

SAMUEL CROCKETT

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S
WOOING AND OTHER
GALLOWAY STORIES

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and Other Galloway Stories**

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The Stickit Minister's Wooing and Other Galloway Stories

Eight years ago "The Stickit Minister" stood friendless without the door of letters. He knew no one within, and feared greatly lest no hand of welcome should be held out to him from those already within, so that, being encouraged, he too might pluck up heart of grace to enter.

Yet when the time came, the Stickit One found not one, but two right hands outstretched to greet him, which, after all, is as many as any man may grasp at once. One was reached out to me from far-away Samoa. The other belonged to a man whom, at that time, I knew only as one of the most thoughtful, sympathetic, and brilliant of London journalists, but who has since become my friend, and at whose instance, indeed, this Second Series of "The Stickit Minister" stories has been written. To these two men, the London man of letters and the Samoan exile, I owe the first and greatest of an author's literary debts – that of a first encouragement.

They were both men I had never seen; and neither was under any obligation to help me. Concerning the former, still strenuously and gallantly at work among us, I will in this place say nothing further. But, after having kept silence for eight years lest I should appear as one that vaunted himself, I may be permitted a word of that other who sleeps under the green tangle of Vaea Mountain.

Mr. Stevenson and I had been in occasional communication since about the year 1886, when, in a small volume of verse issued during the early part of that year, the fragment of a "Transcript from the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's," chanced to attract his attention. He wrote immediately, with that beautiful natural generosity of appreciation of his, to ask the author to finish his translation in verse, and to proceed to other dramatic passages, some of which, chiefly from Isaiah and Job, he specified. I remember that "When the morning stars sang together" was one of those indicated, and "O, thou afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted," another. "I have tried my hand at them myself," he added kindly; "but they were not so good as your Shulamite."

After this he made me more than once the channel of his practical charity to certain poor miner folk, whom disaster had rendered homeless and penniless on the outskirts of his beloved Glencorse.

A year or two afterwards, having in the intervals of other work written down certain countryside stories, which managed to struggle into print in rather obscure corners, I collected these into a volume, under the title of "The Stickit Minister and Some Common Men." Then after the volume was through the press, in a sudden gulp of venturesomeness I penned a dedication.

TO

Robert Louis Stevenson

OF SCOTLAND AND SAMOA,

I DEDICATE THESE STORIES OF THAT

GREY GALLOWAY LAND

WHERE

ABOUT THE GRAVES OF THE MARTYRS

THE WHAUPS ARE CRYING —

HIS HEART REMEMBERS HOW

Still much fearing and trembling, how needlessly I guessed not then, I packed up and despatched a copy to Samoa. Whereupon, after due interval, there came back to these shores a letter – the sense of which reached me deviously – not to myself but to his friend, Mr. Sidney Colvin. "If I could only be buried in the hills, under the heather, and a table tombstone like the martyrs; 'where the whaups and plovers are crying!' Did you see a man who wrote 'The Stickit Minister,' and dedicated it to me, in words that brought the tears to my eyes every time I looked at them? 'Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying – his heart remembers how.' Ah, by God, it does! Singular that I should fulfil the Scots destiny throughout, and live a voluntary exile and have my head filled with the blessed, beastly place all the time!"

To another friend he added some criticism of the book. "Some of the tales seem to me a trifle light, and one, at least, is too slender and fantastic – qualities that rarely mingle well." (How oft in the stilly night have I wondered which one he meant!) "But the whole book breathes admirably of the soil. 'The Stickit Minister,' 'The Heather Lintie,' are two that appeal to me particularly. They are drowned in Scotland. They have refreshed me like a visit home. 'Cleg Kelly' also is a delightful fellow. I have enjoyed his acquaintance particularly."

Curiously enough, it was not from Samoa, but from Honolulu, that I first received tidings that my little volume had not miscarried. It was quite characteristic of Mr. Stevenson not to answer at once: "I let my letters accumulate till I am leaving a place," he said to me more than once; "then I lock myself in with them, and my cries of penitence can be heard a mile!"

