changes.

'The Lord preserve's,' he cries, as he catches sight o' a dizzen mair rigs cut, past the mark whaur he had finished at the gloamin' o' the nicht afore— 'the mid-

nicht fairies hae been here. I'se gang hame. I'se no work wi' Broonie.'

'Ye muckle nowt,' says his master, 'be thankfu' that Broonie thinks so weel o' the place as to work on it. A licht heart an' an untired leg has the lads about the bit whaur Broonie works. Heartsome be his meal o' meat, puir falla!'

'So the neist day at e'en there's a basin o' parritch an' a great bowl o' milk set oot at the barn-end. Then I tak' my great sheepskin coat aboot me, that keeps me warm on the cauldest nicht in a hedge-root, if need be, an' up the loanin' I gang my ways. There'll be some muckle gomerel o' a half-grown loon that wants to get credit wi' the lasses. He's watchin' for Broonie. I can hear his knees playin' knoit thegither at the back o' the hedge.

'BOO-HOO!' says I, billying like a bullock.

'Up gets Hobbledehoy, an' rins wi' skelloch on rainin' skelloch to the farmhouse, where the lasses are biggit in threes about the back o' the door, fair wat wi' fear.

'Never was there sic a thing!' Gomerel threeps. He has seen Broonie. He can describe him. He is as big as the barn, an' beltit wi' a curly hide. He has horns as lang as my leg. Then on the morn whatna bizz there is in a' the kintraside. Frae far an' near they come to hear Rob Gomerel tell about the Broonie that billied at him in the hedge. Rab tells the tale, and tells it ower again. An' every time he tells it there's twa yairds on till the length o' the beast, an' at least yin to the horns. It's a fearsome beast afore a's dune.'

Silver Sand laughed his silent chuckling laugh, and went on.

Then there are the trysts o' the lasses an' the lads. There was an ill speldron o' a loon that had mistrysted wi' twa lasses already, an' he cam' to the kirk-stile to speak to wee Margaret Lauder that is as innocent as a lamb. I saw the colour come an' gang, an' the bit heart loup. And my bauld birkie saw it too, for he eined wi' the denty wee lass to meet him at the Myrestane black-yetts at the back o' the wood. But he never gat there to this day. Brownie met him as he

cam' steppin' sae gawsy across the dry stanes at Sandy's Ford. There Brownie stood an' shook his horns at the great scoundrel frae side to side like a gov'in' beast, wi' a kind o' elricht yammer that near feared mysel' as I made it.

'Flat doon fell the speldron, for ill-doers are a' ill-dreaders. Syne Broonie comin' a wee nearer, he gat him on his feet an' ran hame to his stable-laft wi' the cauld ice water drappin' aff him.

'Then wha but Silver Sand an' no Broonie ava' saw hame the bit lass to her mither, an' took the chance o' reddin' up the loon's character on the road. I'se warrant he gets a flea in his lug the neist time he gangs to yon toon!' said Silver Sand, triumphantly.

'Dod, man, Silver Sand, but that was guid!' cried I, hitting my thigh in my delight. For he made us see the whole business by his manner of telling it.

'But there's better than that,' says he, blinkin' kindly at me across the red glow of the Aughty fire.

'Mony is the time,' he went on, 'in the auld days when Craigdarroch ingle-cheek lowed bonny, an' the lads o' the countryside forgathered in the gloamin', I hae played bogle there an' seen strange things. There was a lass (I'se no tell ye her name, so dinna ask) that I hae seen wi' thae e'en o' mine, comin' slippin' sae denty to the door, an' gaun doon by the soughin' grey willows that turned their white undersides to look at her in the gloom of the gloamin' as she gaed by the three thorns, hastening as though she were gangin' to a love tryst.'

I began to understand, yet I so loved my lass that I had no fear of what I might hear from this recording angel of the night and the fields.

'An' wha, think ye, cam' to see her—this bonny lass that left the braw woers ahint, speakin' about the nowt to her daddy?'

I shook my head.

'She stood by the side o' the Solway, wi' the tide washin' up to her feet, and she lookit ower at the auld Hoose o' Rathan, where there was a licht at the high window, and whiles a bit fire doon on the shore. That was the camp o' Silver Sand. Maybe it was at the camp she lookit, an' maybe it was for the sake o' Silver Sand

that she gaed doon there by hersel'—an' maybe no!

'At ony gate it wasna juist the safest to be gaun there, wi' Freetraders an' Yawkins an' sic like cattle aboot; so Quharrie an' me we made it our business like to see that she wasna disturbit.'

'But whatna cuif was the lad she likit to bide in the Rathan when the bonniest lass in the countryside cam' doon to keep tryst wi' nocht but the bit fardin' candle in the Hoose o' Rathan?'

'But I never jaloosed—hoo was I to ken?' I say, for I am indeed ashamed.

'Hoot awa', man! Ye surely wore your e'en in the tail o' your coat! Ye micht hae kenned by the way she flyted (scolded) on ye!'

'O man, Silver Sand, ye should hae telled me,' says I.

'Na, na, Laird Rathan, Silver Sand is nae tale-pyet. A bonny-like thing gin a young lass trusted me an' the stars wi' the innocence o' her heart's chamber, an' I should rin clashin' to a great hulk that hadna the gumption to find the road in for himsel!'

Silver Sand shook his head at the thought, but I took no offence for all the ill names he gave me. Contrariwise, I was exceeding glad; because I wanted to believe that her heart was mine before the night of the Dungeon and the fight by the Murder Hole.

'There's yae thing mair,' said he, 'that for your peace I may tell ye, though ye but little deserve it. It was the day ye waur sae ill wi' the brain heat when it turned to a raging fever, frae the cloor ye got up by the Neldricken. The doctor that had been ridden for to Dumfries, had gien ye up an' gaen awa' to order your coffin, belike. It was waefu' to hear ye. They say that they could hear the cryin' o' ye at the Orraland through the open windows that terrible nicht.

'Weel, man, I was there by the water edge, and what think ye I saw? I saw a bit lassie that had been wearin' herself oot to help ye, come awa' oot into the nicht air, an' afore I had time to rin, doon she clapped on her knees close by me, an' by chance (because I couldna help it) I heard the prayer for you she thocht only the Almichty listened to. She prayed lang and sair

for ye, Paitrick, my lad. Ye ill deserve the like o' her. She asked that the Lord nicht tak' her an' leave ye a wee bit langer, 'for he's but young,' she said, 'an' hasna had time to bethink himsel'.'

