GEORGE MACDONALD

ALEC FORBES OF HOWGLEN

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MacDonald G.

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Содержание

CHAPTER I 5
CHAPTER II 7
CHAPTER III 9
CHAPTER IV 11
CHAPTER V 13
CHAPTER VI 15
CHAPTER VII 17
CHAPTER VIII 20
CHAPTER IX 24
CHAPTER X 28
CHAPTER XI 31
CHAPTER XII 35
CHAPTER XIII 39
CHAPTER XIV 42
CHAPTER XV 48
CHAPTER XVI 50
CHAPTER XVII 55
CHAPTER XVIII 58
CHAPTER XIX 61
CHAPTER XX 63
CHAPTER XXI 67
CHAPTER XVIII. [sic, should be XXII.] 74
CHAPTER XXIII 78
CHAPTER XXIV 81
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 83

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CHAPTER I

The farm-yard was full of the light of a summer noontide. Nothing can be so desolately dreary as full strong sunlight can be. Not a living creature was to be seen in all the square inclosure, though cow-houses and stables formed the greater part of it, and one end was occupied by a dwelling-house. Away through the gate at the other end, far off in fenced fields, might be seen the dark forms of cattle; and on a road, at no great distance, a cart crawled along, drawn by one sleepy horse. An occasional weary low came from some imprisoned cow—or animal of the cow-kind; but not even a cat crossed the yard. The door of the barn was open, showing a polished floor, as empty, bright, and clean as that of a ball-room. And through the opposite door shone the last year's ricks of corn, golden in the sun.

Now, although a farm-yard is not, either in Scotland or elsewhere, the liveliest of places in ordinary, and still less about noon in summer, yet there was a peculiar cause rendering this one, at this moment, exceptionally deserted and dreary. But there were, notwithstanding, a great many more people about the place than was usual, only they were all gathered together in the ben-end, or best room of the house—a room of tolerable size, with a clean boarded floor, a mahogany table, black with age, and chairs of like material, whose wooden seats, and high, straight backs, were more suggestive of state than repose. Every one of these chairs was occupied by a silent man, whose gaze was either fixed on the floor, or lost in the voids of space. Each wore a black coat, and most of them were in black throughout. Their hard, thick, brown hands—hands evidently unused to idleness—grasped their knees, or, folded in each other, rested upon them. Some bottles and glasses, with a plate of biscuits, on a table in a corner, seemed to indicate that the meeting was not entirely for business purposes; and yet there were no signs of any sort of enjoyment. Nor was there a woman to be seen in the company.

Suddenly, at the open door, appeared a man whose shirt-sleeves showed very white against his other clothing which, like that of the rest, was of decent black. He addressed the assembly thus:

"Gin ony o' ye want to see the corp, noo's yer time."

To this offer no one responded; and, with a slight air of discomfiture, for he was a busy man, and liked bustle, the carpenter turned on his heel, and re-ascended the narrow stairs to the upper room, where the corpse lay, waiting for its final dismission and courted oblivion.

"I reckon they've a' seen him afore," he remarked, as he rejoined his companion. "Puir fallow! He's unco (uncouthly) worn. There'll no be muckle o' *him* to rise again."

"George, man, dinna jeest i' the face o' a corp," returned the other.

"Ye kenna whan yer ain turn may come."

"It's no disrespeck to the deid, Thamas. That ye ken weel eneuch. I was only pityin' the worn face o' him, leukin up there atween the buirds, as gin he had gotten what he wanted sae lang, and was thankin' heaven for that same. I jist dinna like to pit the lid ower him."

"Hoot! hoot! Lat the Lord luik efter his ain. The lid o' the coffin disna hide frae his een."

The last speaker was a stout, broad-shouldered man, a stonemason by trade, powerful, and somewhat asthmatic. He was regarded in the neighbourhood as a very religious man, but was more respected than liked, because his forte was rebuke. It was from deference to him that the carpenter had assumed a mental position generating a poetic mood and utterance quite unusual with him, for he was a jolly, careless kind of fellow, well-meaning and good-hearted.

So together they lifted the last covering of the dead, laid it over him, and fastened it down. And there was darkness about the dead; but he knew it not, because he was full of light. For this man was one who, all his life, had striven to be better.

Meantime, the clergyman having arrived, the usual religious ceremonial of a Scotch funeral —the reading of the Word and prayer—was going on below. This was all that gave the burial any sacred solemnity; for at the grave the Scotch terror of Popery forbids any observance of a religious character. The voice of the reader was heard in the chamber of death.

"The minister's come, Thamas."

"Come or gang," said Thomas, "it's muckle the same. The word itsel' oot o' his mou' fa's as deid as chaff upo' clay. Honest Jeames there'll rise ance mair; but never a word that man says, wi' the croon o' 's heid i' the how o' 's neck, 'll rise to beir witness o' his ministrations."

"Hoot, Thamas! It's no for the likes o' me to flee i' your face—but jist say a fair word for the livin' ower the deid, ye ken."

"Na, na. It's fair words maks foul wark; and the wrath o' the Almichty maun purge this toon or a' be dune. There's a heap o' graceless gaeins on in't; and that puir feckless body, the minister, never gies a pu' at the bridle o' salvation, to haud them aff o' the scaur (cliff) o' hell."