In a San Francisco paper there appeared a report of a speech he had made to some kindly Scots who entertained him in Honolulu, In it he spoke affectionately of "The Stickit Minister." I have, alas! lost the reference now, but at the time it took me by the throat. I could not get over the sheer kindness of the thing.

Then came a letter and a poem, both very precious to me:

"Thank you from my heart, and see with what dull pedantry I have been tempted to extend your beautiful phrase of prose into three indifferent stanzas:

"Blows the wind to-day, and the sun and the rain are flying;
Blows the wind on the moors to-day, and now,
Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying —
My heart remembers how!

Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places,
Standing Stones on the vacant, wine-red moor;
Hills of sheep, and the howes of the silent vanished races,
And winds austere and pure!

Be it granted me to behold you again in dying,
Hills of home! and to hear again the call —
Hear about the graves of the martyrs the pee-wees crying,
And hear no more at all."

To me, in the all too brief days that remained to him, he wrote letter after letter of criticism, encouragement, and praise (in which last, as was his wont, he let his kind heart run far ahead of his judgment). It goes to my heart now not to quote from these, for they are in some wise my poor patent of nobility. But, perhaps with more wisdom, I keep them by me, to hearten myself withal when the days of darkness grow too many and too dark.

So much for bush to this second draught of countryside vintage – the more easily forgiven that it tells of the generosity of a dead man whom I loved. But and if in any fields Elysian or grey twilight of shades, I chance to meet with Robert Louis Stevenson, I know that I shall find him in act to help over some ghostly stile, the halt, the maimed, and the faint of heart – even as in these late earthly years he did for me – and for many another.

S. R. CROCKETT.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING¹

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

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

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

"Come your ways in, Alec, man," his voice came from the inner room, as he heard me pause to exchange banter of a rural sort with the servant lasses in the kitchen; "I have been waitin' for ye. I kenned ye wad come the nicht!"

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

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

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

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

This he said, though he knew different.

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

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

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

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

¹ These stories have been edited chiefly from manuscripts supplied to me by my friend Mr. Alexander McQuhirr, M.D., of Cairn Edward in Galloway, of whose personal adventures I treated in the volume called "Lad's Love," I have let my friend tell his tale in his own way in almost every case.

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

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

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

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

I did as he asked me, and with the leaf in his hand he turned over the pages of his Bible carefully, like a minister looking for a text. He stopped at a yellowing envelope, as if uncertain whether to deposit the inscription in it. Then he lifted the stamped oblong and handed it to me with a kind of smile.

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

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

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

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

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

"Aye, Alec," he said, meditatively, with his eyes still on the red glow, "ye think that ye love the lass ye hae set your heart on; and doubtless ye do love her truly. But I pray God that there may never come a day when ye shall have spoken the last sundering word, and returned her the written sheets faithfully every one. Ye hae heard the story, Alec. I will not hurt your young heart by telling it again. But I spared Jessie Loudon all I could, and showed her that she must not mate her young life with one no better than dead!"

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

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

"Then after that I came back to an empty house – and this!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Henry, Henry, this is kind – kind of you – to come so far to see me on such a night!"

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

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

* * * * *

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

He entered, and at the first glimpse of him I stood astonished. His pale student's face had grown red and a trifle mottled. The lids of his blue eyes (the blue of his brother's) were injected. His mouth was loose and restless under a heavy moustache, and when he began to speak his voice came from him thick and throaty.

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

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

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

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

Then he leaned back and looked at the Stickit Minister.

"Well, Robert, how do you find yourself to-night? Better, eh?" he said, speaking in his professional voice.

His brother's face flushed again with the same swift pleasure, very pitiful to see.

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

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

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

So I went out with my heart heavy within me for my friend, and though Bell Gregory, the bonniest of the farm lasses, ostentatiously drew her skirts aside and left a vacant place beside her in

the ingle-nook, I shook my head and kept on my way to the door with rib more than a smile and "Anither nicht, Bell."