'The God of Jacob bless her!' I said, solemnly, for I could hardly speak. And small wonder.

Silver Sand said 'Amen!'

But a thought struck me.

'An' what,' I said, 'nicht ye be doin' doon by the shore at that time o' nicht? Were you no at the pray in' too?'

'O,' said Silver Sand, lightly, 'I was juist throwin' chuckie-stanes in the water!'

On the morning of the seventeenth day, when we were becoming anxious for those whose anxiety for us we dared not think upon, we looked out, and lo! the great blast—the greatest of a century—had blown itself out. We gazed abroad on the face of the world, and the sight made us both fear and quake, and that exceedingly.

It was a clear, bright morning when we put aside the mat and looked out. The brightness was like the kingdom of heaven. There was a chill thin air blowing, and the snow was already hard bound with frost. We looked down into the Dungeon of Buchan. Its mighty cauldron that had the three lochs at the bottom, was nearly full of snow. The lochs were not. The Wolfs Slock was not. The night before we had only seen a whirling chaos of hurrying flakes of infinite deepness. The morning showed us the great valley almost levelled up with snow, from Breesha and the Snibe to the Range of Kells.

We stepped from the door upon the first wreath. It rose in a grand sweep which curved round the angle of the hill. We set foot on it, and it was strong enough to bear us. So closely had the particles been driven by the force of the wind, that as soon as the pressure was taken off, the frost bound the whole mass together firm as ice and smooth as ivory.

Then as we stood on the top there was a

wonderful sight to be seen. A wide world of wreathed snow. There was no Loch Enoch to be discerned. The dazzling curve of the blown snow ran clear up the side of the great Merrick Hill. There was no Loch-in-loch. There was no Outlaws' Island. The same frost-bound whiteness had covered all. The old world was drowned in snow and there was no Bow of Promise to be seen. Perhaps because we had offered no sacrifice.

'God help them that are under that!' said Silver Sand.

But indeed we saw at a glance that all who had been without roof-tree during the great storm were long past our help.

Only on the Dungeon Hill opposite, under the hanging brow of Craignairny there was a great pit mark like a stone quarry, in colour red and grey—the granite showing its unhealed edges, set about with the white snow. This landslip we had not seen before.

Bidding Marion abide in the Aughty till we returned, we set out to explore. We bound kerchiefs about our brogues to keep the loose particles from balling; but, both of us being light on our feet, we sank only a very inconsiderable way. And Quharrie did not sink at all, but lightly passed over, and so went before. He was a thoughtful but not a morose dog. Only this morning the snow seemed to get into his sedate brain, and he whirled about after the stump of a tail so short, that as he turned, he only saw it rounding the uttermost curve of a very far away turn. A stern chase in his case, was not only a long one but a perfectly hopeless one. Yet he spun round nevertheless. He overturned himself in the snow. He slid on his back down the great snow wreaths—in fact did everything except bark. Then suddenly he took himself up, as one may see a dignified baillie or magistrate surprised in a game of romps, look about to see whether any one has observed him, and then walk off with an air as though he were mightily surprised at the lightness of the walk and conversation of the man next to him. So Quharrie on the great snow wreaths that filled up the valley of the Star Hill.

Before going out we looked to our arms, although

Silver Sand sighed and said, 'I misdoot me that all the arms we shall need the day are picks and shovels.'

The wreaths of the snow were bewildering and of exquisite beauty, rosy where the sun touched them—a pale faint blue in the shadow, and with such a delicious play of wavering light where the sun and shade met that it was like the sun shining through deep leaves and throbbing in the clearness of a shaded mountain pool.

As we went we sounded each step with our great poles tipped with iron. Silver Sand went foremost, because I knew but little about snow; for by the sea edge of Solway it lies but seldom and that never deep. Sometimes we set foot on a snow bridge between two stones—so fell in and had to pull one another out. Sometimes we would start a rush of snow sliding downhill, which always made Silver Sand very grave, knowing the danger of it.

First we went towards the Isle of Enoch, from which we had set out the night we came to the Aughty. So level was the buried loch that it was only by very carefully observing the landmarks that we could tell when the frozen water lay beneath us. But the side of the Merrick above us was clear in patches, where it rises too steeply to hold the snow.

Soon we came to where we thought the Isle of Loch-in-loch to lie, but nothing told us that any abodes of human beings could be beneath. Looking westward to the side of the Merrick from the highest part of the snow, we saw what seemed to be an excavation of an oval form.

'There!' said Silver Sand, pointing with his iron-shod 'kent.'

So he went upward and I followed him, till we came to the edge. I shall never forget what I saw, though I must hasten to tell it briefly. It was a great pit in the snow, nearly circular, built up high on all sides, but specially towards the south. The lower tiers of it were constructed of the dead bodies of a great multitude of sheep piled one on top of the other, forming frozen fleecy ramparts. But the snow had swept over and blown in, so that there was a way down

to the bottom by walking along the edge of a wreath. Looking in, we saw protruding from the snow—here the arm of a man and there the horn of a bullock.

I understood at once. We were standing above the white grave of the outlaws of the Dungeon. They had died in their hillside shelter. With our 'kents' we could do little to unbury them, and give them permanent sepulture. It was better that they should lie till the snow melted off the hill. But we uncovered many of the faces, for so much of the work was not difficult. As each white frozen face came in view Silver Sand said briefly, 'Miller!' or 'Macaterick!' or 'Marshall!' as soon as he looked upon them.

But there were no Faas among them.

'The Faas have done my bidding,' he said, 'and they have at least a chance for their lives.'

Quharrie marked the spots where the dead were to be found by digging with his forepaws, throwing the snow through the wide space between his hind legs, and blowing through his nose as a terrier does at a rabbit hole.

But we found seventeen and no more, all under the great south wall of sheep, which the starving wretches had built to keep them from the icy bensil of the snow wind. I wondered why they had not abode in their little cots and clay biggings; but Silver Sand said that to gather into great camps with their cattle, and collect materials for a vast fire in the midst was ever their custom in time of storm. But the Sixteen Drifty Days had been too much for them.