The stone-mason generally spoke of the Almighty as if he were in a state of restrained indignation at the wrongs he endured from his children. If Thomas was right in this, then certainly he himself was one of his offspring. If he was wrong, then there was much well worth his unlearning.

The prayer was soon over, and the company again seated themselves, waiting till the coffin should be placed in the hearse, which now stood at the door.

"We'll jist draw the cork o' anither boatle," whispered a sharp-faced man to his neighbour.

And rising, he opened two bottles, and filled the glasses the second time with wine, red and white, which he handed to the minister first.

"Tak' a drappy mair, sir," he whispered in a coaxing, old-wivish tone; "it's a lang road to the kirkyard."

But the minister declining, most of the others followed his example. One after another they withdrew to the door, where the hearse was now laden with the harvest of the grave.

Falling in behind the body, they moved in an irregular procession from the yard. Outside, they were joined by several more in gigs and on horseback; and thus they crept, a curious train, away towards the resting-place of the dead.

It were a dreary rest, indeed, if that were their resting-place—on the side of a low hill, without tree or shrub to beautify it, or even the presence of an old church to seem to sanctify the spot. There was some long grass in it, though, clambering up as if it sought to bury the gravestones in their turn. And that long grass was a blessing. Better still, there was a sky overhead, in which men cannot set up any gravestones. But if any graveyard be the type of the rest expected by those left behind, it is no wonder they shrink from joining those that are away.

CHAPTER II

When the last man had disappeared, the women, like those of an eastern harem, began to come out. The first that entered the deserted room was a hard-featured, reproachful-looking woman, the sister of the departed. She instantly began to put the place in order, as if she expected her turn to come on the morrow. In a few moments more a servant appeared, and began to assist her. The girl had been crying, and the tears would still come, in spite of her efforts to repress them. In the vain attempt to dry her eyes with the corner of her apron, she nearly dropped one of the chairs, which she was simultaneously dusting and restoring to its usual place. Her mistress turned upon her with a kind of cold fierceness.

"Is that hoo ye shaw yer regaird to the deid, by brackin' the cheirs he left ahin' him? Lat sit, an' gang an' luik for that puir, doited thing, Annie. Gin it had only been the Almichty's will to hae ta'en her, an' left him, honest man!"

"Dinna daur to say a word again' the bairn, mem. The deid'll hear ye, an' no lie still."

"Supperstitious quean! Gang an' do as I tell ye this minute. What business hae ye to gang greetin aboot the hoose? He was no drap's bluid o' yours!"

To this the girl made no reply, but left the room in quest of Annie. When she reached the door, she stood for a moment on the threshold, and, putting her hand over her eyes, shouted "*Annie*!" But, apparently startled at the sound of her own voice where the unhearing dead had so lately passed, she let the end of the call die away in a quaver, and, without repeating it, set off to find the missing child by the use of her eyes alone. First she went into the barn, and then through the barn into the stack-yard, and then round the ricks one after another, and then into the corn-loft; but all without avail. At length, as she was beginning to feel rather alarmed about the child, she arrived, in the progress of her search, at the door of one of the cow-houses. The moment she looked round the corner into the stall next the door, she stood stock-still, with her mouth wide open. This stall was occupied by a favourite cow—brown, with large white spots, called therefore *Brownie*. Her manger was full of fresh-cut grass; and half-buried in this grass, at one end of the manger, with her back against the wall, sat Annie, holding one of the ears of the hornless Brownie with one hand and stroking the creature's nose with the other.

She was a delicate child, about nine years old, with blue eyes, half full of tears, hair somewhere between dark and fair, gathered in a silk net, and a pale face, on which a faint moon-like smile was glimmering. The old cow continued to hold her nose to be stroked.

"Is na Broonie a fine coo, Betty?" said the child, as the maid went on staring at her. "Puir Broonie! Naebody mindit me, an' sae I cam to you, Broonie."

And she laid her cheek, white, smooth, and thin, against the broad, flat, hairy forehead of the friendly cow. Then turning again to Betty, she said—

"Dinna tell auntie whaur I am, Betty. Lat me be. I'm best here wi'

Broonie."

Betty said never a word, but returned to her mistress.

"Whaur's the bairn, Betty? At some mischeef or ither, I'll wad."

"Hoot! mem, the bairn's weel eneuch. Bairns maunna be followed like carr (calves)."

"Whaur is she?"

"I canna jist doonricht exackly tak upo' me to say," answered Betty; "but I hae no fear aboot her. She's a wise bairn."

"Ye're no the lassie's keeper, Betty. I see I maun seek her mysel'.

Ye're aidin' an' abettin' as usual."

So saying, Auntie Meg went out to look for her niece. It was some time before the natural order of her search brought her at last to the *byre*. By that time Annie was almost asleep in the grass, which

the cow was gradually pulling away from under her. Through the open door the child could see the sunlight lying heavy upon the hot stones that paved the yard; but in here it was so dark-shadowy and cool, and the cow was such good, kindly company, and she was so safe hidden from auntie, as she thought—for no one had ever found her there before, and she knew Betty would not tell—that, as I say, she was nearly asleep with comfort, half-buried in Brownie's dinner.