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

But even Nance Chrystie was not in my thoughts that night. I stepped out, passing in front of the straw-thatched bee-hives which, with the indrawing days, had lost their sour-sweet summer smell, and so on into the loaning. From the foot of the little brae I looked back at the lights burning so warmly and steadily from the low windows of the Dullarg, and my mind went over all my father had told me of what the Stickit Minister had done for his brother: how he had broken off his own college career that Henry might go through his medical classes with ease and credit; and how, in spite of his brother's rank ingratitude, he had bonded his little property in order to buy him old Dr. Aitkin's practice in Cairn Edward.

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

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

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

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

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

She gave a little shivering moan.

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

And I ran.

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

"They are only some cotter people," he said, "they must just wait till I am on my way back from the village. I will look in then. Robert, it is a cold night, let me have some whisky before I get into that ice-box of a gig again."

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

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

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

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

But the Doctor interrupted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Stickit Minister sank back into his chair.

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

I looked down at him in surprise.

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

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

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

I sat down on the hearthrug beside him – a habit I had when we were alone together. It was thus that I used to read Homer and Horace to him in the long winter forenights, and wrangle for happy hours over a construction or the turning of a phrase in the translation. So now I simply sat and was silent, touching his knee lightly with my shoulder. I knew that in time he would tell me all he wished me to hear. The old eight-day clock in the corner (with "*John Grey, Kilmaurs, 1791*" in italics across the brass face of it), ticked on interminably through ten minutes, and I heard the feet of the men come in from suppering the horse, before Robert said another word. Then he spoke: "Alec," he said, very quietly – he could hardly say or do anything otherwise (or rather I thought so before that night). "I have this on my spirit – it is heavy like a load. When I broke it to Jessie Loudon that I could never marry her, as I told you, I did not tell you that she took it hard and high, speaking bitter words that are best forgotten. And then in a week or two she married Gib Barbour, a good-for-nothing, good-looking young ploughman, a great don at parish dances – no meet mate for her. And that I count the heaviest part of my punishment.

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

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

"And that," said Robert Fraser, "was the reason why Jessie Loudon would not come up to the Dullarg this nicht – no, not even for her bairns' sake!"

THE STICKIT MINISTER WINS THROUGH

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

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

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

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

Then with a shaking voice I read the mighty words before me: "When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy" ... But when I came to the verse which says: "Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? Or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?" I saw the Stickit Minister nod his head three times very slightly, and a strange subtle smile came over his face as though he could have answered: "Yea, Lord, verily I have seen them – they have been opened to me!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Do I understand you to say," he began, in a voice clear, resonant, and full, not at all the voice of a stricken man, "that my brother has not yet visited your children?"

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

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

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

She hesitated a moment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I have no pony now," he said gently and a little sadly, "I have no need of one. And besides, the quickest way is across the fields."

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

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

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

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

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

From that point the Stickit Minister went faster than ever. Indeed, he rushed forward, in spite of my restraining arm, with some remaining flicker of the vigour which in youth had made him first on the hillside at the fox-hunt and first on the haystacks upon the great day of the inbringing of the winter's fodder.

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

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

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

Suddenly in the midst of their jovial chorus some one said "*Hush!*" – some one of themselves – and instinctively all turned towards the door.

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I will come, Robert – I was coming in a moment anyway!"

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

But no mortal knows what Robert Fraser said to his brother during that drive – something mightily sobering at all events. For when the two reached the small cluster of cothouses lying under the lee of Earmark wood, the young man, though not trusting himself to articulate speech, and somewhat over-tremulous of hand, was yet in other respects completely master of himself. I was not present at the arrival, just as I had not seen the startling apparition which broke up the "Cronies'" club. The doctor's gig held only two, and as soon as I handed Robert Fraser the reins, the beast sprang forward. But I was limber and a good runner in those days, and though the gray did his best I was not far behind.