It was a mighty storm, and the like has never been seen in Galloway to this day. Afterwards when men came to bury the dead, they found good proof that they had warred it out till the tenth day, when their food and their fire alike gave out. Then here and there they had laid them down to sleep, and so awoke no more. Thus we found them, and thus, poor wretches, we left them.

They looked strangely happy, for the whiteness of the snow set their faces as in a frame. I saw the rascal that would have killed me in the cot of Craignairny. He looked quite a respectable man. Which made me think

that some ill devil had, mayhap, long hirsled and harried an innocent body against its will. So may it be. The good God knows. The Day of Judgment is not my business.

Then we went towards the House of Craignairny itself. But when we got there we found not the house, and we found not the landmarks. The great gash on the Dungeon brow, which we had seen from the Aughty, had been made by an inconceivable quantity of rock, which had fallen, crushing its way down the hillside and followed by a multitude of smaller stones mixed with snow. The lirk of the hill in which the ill-omened House of Death once stood, was covered fathoms deep in rock, as though the very mountain had hanged itself, Judas-like, so that all its bowels gushed out. Thus was the surprising judgment of God made plain and manifest. It was the roar of that great downthrow which we had heard when we were in the Aughty, and thought that the Star Hill was about to fall upon our heads.

No man ever saw hilt or hair of Eggface or her sons, nor of any that had been seen in that ill house, save only the man that would have knifed me, whom I saw in the great Pit of Sheep under the lee of the Merrick. The place is now all overgrown with heather and the brown bent grass; but it is still plain to be seen, and the shepherds call it the Landfall of Craignairny. They say that no sheep will feed there to this day, but I know not the truth of that.

We had, however, seen enough. So we went back to the Aughty till night, for the sun was rendering the snow too soft even on that keen December day to make travelling easy.

'Storm on the Wilderness' (From *Rose of the Wilderness*)

They tell you that nobody is really alive to the beauty of their birthplace. Well, perhaps not for some time after. But in the long run it depends on the person. For me, Rose Gordon of the Dungeon in the uplands of Galloway, from my earliest years I was glad of the large freshness of every breath I drew.

Solitary? Why should I be? I had my father. I had books. Men did not often come there, it is true, save our great Lob-Lie-by-the-Fire, Muckle Tamson, but on winter evenings a stray shepherd or two would look in, each with five or six miles of trackless moorland to cover when he left our warm ingle-nook. But men I did not want—at least, not yet.

I have told you how unhappy my father was after the failure of his great plan of making my dresses by rule and line—how he slashed the good cloth in order to give me relief when I lay fainting, so that it was no longer any good except to make floorcloths of.

But he was a determined man, my father, Henry Gordon, as you shall hear. He had a cousin, or niece, rather, who had married a great banker in Edinburgh. Her name was Nan Gilfillan. She was said to 'lead her husband a life,' but my father said that that was 'no more than was good for Watty Gilfillan in thae big towns.' You see my father had known him as a laddie-boy about Clachanpluck. In fact, Henry Gordon had been a strong, big boy when Walter Gilfillan was a timid, little one. Well, it chanced that one August day my father had been down at Cairn Edward with some lambs—the first thinning-crop of the year—and there, who should he meet but the banker's wife, a determined lady, bold and bright, if ever there was one—a true kinswoman of his own.

And to her he opened his mind, concerning the dresses and also about me. In one way he could not have done worse—in another he could not have done better. For you see, as I found out later, it was Mrs. Nan Gilfillan's joy to take hold of things, to bend them according to her will, to invent plans for other people,

and to make them carry them out, on pain of her severest displeasure.

Still, I was fairly safe. It was a far, far cry to the Dungeon, bosomed in tall heather and deep morasses, sphered by roadless, trackless wildernesses, and wide slow 'lanes' to be crossed only by the leaping-pole.

Like the Montenegrins, our Black Mountain, that is to say the Dungeon, saved us for long from the invasion of the Turks. Not that Mrs. Nan was a Turk—or if she were, it was only in the intimacy of her family, and a very pretty and lovable one always.

At any rate, now she could only advise. She knew a family of poor girls—relatives of her own in some remote degree, traceable only by Mrs. Walter Gilfillan herself. For Nan the whole world was divided into two very unequal portions—'my people' and others. So far as in her lay, she was kind to outsiders, and helped them in a sort of organised charitable way that discouraged too frequent demands. But 'her folk'—she would run on all fours, climb a lamp-post, or camp out for their sakes!

The Kemp family had once been—no, not exactly rich, but well off. The loss of Father Kemp had changed everything. A careful, clever, managing mother had done her best for the five or six daughters. They had gone into a small house. The elder had taken to school-teaching, governnessing, and the usual sad makeshifts of women left to their own resources.

The youngest, Lila—which is to say Lily—had neither the head nor the stamina for such pursuits. She possessed, however, a turn for dressmaking. Once she had been sent for to stop with some rich relatives of her mother's—not the Gilfillan's; bank managers are not, as one might think, hideously wealthy. The clinking dross, the dirty rustling oblongs which represent money, do not stick to their fingers. But in no profession is there perhaps a higher percentage of good men—no, I will not say that, lest I should be misunderstood—perhaps rather 'of fine fellows' than in any other.

At any rate, Lila Kemp went to the Langleys. Mrs. Langley was a capricious woman. At first she thought

of adopting little mouse-like Lila, whose fair hair and blue eyes attracted her. If she had kept this to herself, no great harm might have been done. But being of that type of woman who can keep nothing to herself which redounds to her credit, she told the girl of it. She even made her sign 'Lila Kemp-Langley' in her letters to her own proper mother!

'Mamie always was a fool of a woman!' said Nan Gilfillan, in her breezy rapid way; 'that poor man she married is only fit to be a stock-broker! All the same, she has no business to put foolish notions into that girl's head.'

And it was not at all little Lila's fault. She could not help having an artistic nature. Mrs. Langley spent her days in taking her to the most expensive and exclusive dressmakers, but there was something in that little head of Lila's which guided and overruled the fancies of her foster-mother, her aunt, and the preconceptions of the millinery women. Instinctively Lila knew what was right. And the result was astonishing. Lila floated into great drawing-rooms like a windborne fay. She swung in the dance as the half-open petal of a flower sways in the breeze.