But she was roused all at once to a sense of exposure and insecurity. She looked up, and at the same moment the hawk-nose of her aunt came round the *door-cheek*. Auntie's temper was none the better than usual that it had pleased the *Almichty* to take the brother whom she loved, and to leave behind the child whom she regarded as a painful responsibility. And now with her small, fierce eyes, and her big, thin nose—both red with suppressed crying—she did not dawn upon the sense of Annie as an embodiment of the maternity of the universe.

"Ye plaguesome brat!" cried Auntie; "there has Betty been seekin' ye, and I hae been seekin' ye, far an' near, i' the verra rottan-holes; an' here ye are, on yer ain father's buryin' day, that comes but ance—takin' up wi' a coo."

But the causes of Annie's preference of the society of Brownie to that of Auntie might have been tolerably clear to an onlooker, without word spoken. For to Annie and her needs, notwithstanding the humble four-footedness of Brownie, there was in her large mild eyes, and her hairy, featureless face, all nose and no nose, more of the divine than in the human form of Auntie Meg. And there was something of an indignation quite human in the way the cow tossed her bound head and neck towards the woman that darkened the door, as if warning her off her premises. But without a word of reply, Annie rose, flung her arms around Brownie's head, kissed the white star on her forehead, disengaged herself from the grass, and got out of the manger. Auntie seized her hand with a rough action, but not ungentle grasp, and led her away to the house. The stones felt very hot to her little bare feet.

CHAPTER III

By this time the funeral was approaching the churchyard at a more rapid pace; for the pedestrians had dropped away one by one, on diverging roads, or had stopped and retraced their steps. But as they drew near the place, the slow trot subsided into a slow walk once more. To an English eye the whole mode would have appeared barbarous. But if the carved and gilded skulls and cross-bones on the hearse were ill-conceived, at least there were no awful nodding plumes to make death hideous with yet more of cloudy darkness; and one of the panels showed, in all the sunshine that golden rays could yield, the Resurrection of the Lord—the victory over the grave. And, again, when they stopped at the gate of the churchyard, they were the hands of friends and neighbours, and not those of cormorant undertakers and obscene mutes, that bore the dead man to his grave. And, once more, if the only rite they observed, when the body had settled into its place of decay, was the silent uncovering of the head, as a last token of respect and farewell, it may be suggested that the Church of England herself, in all her beautiful service, has no prayer for the departed soul, which cannot be beyond the need of prayer, as the longings that follow it into the region of the Unknown, are not beyond its comfort.

Before the grave was quite filled the company had nearly gone. Thomas Crann, the stone-mason, and George Macwha, the *wright*, alone remained behind, for they had some charge over the arrangements, and were now taking a share in covering the grave. At length the last sod was laid upon the mound, and stamped into its place, where soon the earth's broken surface would heal, as society would flow together again, closing over the place that had known the departed, and would know him no more. Then Thomas and George sat down, opposite to each other, on two neighbouring tombstones, and wiping their brows, gave each a sigh of relief, for the sun was hot and oppressive.

"Hech! it's a weary warl," said George.

"Ye hae no richt to say sae, George," answered Thomas, "for ye hae never met it, an' foughten wi' 't. Ye hae never draan the soord o' the Lord and o' Gideon. Ye hae never broken the pitcher, to lat the lamp shine out, an' I doubt ye hae smo'red it by this time. And sae, whan the bridegroom comes, ye'll be ill-aff for a licht."

"Hoot, man! dinna speak sic awfu' things i' the verra kirkyard."

"Better hear them i' the kirkyard than at the closed door, George!"

"Weel, but," rejoined Macwha, anxious to turn the current of the conversation, which he found unpleasantly personal, "jist tell me honestly, Thamas Crann, do ye believe, wi' a' yer heart an' sowl, that the deid man—Gude be wi' him!—"

"No prayin' for the deid i' my hearin', George! As the tree falleth, so it shall lie."

"Weel! weel! I didna mean onything."

"That I verily believe. Ye seldom do!"

"But I jist want to speir," resumed George, with some asperity, getting rather nettled at his companion's persistent discourtesy, "gin ye believe that Jeames Anderson here, honest man, aneath our feet, crumblin' awa', as ye ken, and no ae spoke o' his wheel to the fore, or lang, to tell what his cart was like—do ye believe that his honest face will, ae day, pairt the mouls, an' come up again, jist here, i' the face o' the light, the verra same as it vanished whan we pat the lid ower him? Do ye believe that, Thamas Crann?"

"Na, na, George, man. Ye ken little what ye're busiest sayin'. It'll be a glorifeed body that he'll rise wi'. It's sown in dishonour, and raised in glory. Hoot! hoot! ye *are* ignorant, man!"

Macwha got more nettled still at his tone of superiority.

"Wad it be a glorifeed timmer-leg he rase wi', gin he had been buried wi' a timmer-leg?" asked he.

"His ain leg wad be buried some gait."

"Ow ay! nae doubt. An' it wad come happin' ower the Paceefic, or the Atlantic, to jine its oreeginal stump—wad it no? But supposin' the man had been born *wantin'* a leg—eh, Thamas?"

"George! George!" said Thomas, with great solemnity, "luik ye efter yer sowl, an' the Lord'ill luik after yer body, legs an' a'! Man, ye're no convertit, an' hoo can ye unnerstan' the things o' the speerit? Aye jeerin', an' jeerin'!"