There is no ceremony at such a house in time of sickness. The door stood open to the wall. A bright light streamed through and revealed the inequalities of the little apron of causewayed cobblestones. I entered and saw Henry Fraser bending over a bed on which a bairn was lying. Robert held a candle at his elbow. The mother paced restlessly to and fro with another child in her arms. I

could see the doctor touch again and again the back of the little girl's throat with a brush which he continually replenished from a phial in his left hand.

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

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

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

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

And even as he stood there the Stickit Minister swayed sidelong, but the next moment he had recovered himself with a hand on the bed-post. Then very swiftly he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and set it to his lips.

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

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

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

"My brother is dead!" he said.

But Jessie Loudon did not utter a word.

GIBBY THE EEL, STUDENT IN DIVINITY

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

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

To how many medical students would you willingly entrust the application of one square inch of sticking-plaster to a cut finger, or the care of a half-guinea umbrella? What surgeon would you not, in an emergency, trust with all you hold dear? You may cherish preferences and even prejudices, but as a whole the repute of the profession is above cavil.

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

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

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

Now there ought to be room, in a gallery which contains so many portraits of ministers, for one or two Students of Divinity, faithfully portrayed.²

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

At college we all loved Gilbert. He was a merry-hearted youth, and his mere bodily presence was enough to make glad the countenances of his friends. His father was a minister in the West with a large family to bring up, which he effected with success upon a stipend of surprising tenuity. So it behoved Gilbert to keep himself at college by means of scholarships and private tuition. His pupils had a lively time of it.

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

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

Part of Gilbert's personal equipment was the certain lithe slimness of figure which gained him the title of "Gibby the Eel," and enabled him to practise many amusing pranks in the class-room. He would have made an exceptionally fine burglar, for few holes were too small and no window too

² These studies I wrote down during certain winters, when, to please my mother, I made a futile attempt to prepare myself "to wag my head in a pulpit." Saving a certain prolixity of statement (which the ill-affected call long-windedness), they were all I carried away with me when I resolved to devote myself to the medical profession. – A. McQ.

secure for Gilbert to make his exits and entrances by. Without going so far as to say that he could wriggle himself through an ordinary keyhole, I will affirm that if anybody ever could, that person was Gilbert Denholm.

One of the most ordinary of his habits was that of wandering here and there throughout the classroom during the hour of lecture, presuming upon the professor's purblindness or lack of attention. You would be sitting calmly writing a letter, drawing caricatures in your note-book, or otherwise improving your mind with the most laudable imitation of attention, when suddenly, out of the black and dusty depths about your feet would arise the startling apparition of Gibby the Eel. He would nod, casually inquire how you found yourself this morning, and inform you that he only dropped in on his way up to Bench Seventeen to see Balhaldie, who owed him a shilling.

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

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

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

No one who ever studied under Dr. Simeon Galbraith will forget that gentle droning voice overhead, that full-orbed moon-like countenance, over which two smaller moons of beamy spectacle seemed to be in perpetual transit, and in especial he will remember that blessed word "*Hermeneutics*," of which (it is said) there was once one student who could remember the meaning. He died young, much respected by all who knew him. Dreamily the great word came to you, soothing and grateful as mother's lullaby, recurrent as the wash of a quiet sea upon a beach of softest sand. "*Gentlemen, I will now proceed to call your attention ... to the study of Hermeneutics ... Hermeneut ... Gegenbauer has affirmed ... but in my opeenion, gentlemen ... Hermeneutics...!*" (Here you passed from the subconscious state into Nirvana.)

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

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

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

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

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

"Ah! Mr. Denholm, will you read for us this morning – beginning at the 29th verse – of the chapter under consideration?"

And he subsided expectantly into his lecture.

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

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

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

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

"Mr. Denholm, you construed *vairy* well last time. Be good enough to continue at the place you left off. Mr. Denholm – where is Mister – Mister Den – holm?"

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

"Mister – Mist – er Denholm?"

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

"I am here, sir!"