Gone were the short-skirted little home-made frocks, the neat white blouses, the straw canoeing hat with the white feather picked up in the poultry yard. She breathed a very incense of adulation. Men noble and distinguished bowed before her. What wonder if her head was turned a little. But her heart was the heart of Lila. And as to her beauty, that seemed to grow rarer, daintier every day. 'Pale as a lily,' so far as she was concerned, was no mere play of words. She possessed, however, to hide her paleness, a creamy bloom on her cheeks like that which the bees gather for their cells of wax.

It lasted one winter—the beat of light feet on waxed floors, the quicker, lighter beat of Lila's heart above, the thrill and tremble of some great opera—hundreds and hundreds of fair women, darkly backed by the silhouettes of men, all with their eyes on one stage—perhaps watching one woman, Lucy of Lammermoor, pouring forth her desperate sorrows, or

listening to the Huguenots singing their midnight hymns to the praise of their God. Fervently Lila believed in them all. They were all true to her. As true and real, that is, as any other part of her life.

How could it be otherwise? She looked at her wrists, and under the mist of diaphanous laces she could see the blue and gold bangles glittering snake-headed, brought at great price from the Orient. She wore her new mother's rings on her fingers. When the artist-coiffeur spent a couple of hours on her long, rippling hair—pale Australian gold—she looked sometimes in the glass at the girl whom it shrouded, at the flowing lines of the kimono—willow-pattern with hanging sleeves—and wondered if this were indeed little Lila Kemp. Her 'mother'—not that first one with the hands hardened with household duties, but the woman of carriages and 'male domestics'—appeared never to tire of her company. Her husband was all day away at his business of money-spinning, and Lila was there to delight Mrs. Langley's eyes with a frail daintiness like that of some rare ornament which the connoisseur unwraps from its silver-paper with the utmost care, so fragile and precious it is.

There was one man who seemed to be that connoisseur. He was Mr. Assheton Baddow, a man of means and family, who frequented the Langley's, delighting to hand about tea-cups and bend over little Lila at garden parties.

Did little Lila's heart beat the quicker at his approach? I do not know. Certainly mine would not, out here on the moorlands. As Henry Gordon says, the air of the Dungeon is a wonderful solvent for conventions. But still, I have never been tried so high, and what emotions ran or hopes crystallised in little Lila's breast, I know not, and you will soon see why I never asked her to tell me.

The very month when Lila was beginning her second season, with a skin cleared to the rare paleness of alabaster, and a carnation mouth too red and full and gracious, from which all the sharp lines of poverty and hard condition had been ruled away, Mr. Langley died.

Lila was promptly sent home. The hireling 'mother,' the woman of the rings and the 'male domestics,' had other plans. Lila stepped back into a world as unreal as the one she had left. She put on again the alpaca and the linsey-woolsey, and resolutely, like a brave girl, shut all her brave doings and the witchery of Langleydom into the chest with her city dresses.

It was as well. In a year to a day Mrs. Langley was Mrs. Assheton Baddow, and using her money to further her husband's candidature for a seat in Parliament.

But all was not over. From those months of heated rooms and late hours little Lila had brought back something—a seed of disease. Gloriously happy and carefully nurtured she might have escaped, though a look at the spots of rose that hovered at times without apparent cause in the midst of the alabaster of her cheeks, told that the ill was by no means of yesterday.

But the worm of disappointment and rejection was burrowing deep, though Lila said nothing. Nan Gilfillan, one day when she came, charged as usual with good words and fruitful deeds to her kinswoman's home, stood aghast at Lila's appearance. She swept her off to the city—another city which is set on many hills, and is called Edinburgh, through which the winds blow almost too purely from the East and whirl across the Firth when the hills of Fife are blue and hard as Penrhyn slate.

No, decidedly, Edinburgh, after a month's trial, was not the place for little Lila. A masterful, encompassing, motherly love she had, that of Nan Gilfillan—as well as good thoughts and attentions from her husband Watty, the Clachanpluck boy, in his short intervals of business. But the light burnt too low in its delicate lamp of gold for that rude Northern place, in which (as the natives say) even summer 'sets in with more than its wonted severity.'

But Galloway is sweeter, warmer, better. The very winds and rains there lack the Baltic edge, the tang of Russian steppes, and are soft and kindly and flowing

like the speech of its natives.

So as soon as my father had the words out of his mouth, Mrs. Nan Gilfillan knew what to do. Her plans sprang like Minerva, wasn't it? (wait till I look out Lempriere!), full-armed for battle from the head of Jupiter.

'Lila Kemp!' she cried, and clapped her hands.

Then she explained. Lila was no invalid. She knew all about dressmaking. She was eager for work, but to send her into an ordinary establishment would be to send her to her grave. The moorlands was the place. And she told the girl's story.

My father objected. How could a girl, daintily nurtured and accustomed for so long to such luxuries, put up with the roughness of a Galloway farm? And so on, and so forth. But Mrs. Nan Gilfillan cut him short. She had two words for each that he could utter, in his softly resonant speech—not dialect, for, like most of his class, whenever moved, Henry Gordon used the best of English, only he wore his rue with a difference. Something more eminently gentle—like a child speaking a foreign tongue, perfectly yet somehow ashamed, I used to hear something almost sacred, too, in his finest moments, when my father took to his English—like the benediction after sacrament; I speak advisedly and with reverence.

Well, as you may think, Mrs. Gilfillan arranged it all, and in due time my father, with Charlie Hogg, Muckle Tamson, and a friendly neighbour herd, went to the Clattering Shaws to bring little Lila to us. She was the first girl companion I had ever known, and my heart went pit-a-pat as never for a lover's coming.

I can see them yet. Let those who have ever dwelt in a world bounded by the rocky 'taps' of the hills, with green peeps of grass where the sheep fed, with the brown and purple heather, the grey of granite, say what this first invasion of my solitude was to me.

There were things I could not tell my father—hidden yearnings such as girls whisper to each other in the night when the house is still and the candle out, or when they stroll -arm-linked, looking round every once in a while lest they should find themselves overheard.

Could I tell Lila all or any of these things? She had been in the great city. She knew 'the world!' Would she look down on us—on me? Oh, was I glad or was I sorry? As they came nearer, I became more excited. I could see them from far with my young sheep-searching eyes—one, two, three, four—yes, four men, and between them, led by the giant Muckle Tamson, a moor-pony. Something slight and small was set upon it, and a man, doubtless Henry Gordon of the Dungeon, supported the figure on one side.