"Weel! weel! Thamas," rejoined Macwha, mollified in perceiving that he had not had altogether the worst in the tilt of words; "I wad only tak' the leeberty o' thinkin' that, when He was aboot it, the Almighty micht as weel mak' a new body a'thegither, as gang patchin' up the auld ane. Sae I s' twa hame."

"Mind ye yer immortal pairt, George," said Thomas with a final thrust, as he likewise rose to go home with him on the box of the hearse.

"Gin the Lord tak's sic guid care o' the body, Thamas," retorted Macwha, with less of irreverence than appeared in his words, "maybe he winna objec' to gie a look to my puir soul as weel; for they say it's worth a hantle mair. I wish he wad, for he kens better nor me hoo to set aboot the job."

So saying, he strode briskly over the graves and out of the churchyard, leaving Thomas to follow as fast as suited his unwieldy strength.

CHAPTER IV

Meantime another conversation was going on in one of the gigs, as it bore two of the company from the place of tombs, which will serve a little for the purposes of this history. One of the twain was a cousin of the deceased, already incidentally mentioned as taking some direction in the matter of refreshment. His name was no less than Robert Bruce. The other was called Andrew Constable, and was a worthy elder of the kirk.

"Weel, Robert," began the latter, after they had jogged on in silence for half a mile or so, "what's to be done wi' little Annie Anderson and her Auntie Meg, noo that the douce man's gane hame, an' left them theroot, as't war?"

"They canna hae that muckle to the fore efter the doctor an' a' 's sattled for."

"It's no to be thought. It's lang sin' ever he wrought a day's darg (contracted from 'daywerk')."

"Jeames Dow luikit weel after the farmin', though."

"Nae doot. He's a guid servant that, to ony man he ca's master. But there canna be muckle siller to the fore."

A pause followed.

"What think ye noo, Andrew?" recommenced Bruce. "Ye're weel kent for an honest an' a langheided man. Do ye think that folk wad expec' onything o' me gin the warst cam to the warst?"

"Weel, Robert, I dinna think there's muckle guid in luikin' to what fowk micht or micht not expec' o' ye."

"That's jist what I was thinkin' mysel'; for, ye see, I hae a sma' family o' my ain to haud chowin' already."

"Nae doot—nae doot. But—"

"Ay, ay; I ken what ye wad say. I maunna a'thegither disregaird what fowk think, 'cause there's the chop (shop); an' gin I ance got—no to say an ill name, but jist the wind o' no being sae considerate as I micht hae been, there's no sayin' but twa or three micht gang by my door, and across to Jamie Mitchell's yonner."

"Do ye what's richt, Robert Bruce, and sae defy fowk and fairy."

"Na, na, that winna *aye* work. A body maun tak' care o' their ain, else wha's to do't?"

"Weel," rejoined Andrew with a smile, for he understood Bruce well enough, although he pretended to have mistaken his meaning—"weel, gin the bairnie falls to you, nae doot ye maun take chairge o' her."

"I dinna mean Jeames Anderson's bairns—I mean my ain bairns."

"Robert, whatever way ye decide, I houp it may be sic a deceesion as will admit o' yer castin' yer care upo' *Him*."

"I ken a' aboot that, Andrew. But my opeenion upo' that text is jist this—that ilka vessel has to haud the fill o' 't, and what rins ower may be committed to Him, for ye can haud it no langer. Them that winna tak tent (care) 'll tak scathe. It's a sweer (lazy) thochtless way to gang to the Almichty wi' ilka fash. Whan I'm driven to ane mair, that ane sall aye be Him. Ye min' the story about my namesake and the spidder?"

"Ay, weel eneuch," answered Andrew.

But he did not proceed to remark that he could see no connection between that story and the subject in hand, for Bruce's question did not take him by surprise, it being well understood that he was in the habit of making all possible and some impossible references to his great namesake. Indeed, he wished everybody to think, though he seldom ventured to assert it plainly, that he was lineally descended from the king. Nor did Andrew make further remark of any sort with regard to the fate of Annie or the duty of Bruce, for he saw that his companion wanted no advice—only some talk, and possibly some sympathy with his perplexity as to what the world might think of him. But with this

perplexity Andrew could accord him very little sympathy indeed; for he could not take much interest in the buttressing of a reputation which he knew to be already quite undermined by widely-reported acts of petty meanness and selfishness. Nor was this fact much to be wondered at, if his principles were really those which he had so openly advocated. Indeed, Andrew knew well that it would be a bad day for poor Annie when she came under Bruce's roof, and therefore sincerely hoped that Auntie Meg might find some way of managing so as to avoid parting with the child; for he knew, too, that, though her aunt was fierce and hard, she had yet a warm spot somewhere about her heart.

Margaret Anderson had known perfectly well for some time that she and Annie must part before long. The lease of the farm would expire at the close of the autumn of next year; and as it had been rather a losing affair for some time, she had no inclination to request a renewal. When her brother's debts should be paid, there would not remain, even after the sale of the stock, more than a hundred and fifty pounds. For herself, she believed she must go into service—which would hurt her pride more than it would alter her position, for her hands had done far more of the necessary labour than those of the maid who assisted her. Indeed, in her proudest mood, she would have welcomed death rather than idleness. What was to become of Annie she did not yet see.