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

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

"Mister – Den – holm, will you go on where you left off?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

And Gilbert sat down to resume the discussion of the dress clothes. By this time, of course, he considered himself quite safe from further molestation. The Professor had never been known to call up a man thrice in one day. So, finding Nick McFeat obdurate in the matter of the dress suit, Gilbert announced his intention of visiting Kenneth Kennedy, who, he said pointedly, was not a selfish and unclean animal of the kind abhorred by Jews, but, contrariwise, a gentleman – one who would

lend dress clothes for the asking. And Kennedy's were better clothes, any way, and had silk linings. Furthermore, Nick need not think it, he (Mr. Gilbert Denholm) would not demean himself to put on his (Mr. McFeat's) dirty "blacks," which had been feloniously filched from a last year's scarecrow that had been left out all the winter. And furthermore, he (the said Gilbert) would take Madge Robertson to the theatre in spite of him, and what was more, cut Nick McFeat out as clean as a leek.

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

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

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

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

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

"That's all very well, Eel," he said, raising himself reluctantly to the perpendicular; "but you know as well as I do that the last time I lent it to you, you let some wax drop on the waistcoat, right on the pocket, and I have never been able to get it out since – "

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

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

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

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

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

No better proof can be adduced that the Eel had become temporarily deranged, than the fact that even now, when it was obvious that the long latent suspicions of the Gentle Hermeneut were at last aroused, he refused to abide in his breaches; but, scorning all entreaty, and even Kennedy's unconditioned promise of the dress suit, he proceeded to crawl down the gallery steps, in order to regain position Number One, in the front seat under the Professor's very nose.

Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.

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

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

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

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

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

What happened after this is a kind of maze. I suppose that Gibby regained a seat somewhere, and that the lecture proceeded after a fashion; but I do not know for certain. Bursts of unholy mirth forced their way through the best linen handkerchiefs, rolled hard and used as gags.

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

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

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

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

And then we heard the words of the Angelical Scholiast.

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

DOCTOR GIRNIGO'S ASSISTANT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dr. Girnigo was in the habit of saying, whenever he had made it too hot for his acting assistant, that he would rather look after three parishes than one probationer. At first the engaging and dismissal of these unfortunate young men had been placed unreservedly in the Doctor's hands; but as the affair assumed more and more the appearance and proportions of a mere procession to and from the railway station, the members of Session were compelled to assume the responsibility themselves. So long as the Doctor's sway continued unchallenged, the new assistant usually arrived in Nether Balhaldie's "machine" on Saturday night, and departed on Tuesday morning very early in the gig belonging to Upper Balhaldie. He preached on Sabbath, and Monday was spent in Dr. Girnigo's study, where it was explained to him: first, that he knew nothing; secondly, that what he thought he knew was worse than nothing; thirdly, that there is nothing more hateful than a vain pretence of earthly learning; and fourthly, that Paul and Silas knew nothing of "Creeticism." No, they were better employed – aye, and it would be telling the young men of the day – the conclusion of the whole matter being that the present victim would never do at all for the parish of Rescobie and had better go.

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

But it was felt that this was a state of affairs which could not continue. It amounted, indeed, to nothing less than a scandal that the Session should be paying £60 for an assistant, and that at the

end of the year eight of these should only have spent exactly twenty-seven days in the parish, while the remaining three hundred and thirty-eight days had been occupied by the Doctor in filling the vacancies he had himself created. Besides, since he always insisted on a week's trial without salary when he engaged his man (in order, as he said, to discover where there was a likelihood of the parties being mutually satisfied), the shrewd business men of the Session saw more than a probability of their good and hardly gathered sixty "notes" still remaining intact in the possession of their minister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So Dr. Girnigo had to try other tactics. Usually he gave the unfortunate "helper" delivered into his hands no peace night nor day, till in despair he threw up his appointment, and shook the Rescobie dust off the soles of his feet.