I could see them winding slow among the moss-hags, then getting into the midst of the tracked links of the Cooran. Presently the four men drew together. It was a place impassable for any one on horseback. I knew what was happening. My father and Muckle Tamson would be making a chair of their hands, clasped hand upon wrist. Charlie Hogg and the herd, Will Gillespie, would have the luggage. The moor-pony, eased of responsibility and load, found a way for himself, grazing as he went.

So they came to the garden-yett, through the high heather and yellowing tangle of bent.

And how shall I tell what it was that they set down there at my feet? I cannot really. But in a moment my whole heart went out to little Lila—Lila Kemp, who had once been Miss Kemp-Langley and ridden in a carriage with two horses. Now she had four men.

But, you see, Lila smiled up at me, and the lift of her eyes, at once pitiful and patient, gentle and loving, did away with every fear. I loved Lila. I love her still. She turned and thanked the men, so gently, and shook hands with them each. They were not awkward, because the right hill-folk have the original Celtic good manners which come to them perhaps with their race, at least with the names of their hills and habitations.

And Lila stood smiling at us all, though in her cheeks (as sayeth the preacher) the almond tree flourished and already the grasshopper was a burden. Yes, she smiled at us all. And thanked us with a voice which showed that at least the daughters of music had not yet been brought low.

And Muckle Tamson stood looking at the hand she had taken in hers—a part of it, that is. He held it up to see if it were not different from the rest. Then he turned to his comrade, and uttered as his highest token of surprise and admiration the single word ‘Glory!’

This in Muckle Tamson's vocabulary had no direct religious intention. It only expressed the utmost limits of happy astonishment.

‘Noo for the sheep!’ he said. And whistling on his dogs he padded away up the front of the fell with his long, slow, steady hillman's stride.

‘Lila,’ I said when I had her up in my room, ‘am I to call you Lila?’

‘What else?’ she smiled, ‘and may I call you Rose?—Have you any other name?’

I shook my head.

‘Sometimes,’ I said, ‘they call me The Rose of the Wilderness.’ She clapped her hands happily and simply as a child.

‘Then I shall be the Lily!’ she cried— ‘yes, yes, the Lily and the Rose!’

It was a happy time—happy, that is, but for something that tugged at my heartstrings, or whatever is the thing that feels achey and will not let you alone inside.

Ah, well—no one suspected it, except myself alone. The breezes of the warmest summer and the longest autumn on record, the hills all one spread garnishing of rose and purple, league after sunny league of heath bells and heather, the hum of bees, the distant bleating of the many sheep, worked like magic on her spirits and on her body.

Lila was no longer the same Lila as when she came. She had forgotten London and Langleydom. She had forgotten the narrow things of a narrow home. Here there was plenty—such as it was—milk from the ewes, all the men in the neighbourhood ready to tramp the heather for her slightest wish to bring home anything that would make the colour come back to the cheek of our Lily of the Wilderness —or, more materially, tempt her appetite.

And she was happy. She laughed while she and I were dressing together in the mornings. She taught me to sing, for she had brought her banjo. And she knew old dreamy negro melodies so gladsome that they made you weep, and others so sad that they had perforce to finish with a laugh.

She taught my father also to dress-make. She taught him more than that too. The reader can guess what. I for one soon saw it. But I was not jealous — only there came into my heart a pain so exquisitely sad and sacred and—yes—sweet, that there is no name for it in any tongue or in any land, till we shall reach that one where God shall wipe away the tears from every eye.

But these our lessons, with Lila for a teacher, were not long. One autumn held them all. July was already bright and hot upon the purple mountains when she came to us. The very granite slabs of the precipices reflected the heather bells as if it had been sunset all day long. Yet it was only the first bitter day of November when a procession went across the moorland, and so down the long glen.

Our Lily of the Wilderness was in the midst. Four men bore her body. It was not heavy, but the black of the coffin made a sombre dash on the first snow of the winter.

I stood in the doorway and watched them go. For that in Scotland is an affair for men only. Only the collies Tweed and Tusker abode with me, obedient and whining, because of the sense of calamity in the air.

Four men bore her, and four relieved. My father, Henry Gordon, walked bareheaded behind. The goodwife of Bonegill and she of Craigencaillie had done what was necessary for Lila. But it was Henry Gordon himself who, with his new learning, had made the shroud as never shroud was made before. They were taking her to her own, and at the little railway station of New Galloway, the banker, Walter Gilfillan, was in waiting to convey Lila Kemp to her mother.

But I shall ever feel that her real funeral, from amidst those who loved her, was when I saw that little dark burden dwindle and vanish into the swirls of

bleak November snow, upheld by the shoulders of four strong men, my father, tall and a little stooping, in front, and Muckle Tamson tramping steadily alongside waiting his turn, his eyes far away and the snow in his beard.

Then darkness came. The storm swept up the glen. In all the Wilderness of the Dungeon there was no longer any Lily.

And she whom they called its Rose was lonely indeed.

The night of Lila's going away, my father came to kiss me. Usually he said, speaking his English gently, like one who has learned it by reading the Bible to himself, 'Good night, little daughter!' But instead this night he said, 'Good night, my only little daughter.' And he kissed me. Now in Scotland nobody (except certain foolish young people), kiss one another. And even they not much after they get married. So, as you may suppose, I was surprised, though Henry Gordon of the Dungeon had gentle ways with him too, quite different from other people. In Galloway the rule is the copybook one—'A Kiss for a Blow!' But the real interpretation is, that if you try to kiss anybody, she gives you a blow, and as hard a one, too, as possible.

It was a memorable winter that followed the summer of which I have written, the like of which for the beauty of its nights and days had never been seen in the uplands. But such a contrast is, however, no uncommon thing. Hill folk do not like their summers too good. They know that, as for all good things in this world, you have got to pay for them later.

After Lila's death my father was clearly discouraged, abode much in the house, reading books or appearing to read them. But he could not be persuaded to put his skill in dressmaking again to the proof.

'No,' he said, 'never—never again!'

And there was the far-away look in his eyes which told me of what he was thinking. He had

exhausted himself on the last dress that the little Lily of our Wilderness was to wear—the one she was wearing even now.