Meantime there remained for the child just a year more of the native farm, with all the varieties of life which had been so dear to her. Auntie Meg did not spare to put her in mind of the coming change; but it seemed to Annie so long in coming that it never would come. The impression was worn off by the daily attempt to deepen it, she gave herself up to the childish pleasures within her reach, without thinking of their approaching loss.

CHAPTER V

And why should Annie think of the future? The future was not: the present was—and full of delights. If she did not receive much tenderness from auntie, at least she was not afraid of her. The pungency of her temper was but as the salt and vinegar which brought out the true flavour of the other numberless pleasures around her. Were her excursions far afield, perched aloft on Dowie's shoulder, and holding on by the top of his head, or clinging to his back with her arms round his neck, at all the less delightful that auntie was scolding at home? They would have been less delightful if she had thought of the future; but she thought only of the present joy; or rather she took it as it came, and let it play upon her, without thinking about it at all. And if she was late for one of her meals, for Annie had no very correct sense of the lapse of time, and auntie had declared she should go fasting, it was yet not without her connivance that rosy-faced Betty got the child the best of everything that was at hand, and put cream in her milk, and butter on her oat cake, Annie managing to consume everything with satisfaction, notwithstanding the hurdy-gurdy accompaniment of her aunt's audible reflections. And Brownie was always friendly; ever ready on any serious emergency, when auntie's temper was still less placid than usual, to yield a corner of her manger for a refuge to the child. And the cocks and hens, even the peacock and the turkey-cock, knew her perfectly, and would come when she called them, if not altogether out of affection for her, at least out of hope in her bounty; and she had not yet arrived at the painful wisdom of beginning to question motives—a wisdom which misleads more than it guides. She loved *them*, and that was enough for her. And she would ride the horses to water, sitting sideways on their broad backs like a barefooted lady; for Dowie had such respect for his little mistress, as he called her, that he would never let her get astride "like a laddie," however much she wanted to do so. And when the morning was wet, and the sound of the flails came to her from the barn, she would watch for the moment when her aunt's back would be turned, and then scurry across the yard, like a mouse to its hole; for auntie's first impulse was always to oppose whatever Annie desired. Once in the barn, she would bury herself like a mole in the straw, and listen to the unfailing metronome of the flails, till she would fall so fast asleep as to awake only when her uncomfortable aunt, believing that at last the awful something or other *had* happened to the *royt* lassie, dragged her out ignominiously by the heels. But the *royt* lassie was one of the gentlest of girls, what adventurousness she had being the result of faith, and not of hardihood.

And then came the delights of the harvest-field—soon to become great golden splendours to the memory. With the reapers she would remain from morning till night, sharing in their meals, and lightening their labour with her gentle frolic. Every day, after the noon-tide meal, she would go to sleep on the shady side of a *stook*, upon two or three sheaves which Dowie would lay down for her in a choice spot. Indeed the little mistress was very fond of sleep, and would go to sleep anywhere; this habit being indeed one of her aunt's chief grounds of complaint. For before hay-time, for instance, when the grass was long in the fields, if she came upon any place that took her fancy, she would tumble down at once, and show that she loved it by going to sleep upon it. Then it was no easy task to find her amidst the long grass that closed over her, as over a bird in its nest. But the fact was, this habit indicated a feebleness of constitution, to which sleep itself was the best restorative. And in the harvest-field, at least, no harm could come of it; for Dooie, as she always called him, watched her like a mother; so that sometimes when she awoke, she would find a second stook of ten sheaves, with a high-uplifted crowning pair above, built at right angles to the first, to shelter her from the sun which had peered round the corner, and would soon have stared her awake.

The only discomfort of the harvest-field was, that the sharp stubble forced her to wear shoes. But when the corn had all been carried home, and the potatoes had been dug up and heaped in warm pits against the winter, and the mornings and evenings grew cold, and, though still friendly to strong

men and women, were rather too keen for delicate little Annie—she had to put on both shoes and stockings, which she did not like at all.

So with "gentle gliding," through a whole winter of ice and snow, through a whole spring of promises tardily fulfilled, through a summer of glory, and another autumn of harvest joy, the day drew on when they must leave the farm. And still to Annie it seemed as far off as ever.

CHAPTER VI

One lovely evening in October, when the shadows were falling from the western sun, and the light that made them was as yellow as a marigold, and a keen little wind was just getting ready to come out and blow the moment the sun would be out of sight, Annie, who was helping to fasten up the cows for the night, drawing iron chains round their soft necks, saw a long shadow coming in at the narrow entrance of the yard. It came in and in; and was so long in coming in, that she began to feel as if it was something not quite *cannie*, and to fancy herself frightened. But, at length, she found that the cause of the great shadow was only a little man; and that this little man was no other than her father's cousin, Robert Bruce. Alas! how little a man may cast a great shadow!

He came up to Annie, and addressed her in the smoothest voice he could find, fumbling at the same time in his coat-pocket.

"Hoo are ye the nicht dawtie? Are ye verra weel? An' hoo's yer auntie?"

He waited for no reply to any of these questions, but went on.

"See what I hae brocht ye frae the chop."

So saying, he put into her hand about half-a-dozen *sweeties*, screwed up in a bit of paper. With this gift he left her, and walked on to the open door of the house, which, as a cousin, he considered himself privileged to enter unannounced even by a knock. He found the mistress of it in the kitchen, superintending the cooking of the supper.