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

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

On the second Wednesday after his appointment he departed, uttering sentiments which were a perfect guarantee of good faith (but which were manifestly not for publication) to Watty Learmont as he journeyed to the railway station in the Upper Balhaldie gig.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You are the new assistant," she said, "Mister – ah – !"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gilbert entered, and as they passed in front of the minister's study door Miss Girnigo almost skittishly made a sign for silence, and Gilbert tip-toed past with an exaggeration of caution which made his companion laugh. They found themselves presently in the drawing-room, where again the flower-pots were everywhere, but specially banked round the oriel window. Gilbert named them one after the other like children at a baptism, with a sort of easy certainty and familiarity. His friend the nurseryman's clerk had not failed him. Miss Girnigo was delighted.

"Well," she said, "it *is* pleasant to have some one who knows *Ceterach Officinarum* from a kail-stock. We shall go botanising together!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"*A-tish – shoo!*" remarked the lady, as if he had touched a spring.

"*A-tish – shoo-oo-oo!*" replied Gilbert.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"All right," he said; "better presently – only c-curing Miss – Miss Girni —*goo-ahoo* – *arish-chee-hoo*– of a cold!"

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

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

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

By this time Miss Girnigo had somewhat recovered.

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

"Of Pittenweem," muttered Gilbert between his teeth.

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

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

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nevertheless, Dr. Girnigo considered that Gibby had surpassed himself in his application. He showed how any good that he might do in the parish must not be set down to his credit, but to that of Another who had so long laboured among them; and how that he (the preacher), being but "as one entering upon another man's line of things," it behoved him above all things not to be boastful.

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

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

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

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

But it was to Jemima Girnigo that he owed this.

THE GATE OF THE UPPER GARDEN

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

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

Jemima Girnigo had never been truly young. Repressed and domineered over as a child, she had been suddenly promoted by her mother's death to the care of a household and the responsibility of training a bevy of younger brothers, all now out in the world and doing for themselves. Her life had grown more and more arid and self-contained. She had nourished her soul on secret penances, setting herself hard household tasks, and doing with only one small, untaught, slatternly maid from the village, in order that her father might be able to assist his sons into careers. She read dry theology to mortify a liking for novels, and shut up her soul from intercourse with her equals, conscious, perhaps, that visitors would infallibly discover and laugh at her father's meannesses and peculiarities.

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

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

But Gilbert Denholm, kindly lad though he was, saw no harm. He was only, he thought, impressing himself upon the parish. He saw himself daily becoming more popular. No farmer's party was considered to be anything which wanted his ready wit and contagious merriment. Already there was talk among the Session of securing him as permanent assistant and successor. There were fairways and clear sunlit vistas before Gilbert Denholm; and he liked his professional prospects all the better that he owed them to his own wit and knowledge of the world. He was a good preacher. He made what is called an excellent appearance in the pulpit. He did not "read." His fluency of utterance held sleepy ploughmen in a state of blinking attention for the better part of an hour. Even Dr. Girnigo commended, and Gibby who had no more abundant or direct "spiritual gifts" than are the portion of most kind-hearted, well-brought-up Scottish youths, was unconscious of his lack of any higher qualifications for the Christian ministry.

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

Even Jemima Girnigo was a far better servant of God than the man who had spent seven years in preparation for that service. In the shut deeps of her heart there were locked up infinite treasures

of self-sacrifice. Love was pitifully ready to look forth from those pale eyes at whose corners the crow's feet were already clutching. And so it came to pass that, knowing her folly (and yet, in a way, defying it), this old maid of forty-one loved the handsome youth of four-and-twenty, the only human love-compelling thing that had ever come into her sombre life.

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

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

* * * * *

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

The new immigrants were mostly a sedate and sober folk, as indeed, nearly all paper-makers are. To the easy-going villagers their diligence seemed phenomenal. They were flocking into the mill gates by six in the morning. It was well nigh six in the evening before the tide flowed back toward the village. Among the youths and men there was night-shift and day-shift, and a new and strange pallor began to pervade the street and show itself, carefully washed, in the gallery of Rescobie Kirk. The village girls, finding that they could make themselves early independent, took their places in the long "finishing saal," while elderly women, for whom there had been no outlook except the poorhouse, found easy work and a living wage in Coxon's rag-house.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Doctor sighed a long sigh. He knew that at last his trial was come upon him, and nerved himself to meet it like a man.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, yes," said Jemima Girnigo, holding out her hand, "I am very glad. No one is as glad as I – I want you to believe that!"