He took noticeably less interest in the farm. Muckle Tamson, our big, rough, silent giant, was on the hills all day. Then every evening he made his report, to which my father listened without great interest—how the ewes on such a hill were becoming ‘packed’ and ought to be ‘driven out a bit’ so as to find better provender—how those of another glen were working too low down and encroaching on the ‘home sections.’

To all this Henry Gordon nodded assent, but said little in reply. Nor did Muckle Tamson expect it of him. They were accustomed to work into each other's hands, like two dogs bringing home a flock, one acting fore-and the other rear-guard.

On a certain afternoon there came to the house of the Dungeon the queerest, the quaintest little midget ever seen—a boy, small in stature and tanned of skin, but when one looked at him closely, evidently older than his looks. He said that his name was just ‘Stoor’—which being interpreted means, ‘Windblown Dust.’

He had no other name that he knew of—so, at least, he affirmed. He had been with the gipsies. He had tramped it—‘hoofed it’ was his expression, all over the three kingdoms. But still there was something of bright vivacity and clever directness about his small sloe-black twinkling eyes that was irresistibly mirthful and free from care.

Of course, ‘Stoor’ was received at the Dungeon. So much was compulsory. It is the fashion of the hills. You cannot turn a fellow-creature out upon the heather, and risk having their stiff, frozen corpses to stumble over when you go to the well to draw the morning's water. This is the lowest point of view. Flinty-hearted men argued so. The worst of them admitted the wanderer. They fed and sheltered him, but not so sumptuously as to provoke a return.

Not of such was Henry Gordon. He did not, of course, admit ‘unkenned wastrels’ into his house, but next to the barn he had a vacant chamber floored

comfortably. And upon it good oat straw and plenty of corn sacks made none so ill a bed. The vagrant might share the family meals for four-and-twenty-hours, even for longer in case of need. Provisions were carried out to them, sometimes by me, but oftener by Muckle Tamson, whose slaves in a manner they were. The tray was passed over the 'half-door' of the old disused threshing-floor, which had become the 'wanderers' chammer,' and they were left to it, with the information that they could draw their own provision of water from the well. Sometimes they even washed up the dishes. But neither my father nor Muckle Tamson much approved of this. In fact, they counted it worse than nothing, and you should have seen both of them in the back-kitchen, almost scrubbing the enamel off the plates and dishes which had been so cleansed.

I recommended, as a solution of this difficulty, a set of crockery to be kept specially for tramps, which seemed to me sensible. But my father looked through me with his mild misty eyes, and said, 'Rose, they are human creatures just as we ourselves. And they shall be treated the same—as it was in my father's time, and his father's here on the Fell o' the Dungeon!'

'Then,' said I, a little pertly, I own, 'there is the best spare bed vacant for the next comer, and you can let him wash all our dishes!'

But he did not take up the provocation. He only answered very gently, 'Rose, you are young, but the day may come when it will be well for you that Henry Gordon so kindly entreated the poor ones of this earth.'

Whereat I was abashed, and only said, 'Father dear, whatever you do is right!'

But at this he threw out his hands with a sharp cry of denial.

'Oh no, Rose—not that—far from that!'

I am, however, forgetting 'Stoor.' The boy had a strange way of insinuating himself, which to people more sophisticated or richer than ourselves might have seemed suspicious. He actually took his first meal in the kitchen—eating on a plate by himself in the window-seat, for such was his pleasure. Then he fetched a 'double-rake' of water from the well, and

covered it up carefully so that it would not freeze in its place behind the door.

The dogs, jealous as only the dogs of a 'farm-town' in the wilds can be, never once barked at him, even at his first outgoing. 'Stoor,' though by birth a town laddie, had scoured the country so long that Tweed and Tusker knew him for one of themselves. He brought in sacks from the barn and slept cheek by jowl with Tusker and Tweed on the warm hearthstone.

He was out early in the morning with Muckle Tamson, away to the Back Hill o' the Buss, a place where all the ceiling of heaven seems to have fallen in, scattering far and wide the debris of other worlds.

I said this once to my father, and he nodded his head approving the invention. Yet he had his expert's opinion to oppose to my ill-regulated imaginings.

'But yet it's none such an ill place for sheep as ye might think,' he said. 'I have bidden Tamson gather as many o' the West Side sheep there as he can. Ye see the rocks are lying ower and ower yin anither, this way and that, as in the game ye fetched frae Dumfries—aye, spellikins, that is the silly name o'! And when the snaw comes, and the wind on the muirs is like a besom, it soops and soops and brushes and blows till the maist pairt o' the snaw is soopit into the bunkers, as into sae many scaffenger carts! But for the maist pairt the grund is bare. There is good feedin'—moreover, the sheep are not smooered under the snaw. It's on the bare hills like Corscrine, green and bonny to the e'e, that in the storm the yowes die by the score!'

And this I found afterwards to be a true word.

This winter we had need of all our Back Hills, of all our 'bunkers,' of all the ways of saving the sheep that were my father's only means of livelihood.

For on the 30th of November, a date long to be remembered through all the 'black-faced' country, the great snow-storm broke that wrecked the fortunes of many, and shook those of all who counted their poor wealth, not by the quotations of stocks and shares, but by the price of mutton.

On the afternoon of the storm my father stood at the window, the little window in the gable of the

kitchen, close by the great ingle with its swinging pot, and watched, carelessly enough, the first flecks begin to fall out of the slate-blue sky. They, too, seemed to drift along listlessly, small and fine at first, then gradually they increased in size till they seemed large as the palm of our little Lila's hand—and something of the same shape, too.

'Stoor' played with the collies, all three carefully keeping in the background and not permitting themselves any noise, lest they should find themselves kicked impromptu out of the comfortable kitchen to take refuge in barn or stable.

Only the giant Tamson, once of Ironmacanny, was visibly uneasy.

At last he spoke to my father, moving up till he stood shoulder to shoulder with him. For though my father was over six feet, he stooped, and Muckle Tamson overtopped him by good half-a-head.

'It's a baad nicht!' he said in Henry Gordon's ear.

My father assented with a sound that was almost a moan. I knew what he was thinking of—a little narrow grave, which had hardly yet had time to grow green. The snow would be falling thick on it, away there to the north.

Muckle Tamson tried again, leaning down and moistening his lips apologetically.