"Hoo are ye the nicht, Marget?" he said, still in a tone of conciliatory smoothness, through which, however, he could not prevent a certain hardness from cropping out plentifully. "Ye're busy as usual, I see. Weel, the hand o' the diligent maketh rich, ye ken."

"That portion o' the Word maun be o' leemited application, I doot," returned Marget, as, withdrawing her hand from her cousin's, she turned again to the pot hanging over the fire. "No man daurs to say that my han' has not been the han' o' the diligent; but Guid kens I'm nane the richer."

"We maunna repine, Marget. Richt or wrang, it's the Lord's will."

"It's easy to you, Robert Bruce, wi' yer siller i' the bank, to speik that gait til a puir lone body like me, that maun slave for my bread whan I'm no sae young as I micht be. No that I'm like to dee o' auld age either."

"I haena sae muckle i' the bank as some folk may think; though what there is is safe eneuch. But I hae a bonny business doun yonner, and it micht be better yet. It's jist the land o' Goshen, only it wants a wheen mair tap-dressin'."

"Tak it frae the bank, than, Robert."

"The bank! said ye, Marget? I canna do that."

"And what for no?"

"'Cause I'm jist like the hens, Marget. Gin they dinna see ae egg i' the nest, they hae no hert to lay anither. I daurna meddle wi' the bank."

"Weel, lat sit than; an' lay awa' at yer leisur'. Hoo's the mistress?"

"No that weel, and no that ill. The faimily's rather sair upo' her. But
I canna haud her oot o' the chop for a' that. She's like mysel'—she
wad aye be turnin' a bawbee. But what are ye gaein to do yersel',
Marget?"

"I'm gaein to my uncle and aunt—auld John Peterson and his wife.
They're gey and frail noo, and they want somebody to luik efter them."

"Than ye're weel provided for; Praise be thankit! Marget."

"Ow, ay; nae doot," replied Marget, with bitterness, of which Bruce took no notice.

"And what's to come o' the bairnie?" pursued he.

"I maun jist get some dacent auld body i' the toon to tak' her in, and lat her gang to the schuil. It's time. The auld fowk wadna pit up wi' her a week."

"And what'll that cost ye, Marget?"

"I dinna ken. But the lassie's able to pay for her ain upbringin'."

"It's no far 'at a hunner and fifty'll gang i' thae times, woman. An' it's a pity to tak frae the prencipal. She'll be merryin' some day."

"Ow, 'deed, maybe. Bairns will be fules."

"Weel, end na ye pit it oot at five per cent., and there wad aye be something comin' o' 't? That wad be seven pun' ten i' the year, an' the bairnie micht amaist—no freely but nigh-han'—be broucht up upo' that."

Margaret lifted her head and looked at him.

"An' wha wad gie five per cent. for her bit siller, whan he can get it frae the bank, on guid security, for four an' a half?"

"Jist mysel', Marget. The puir orphan has naebody but you and me to luik till; an' I wad willin'ly do that muckle for her. I'll tell ye what—I'll gie her five per cent. for her siller; and for the bit interest, I'll tak her in wi' my ain bairns, an' she s' hae bit and sup wi' them, an' gang to the school wi' them, and syne—efter a bit—we'll see what comes neist."

To Margaret this seemed a very fair offer. It was known to all that the Bruce children were well-enough dressed for their station, and looked well-fed; and although Robert had the character of being somewhat mean, she did not regard that as the worst possible fault, or one likely to operate for the injury of the child. So she told her cousin that she would think about it; which was quite as much as he could have expected. He took his leave all but satisfied that he had carried his point, and not a little uplifted with his prospects.

For was it not a point worth carrying—to get both the money and the owner of it into his own hands? Not that he meant conscious dishonesty to Annie. He only rejoiced to think that he would thus satisfy any expectations that the public might have formed of him, and would enjoy besides a splendid increase of capital for his business; while he hoped to keep the girl upon less than the interest would come to. And then, if anything should happen to her—seeing she was not over vigorous—the result was worth waiting for; whereas—if she throve—he had sons growing up, one of whom might take a fancy to the heiress, and would have facilities for marrying her, &c. &c.; for Grocer Robert was as deep in his foresight and scheming as King Robert, the crowning triumph of whose intellect, in the eyes of his descendant, was the strewing of the caltrops on the field of Bannockburn.

But James Dow was *ill-pleased* when he heard of the arrangement—which was completed in due time. "For," said he, "I canna bide that Bruce. He's a naisty mean cratur. He wadna fling a bane till a dog, afore he had ta'en a pyke at it himsel'." He agreed, however, with his mistress, that it would be better to keep Annie in ignorance of her destiny as long as possible; a consideration which sprung from the fact that her aunt, now that she was on the eve of parting with her, felt a little delicate growth of tenderness sprouting over the old stone wall of her affection for the child, owing its birth, in part, to the doubt whether she would be comfortable in her new home.

CHAPTER VII

A day that is fifty years off comes as certainly as if it had been in the next week; and Annie's feeling of infinite duration did not stop the sand-glass of Old Time. The day arrived when everything was to be sold by public *roup*. A great company of friends, neighbours, and acquaintances gathered; and much drinking of whisky-punch went on in the kitchen as well as in the room where, a few months before, the solemn funeral-assembly had met.