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

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

It was whispered, on what authority did not appear, that the disease was of the malignant "black" variety, and that all smitten must surely die. Fear ran swift and chilly up each outside staircase and entered unbidden every "land" in Rescobie. It was the first time such a terror had been in the village, and those who had opposed the settlement of the mills, staid praisers of ancient quiet, lifted their hands with something of jubilation mixed with their fear. "Verily, the judgment of God has fallen," they said, "even as in a night it fell on Babylon – as in fire and brimstone it came upon the Cities of the Plain."

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

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

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

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

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

As soon as he had snatched a hasty breakfast and thrown on his coat, he hurried up to the house of Dr. Durie. A plain blunt man was John Durie – slim, pale, with keen dark eyes, and a pointed

black beard slightly touched with gray. The doctor was not at home. He had not been in all night and the maid did not know where he was to be found.

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

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

Gibby inquired if the doctor had been there recently.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gilbert found the doctor in the great "saal" at the mills. He had his coat off and was scraping at bared arms for dear life. At each door stood a pair of stalwart sentinels, and several hundred mill workers were grouped about talking in low-voiced clusters. Only here and there one more diligent than the rest, or with quieter nerves, deftly passed sheets of white paper from hand to hand as if performing a conjuring trick.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * * * *

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

"Where am I?" said Gibby, as the nurse came toward the bed. "I have not seen Betty McGrath this morning, and I promised Father Phil that I would."

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

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

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

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

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

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

"Shall I be much disfigured?"

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

"You have saved my life, doctor."

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

"Not I – you owe that to some one else."

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

"No, she has just been here a few clays, after all danger had passed."

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

The doctor restrained him with a strong and gentle hand.

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

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

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

"And this woman – who saved my life – what was – her name?"

Gibby's voice was very hoarse.

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

"Where is she – I want to see her – I want to thank her?" cried Gibby. He was actually upon his elbow now.

Dr. Dune forced him gently back upon the pillows.

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

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

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

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

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

"Dead," muttered Gibby, "and I cannot even tell her – make it up to her – "

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

"What was it?" cried Gibby, eagerly.

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

"What – what – oh, what? Tell me quickly. I cannot wait."

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

* * * * *

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

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

THE TROUBLER OF ISRAEL

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

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

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

But one – they had but one – Dr. Marcus Lawton of Lady Nixon's Wynd. He was their joy, their pride, their poetry; the kitchen to their sour controversial bread, the mellow glory of their denomination. (Again you must broaden the *a* indefinitely.) He had once been a professor, but by the noblest of self-denying ordinances he had extruded himself from his post for conscience sake.

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

At least to the average mind his employment could hardly be called "secular," being nothing more than the Secretaryship of the Association for the Propagation of Gospel Literature; but to the true covenant man this sonorous society was composed of mere Erastians, or what was little better, ex-Erastians and common Voluntaries. They all dated from 1689, and the mark of the beast was on their forehead – that is to say, the seal of the third William, the Dutchman, the revolutionary Gallio. Yet their Doctor, with his silver hair, his faithful tongue, his reverence, wisdom, and weight of indubitable learning, had to sit silent in the company of such men, to take his orders from them, and even to record their profane inanities in black and white. The Doctor's office was at the corner of Victoria Street as you turn down towards the Grassmarket. And when any of his flock met him coming or going thither, they turned away their heads – that is, if he had passed the entrance to Lady Nixon's Wynd when they met him. So far it was understood that he *might* be going to write his sermon in the quiet of the vestry. After that, there was no escape from the damning conclusion that he was on his way to the shrine of Baal – and other Erastian divinities. So upon George Fourth Bridge the Covenant folk turned away their heads and did not see their minister.