'The yowes!' he said, 'they should be lookit to! The Back Hill is fairly safe—me and That Craitur,' he pointed to 'Stoor,' now playing with the collies and pretending to let them eat his head in turns, 'we drave them ahint the 'bunkers.' But on the Dungeon itsel' and up by the Glints, likewise by the Head o' Dee, there's nae sayin' what may not happen by the mornin' licht!'

My father, angry with the falling snow, and thinking of the Lily of the Wilderness that had bidden with us so short a time, answered testily that he supposed after all that the sheep were his own, and that if it pleased him, they could e'en take their chance.

'Na!' The monosyllable burst from Muckle Tamson as a river bursts a dam, 'Na!'

'NA!' he repeated the third time in yet louder tones.

Henry Gordon turned from the window and looked at the man. I think his idea was that Muckle Tamson had suddenly gone crazy. Never had he been contradicted by any man in his own house before. I saw the warning pinch of his underlip, the drawing down of the upper, which I knew so well.

'What do you mean, Tamson?' he said, and through the liquid softness of his Galloway speech there struck, sudden and strident as the cry of the seamew, the accent of anger, 'what do you mean, sirrah? Are the sheep not mine?'

Still the giant towered mildly above him. His body quailed before Henry Gordon, his master. The instinct of obedience was strong within him. But the spirit that Henry Gordon himself had awakened, the heart of a man, spake.

'Hers!' he said, hoarsely, indicating me with a huge thumb, as I sat on the other side of the fireplace busy with my book and knitting, 'hers — no yours!'

And with a twitch like the first shock of an electric battery, the muscles of my father's face jerked.

The giant stood before him, afraid now of his own temerity. He was not a noble figure. Rather it seemed to me he grinned a little with a weak sort of apology.

'Ye ken yoursel', he added, wringing his hands, because his master did not reply, 'if onything was to happen to you, maister, yon yokes wad be a' her possession. And mine wad be the care o' them for your sake—and hers!'

The words of the Innocent had gone home. My father's face lit up. He held out his hand.

'Tamson,' he said, 'I shall not forget this—be sure of that!'

With an assured countenance he took down his plaid, belted it rapidly about him, the ends over his shoulders and the fringes caught in at the waist. Then he took his longest 'clickie,' the hooked crozier of the first bishop in the world, the shepherd of sheep. The giant was also ready, and as for the dogs they needed no preparations, unless cocked ears, eager eyes, and

frantically wagging tails might be so called. Ready they were, night or day, storm or shine. As an artist loves the skill of his art, the play of brush on canvas, so Tweed and Tusker loved the hillside and the sheep, the far-heard summons, the perilous leap arrested in mid-air, the ewe dragged back into safety, all the play and skill and genius which in dogs they call instinct. The care of sheep on wild hills was to them the finest game in the world—better than love, better than war, better than all!

Then my father's glance fell upon 'Stoor.'

'Let me come too,' cried the boy.

'Tut,' cried my father, 'a town's lad would only be in the road!'

'Wad he?' shouted Stoor, suddenly springing up and pointing his finger at Muckle Tamson, 'speak you!'

'The bairn's worth his salt,' said Tamson, 'he has a nose like a collie!'

And they went out into the raging storm, with only a nod to me, such being the custom of herdmen among the hills. Sheep work in these parts is wild work, and women have no part therein. Only when the mothers drop in a sickly spring, and there are too many lambs to 'graft' on deceived foster-mothers—then the woman of the sheep farm becomes a foster-mother in her turn. With an old coffee-pot hooded with soft linen well soaked in milk, she administers warm milk to twenty or thirty orphans, whose fathers deserted them at an early age, and whose mothers either died of a broken-heart—or in a more practical way, of water in the head, 'turning aval,' or one of those internal maladies that ewe-mothers are particularly heir to.

The evening grew to night. I kept a good hearth-fire, warm meats and drinks rested all night by the hob. But they came not. Sleep I could not, though perhaps I dozed, awaking with a start and the always deceived belief that I heard them knocking off the clods of snow from their boots on the doorstep.

But I was alone, and the storm swept in great gusts over the wilderness, each one like a huge dog hunting its predecessor, howling as it went.

I was at the door often, but could see nothing. The storm was close set, hugging the hills, driving like a white darkness before my eyes.

Then I fell on my knees and prayed. At times it is all that women are good for. Perhaps also there is nothing better to be good for. At any rate, that is what I did.

It was almost morning before any news came from the wild hills behind which two men and a boy wandered, storm-battered. And then through the deepening drifts of snow I ploughed my way to the outer 'yett' of the farm-steading and set it open. I do not know to this day why I did this, save that our house of the Dungeon stood with its back to the hill, and I could see a great drift gathering behind, which my father and the rest would need to turn before they could reach the courtyard and the open door.

Luckily also I bethought me of setting a light in the window of my room, the little gable chamber that had been mine and Lila's. Hardly had I done so when there came a gentle tapping at the window. I had been thinking of our Lily, lying far off under her first coverlet of winter white.

Could it be? No, impossible! I was not a girl to be subject to such fancies. And if she did come back, Lila would do me, who had loved her, no harm. But, of course, it was only a storm-forewandered bird attracted by the light, as I have read of them doing in lighthouses.

The tapping came again. Mastering my nerves I went and threw the wicket window open.

I saw a queer little face, the snow frozen and clinging about the shaggy tags of hair, wild eyes dark as sloes, and a mouth that cried words that were instantly swept away by the tempest without.

It was 'Stoor.'

I helped him in—indeed, I may say I dragged him in. He had seen the light and had come straight for it, climbing the snow-wreaths on his way. Standing on tiptoe his head just reached the window where the lamp had been placed.

'Your father and Muckle Tamson are 'back there,'

he said. 'They are 'nearly dune!'

And the dogs? They were with the sheep. Could I give him something to take to them?

'Laddie,' I said, 'you will never find the way!'

Stoor threw up his head with the action which dogs have of levelling the nose. 'Find them,' he said scornfully, 'what's half a mile at the maist. Lassie, I could find the dogs!'

Then he cast a curious look at me. 'It's no the like o' me that gets lost!'

He gathered a back-load hastily. I insisted upon coming, though 'Stoor' discouraged me by asserting that 'there wad juist be anither to bring hame.'

But being, after all, twice his age, and mistress of the house, I bore my point.