Little Annie speedily understood what all the bustle meant: that the day of desolation so long foretold by the Cassandra-croak of her aunt, had at length actually arrived, and that all the things she knew so well were vanishing from her sight for ever.

She was in the barn when the sound of the auctioneer's voice in the corn-yard made her look over the half-door and listen. Gradually the truth dawned upon her; and she burst into tears over an old rake which she had been accustomed to call hers, because she had always dragged it at hay-making. Then wiping her eyes hastily—for, partly from her aunt's hardness, she never could bear to be seen crying, even when a child—she fled to Brownie's stall, and burying herself in the manger, began weeping afresh. After a while, the fountain of tears was for the time exhausted, and she sat disconsolately gazing at the old cow feeding away, as if food were everything and a *roup* nothing at all, when footsteps approached the *byre*, and, to her dismay, two men, whom she did not know, came in, untied Brownie, and actually led her away from before her eyes. She still stared at the empty space where Brownie had stood,—stared like a creature stranded by night on the low coast of Death, before whose eyes in the morning the sea of Life is visibly ebbing away. At last she started up. How could she sit there without Brownie! Sobbing so that she could not breathe, she rushed across the yard, into the crowded and desecrated house, and up the stair to her own little room, where she threw herself on the bed, buried her eyes in the pillow, and, overcome with grief, fell fast asleep.

When she woke in the morning, she remembered nothing of Betty's undressing and putting her to bed. The dreadful day that was gone seemed only a dreadful dream, that had left a pain behind it. But when she went out, she found that yesterday would not stay amongst her dreams. Brownie's stall was empty. The horses were all gone, and many of the cattle. Those that remained looked like creatures forgotten. The pigs were gone, and most of the poultry. Two or three favourite hens were left, which auntie was going to take with her. But of all the living creatures she had loved, not one had been kept for Annie. Her life grew bitter with the bitterness of death.

In the afternoon, her aunt came up to her room, where she sat in tearful silence, and telling her that she was going to take her into the town, proceeded, without further explanation, to put all her little personal effects into an old hair-trunk, which Annie called her own. Along with some trifles that lay about the room, she threw into the bottom of the box about a dozen of old books, which had been on the chest of drawers since long before Annie could remember. She, poor child, let her do as she pleased, and asked no questions; for the shadow in which she stood was darkening, and she did not care what came next. For an hour the box stood on the floor like a coffin, and then Betty came, with red eyes and a red nose, and carried it downstairs. Then auntie came up again, dressed in her Sunday clothes. She put on Annie's best frock and bonnet—adorning the victim for sacrifice—at least, so Annie's face would have suggested—and led her down to the door. There stood a horse and cart. In the cart was some straw, and a sack stuffed with hay. As auntie was getting into the cart, Betty rushed out from somewhere upon Annie, caught her up, kissed her in a vehement and disorderly manner, and before her mistress could turn round in the cart, gave her into James Dow's arms, and vanished with strange sounds of choking. Dowie thought to put her in with a kiss, for he dared not speak; but Annie's arms went round his neck, and she clung to him sobbing—clung till she roused the indignation of auntie, at the first sound of whose voice, Dowie was free, and Annie lying in the cart,

with her face buried in the straw. Dowie then mounted in front, with his feet on the shaft; the horse—one Annie did not know—started off gently; and she was borne away helpless to meet the unknown.

And the road was like the going. She had often been upon it before, but it had never looked as it did now. The first half-mile went through fields whose crops were gone. The stubble was sticking through the grass, and the potato stalks, which ought to have been gathered and burnt, lay scattered about all over the brown earth. Then came two miles of moorland country, high, and bleak, and barren, with hillocks of peat in all directions, standing beside the black holes whence they had been dug. These holes were full of dark water, frightful to look at; while along the side of the road went deep black ditches half-full of the same dark water. There was no danger of the cart getting into them, for the ruts were too deep to let the wheels out; but it jolted so dreadfully from side to side, as it crawled along, that Annie was afraid every other moment of being tilted into one of the frightful pools. Across the waste floated now and then the cry of a bird, but other sound there was none in this land of drearihead. Next came some scattered and ragged fields, the skirts of cultivation, which seemed to draw closer and closer together, while the soil grew richer and more hopeful, till, after two miles more, they entered the first straggling precincts of the grey market-town.

By this time the stars were shining clear in the cold, frosty sky, and candles or train-oil lamps were burning in most of the houses; for all these things took place long before gas had been heard of in those quarters. A few faces were pressed close to the window-panes as the cart passed; and some rather untidy women came to the house-doors to look. And they spoke one to another words which, though inaudible through the noise of the cart, were yet intelligible enough to Annie, with her own forebodings to interpret the expression of their faces.

"That'll be little Annie Anderson," they said. "She's gaein hame to bide wi' her cousin, Robert Bruce, up i' the Wast Wynd. Puir wee lassie!"

For, on the way, Annie had been informed of her destination.

But she was too miserable already, because of leaving her old home, to care much to what new one she was going. Had it not been for the absorption of this grief, she could not have been indifferent to the prospect of going to live with her cousin, although her dislike to him had never assumed a more active form than that of wishing to get away from him, as often as he came near her.