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

town of Edinburgh, since a certain little fair man called Rutherford preached there on his way to his place of exile in Aberdeen.

So my father has often told me, and you may be sure he was there more than once, having made it a duty to do his business with my lord's factor at a time when his soul also might have dealings with the most approved factors of Another Lord.

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

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

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

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

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

Gullibrand was not an Edinburgh man. He came, they say, from Leicester or some Midland English town, and brought a great reputation with him. He had been Mayor of his own city, a philanthropist almost by profession, and the light and law-giver of his own particular sect always. I have often wondered what brought him to Lady Nixon's Wynd. Perhaps he was attracted by the smallness of our numbers, and by the thought that, in default of any congregation of his own peculiar sect in the northern metropolis, he could "boss" the Kirk of the Covenants as he had of a long season "bossed" the Company of Apocalyptic Believers.

It was said, with I know not what truth, that the first time Mr. Gullibrand came to the Kirk of the Covenants, the Doctor was lecturing in his ordinary way upon Daniel's Beast with Ten Horns. And, if that be so, our angelical Doctor had reason to rue to the end of his life that the discourse had been so faithful and soul-searching. Though Gullibrand thought his interpretation of the ninth

horn very deficient, and told him so. But he was so far satisfied that he intimated his intention of "sending in his lines" next week.

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

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

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

And to this she added a thoughtful rider.

"And after a', what does a bursen Englishy craitur like yon ken about the Kirk o' the Co-avenants?"

And as good Mistress Walker prophesied as she took her douce way homeward with her husband (honorary treasurer and unpaid precentor) down the Middle Meadow Walk, even so in the fulness of time it fell out.

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

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

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

He had for some time been a leading Director of the Association for the Propagation of Gospel Literature; and so in both capacities he was the Doctor's master. Then, having gathered to him a party, recruited chiefly from the busybodies in other men's matters and other women's characters, Jacob Gullibrand turned him about, and set himself to drive the minister and folk of the Kirk of the Covenant as he had been wont to drive his clerks and shop-assistants.

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

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

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

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

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

But the quotation was thrown away upon Jacob Gullibrand.

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * * * *

And he kept his word. He did see about it. In Lady Nixon's Wynd there was division. On the one side were ranged the heads of families generally, the folk staid and set in the old ways – "gospel-hardened" the Gullibrandites called them. With the Doctor were the old standards of the Kirk, getting a little dried, maybe, with standing so long in their post-holes, but, so far as in them lay, faithful unto death.

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

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

"If he was unworthy to enter the pulpits of Laodicean ministers, men neither cold nor hot, whom every earnest evangelist should" (here he continued the quotation and illustrated it with an appropriate gesture) "he at least thanked God that he was no Doctor of Divinity. Nor yet of those who would permit themselves to be dictated to by self-appointed and self-styled ministers."

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

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

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

"Jacob Gullibrand, elder."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Doctor sighed and bent his head lower upon the paper. "Ebenezer Redpath, James Bannatyne, Samuel Gardiner" – he passed the names rapidly, till he came to one – "Isobel Swan."

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

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

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

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

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

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

And the Doctor folded up the blue crackling paper and placed it carefully between the "leds" of the great pulpit Bible.

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

those on the left-hand side, you could see the top of the Martyrs' monument in the kirkyard of Old Greyfriars.

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

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

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

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

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

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

There ensued a silence, deep, still – yet somehow also throbbing, expectant. Isobel Swan did not sob again. She had hidden her face.

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

"No – no – no!"

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

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

He sat down as abruptly as he had risen.

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

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

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

Henry Walker took it and stood up.

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

As one man the whole congregation stood up.

All, that is, save Jacob Gullibrand. He sat a moment, and then amid a silence which could be felt, he rose and staggered out like a man suddenly smitten with sore sickness. He never set foot in Nixon's Wynd again.

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

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

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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