'Tak a guid grip of my coat, then,' he said, 'or ye will get blawn awa!' And indeed, once out of the shelter of the square of farm buildings, the breath was blown right out of me. I was dashed this way and that, but as I had been told—so I did. I clung to 'Stoor's' coat-tail, which luckily had first been made for a much bigger boy. I could not hear my own voice when I shouted. On the mountains the snow raged onward like sea-billows, and I thought we never would reach the two men.

But though the light was tardy, nevertheless a sort of greyness crept through the blackness of night. The tempest scudding over the fells became darker than the ground, instead of lighter, and after an abrupt turn and a plunge through a low archway, the entrance to a sheep-ree, we found my father.

He lay back and seemed very still. I had seen death once, and a great fear came into my heart. Muckle Tamson was stretched beside him, his coat off, and rubbing my father's hands. His coat of rugged frieze was wrapped about my father's feet.

We had a glass of fairly hot spirits first to give them both, then out of a tin pannikin some Scots broth. My father found himself the first.

'Tak him hame!' said Muckle Tamson, 'I'm gaun back to find the dowgs! They will be expectin' me!'

This 'Stoor' approved, and guided us back, helping my father like one long accustomed to the hills.

The lights were still burning, and the house bien and warm. But my father seemed like a man beaten down and oppressed.

'We are ruined, Rose,' he said, mournfully, when I had got him to bed, 'and to think that I, who have been a herd all my life and my father one before me, should not see what that lowland ploughman and that changeling laddie saw!'

But the 'changeling laddie' was gone. He, too, was off into the bitterness of the second day of the storm to find Muckle Tamson, and to retrieve the dogs.

There was a long period of waiting. My father was half unconscious, at times raving of Lila, or calling on her to get into some 'rock bunker out of the snow.' Then, 'Aye, that's the place!' he would say, gleefully, 'the Lily will be safe there!'

The other two came back about mid-day, when the fury of the storm had moderated a little—a 'canny blink,' was what Muckle Tamson called it. But he did not hide from me that the disaster, which was likely to strike all the hill farmers, would certainly be also our portion.

'The Glints are safe,' he would say, 'and 'Stoor' here an' me hae driven the bulk o' the lave behind the Jinglin' Stanes, where at least they hae a chance. But it's a big storm—aye, a great storm, and a sair!' As for Stoor, he said nothing, he was already asleep on the hearthstone between the dogs, his quaint little wizened apple face laid across Tusker's shaggy back. And that, too, was a marvel, for Tusker took no liberties from any stranger.

Up in his room my father kept murmuring his questions. 'Are ye sure her grave is bonny and green, Rose?' Or, maybe, 'Wasna she a bonny lass—I think I hear her singin' the nool!'

While down below Muckle Tamson made short excursions to estimate the extent of our disaster.

'If it freezes on the back o' this,' he would say, 'It will be by a mercy o' Providence if we save twenty score!'

And it was thus that ruin looked in upon the house of the Dungeon. Thus also that my father and I

were in a manner saved by two waifs and strays blown in upon us by the winds of destiny—that is, by Muckle Tamson, once of Ironmacanny, and the wandering gipsy lad who had no other name than the 'Stoor' that the wind swirls along the road on a dusty day.

They saved us while my father lay raving, and I had to attend him—for he would scarce let me out of his sight for a minute.

But how, it will need another sheet to tell.

On the hills the sheep had to take their chance, and a poor one it was. From Lammermuir (where the sheep is a sacred animal) to the Back Shore of Leswalt (where a score or so may tumble into the Irish Channel and never be missed) there went up one wail of moorland distress. A hundred miles by fifty was something like the surface dimensions of that wailing, but of its depth no man can plumb.

The smooth Moorfoots cried to Hundleshope, and Hundleshope passed the word to Minchmoor. Cheviot and Carter Fell on the south cried to Broad Law and Hart Fell on the north. But of all Galloway was the worst smitten. The storm had spent its fury there. The others, bad as was their case, had got off with only the tailings.

And of all in the Wilderness of the Free Province the Dungeon topped the list of 'casualties,' as these were duly reported in the published accounts of the storm.

However, by a special mercy, my father did not know the extent of his losses. He lay, weak and wandering on his bed, talking of this and that with the most sane voice and manner; only the matter was mere scraps of foolishness.

Moreover, spring rent day was coming on, and what should have gone to Wallet's or Lichtbody's mart lay rotting under the still frozen snow. The giant Muckle Tamson and his aid 'Stoor,' with the dogs, had indeed rescued many. Tusker proved himself a dog of parts at these proceedings. The least tiny funnel,

warmed and then melted by the breath of an imprisoned ewe, guided him. He would patter to and fro with waving tail, and then suddenly begin to dig with, as it seemed, all his four paws at once. The snow fled every way at once. Yet the matted spectres of animals that appeared, when found, were sometimes little the worse, and would begin to graze immediately. Often, however, so wide was the Wilderness, and so curious the ways of sheep, that a flock of them would collect in the only place where they must assuredly find Death—perhaps in a hollow shaped like the palm of one's hand, where they were immediately snowed over to the depth of thirty or forty feet, not to be found till the spring winds and rains had cleared the land, sometime in the early days of May.

The Galloway Raiders

If you are interested in finding out more about S.R.Crockett and Galloway as portrayed in his works you can join The Galloway Raiders for free. There is a website with a host of interesting and informative material and special offers on publications for members.

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Samuel Rutherford Crockett

Born in Balmaghie on September 24th 1859, Samuel Crockett was the illegitimate son of dairy maid Annie Crockett. He was brought up on the farm of Little Duchrae by his strict Cameronian maternal grandparents, and the family moved to Castle Douglas in 1867. He gained a Galloway bursary to Edinburgh University in 1876. His writing career began as a way to support himself through his studies. He had articles and short stories/sketches published in a wide range of contemporary magazines. He travelled abroad extensively and became a Free Church minister in 1886. He married Ruth Milner in 1887 and they had four children. His writing became successful following the publication in 1893 of 'The Stickit Minister' and he gave up the ministry to concentrate on his writing in 1895. His popular, episodic and serialised style of writing ensured him bestseller status in his day and despite prolonged ill health he published on average 2 novels a year throughout his long career. He died on April 16th 1914 in France.

The Galloway Collection

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