The cart stopped at Bruce's shop-door. It looked a heavy door, although the upper half was of glass—in small panes. Dowie got down and went into the shop; and before he returned Annie had time to make some listless observations. The house was a low one, although of two stories, built of grey stone, and thatched. The heavy door was between two windows belonging to the shop, in each of which burned a single tallow candle, revealing to the gaze of Annie, in all the enhancing mystery of candlelight, what she could not but regard as a perfect mine of treasures. For besides calico and sugar, and all the multifarious stock in the combined trades of draper and grocer, Robert Bruce sold penny toys, and halfpenny picture-books, and all kinds of confectionery which had been as yet revealed to the belated generations of Glamerton.

But she had not to contemplate these wonders long from the outside; for Bruce came to the door, and, having greeted his cousin and helped her down, turned to take Annie. Dowie had been before him, however, and now held the pale child silent in his arms. He carried her into the shop, and set her down on a sack that stood outside the counter, leaning against it. He then went back to his horse's head.

The sack made no bad seat, for it was half-full of turnip-seed; and upon it Annie sat, and drearily surveyed the circumstances.

Auntie was standing in the middle of the shop. Bruce was holding the counter open, and inviting her to enter.

"Ye'll come in and tak a cup o' tay, efter yer journey, Marget?" said he.

"Na, I thank ye, Robert Bruce. Jeames and I maun jist turn and gae hame again. There's a hantle to look efter yet, and we maunna neglec' oor wark. The hoose-gear's a' to be roupit the morn."

Then turning to Annie, she said:

"Noo, Annie, lass, ye'll be a guid bairn, and do as ye're tell't. An' min' and no pyke the things i' the chop."

A smile of peculiar import glimmered over Bruce's face at the sound of this injunction. Annie made no reply, but stared at Mr Bruce, and sat staring.

"Good-bye to ye, Annie!" said her aunt, and roused her a little from her stupor.

She then gave her a kiss—the first, as far as the child knew, that she had ever given her—and went out. Bruce followed her out, and Dowie came in. He took her up in his arms, and said:

"Good-bye to ye, my bonnie bairn. Be a guid lass, and ye'll be ta'en care o'. Dinna forget that. Min' and say yer prayers."

Annie kissed him with all her heart, but could not reply. He set her down again, and went out. She heard the harness rattle, and the cart go off. She was left sitting on the sack.

Presently Mr Bruce came in, and passing behind his counter, proceeded to make an entry in a book. It could have been no order from poor, homeless Margaret. It was, in fact, a memorandum of the day and the hour when Annie was set down on that same sack—so methodical was he! And yet it was some time before he seemed to awake to the remembrance of the presence of the child. Looking up suddenly at the pale, weary thing, as she sat with her legs hanging lifelessly down the side of the sack, he said—pretending to have forgotten her—

"Ow, bairn, are ye there yet?"

And going round to her, he set her on the floor, and leading her by the hand through the mysterious gate of the counter, and through a door behind it, called in a sharp decided tone:

"Mother, ye're wanted!"

Thereupon a tall, thin, anxious-looking woman appeared, wiping her hands in her apron.

"This is little Miss Anderson," said Bruce, "come to bide wi's. Gie her a biscuit, and tak' her up the stair till her bed."

As it was the first, so it was the last time he called her *Miss* Anderson, at least while she was one of his household.—Mrs Bruce took Annie by the hand in silence, and led her up two narrow stairs, into a small room with a skylight. There, by the shine of the far-off stars, she undressed her. But she forgot the biscuit; and, for the first time in her life, Annie went supperless to bed.

She lay for a while trying to fancy herself in Brownie's stall among the grass and clover, and so get rid of the vague fear she felt at being in a strange place without light, for she found it unpleasant not to know what was next her in the dark. But the fate of Brownie and of everything she had loved came back upon her; and the sorrow drove away the fear, and she cried till she could cry no longer, and then she slept. It is by means of sorrow, sometimes, that He gives his beloved sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

She woke early, rose, and dressed herself. But there was no water for her to wash with, and she crept down-stairs to look for help in this her first need. Nobody, however, was awake. She looked long and wistfully at the house-door, but seeing that she could not open it, she went back to her room. If she had been at home, she would soon have had a joyous good-morrow from the burst of fresh wind meeting her as she lifted the ready latch, to seek the companionship of yet earlier risers than herself; but now she was as lonely as if she had anticipated the hour of the resurrection, and was the little only one up of the buried millions. All that she had left of that home was her box, and she would have betaken herself to a desolate brooding over its contents; but it had not been brought up, and neither could she carry it up herself, nor would she open it in the kitchen where it stood. So she sat down on the side of her bed, and gazed round the room. It was a cheerless room. At home she had had chequered curtains to her bed: here there were none of any kind; and her eyes rested on nothing but bare rafters and boards. And there were holes in the roof and round the floor, which she did not like. They were not large, but they were dreadful. For they were black, nor did she know where they might go to. And she grew very cold.

At length she heard some noise in the house, and in her present mood any human noise was a sound of deliverance. It grew; was presently enriched by the admixture of baby-screams, and the sound of the shop-shutters being taken down; and at last footsteps approached her door. Mrs Bruce entered, and finding her sitting dressed on her bed, exclaimed:

"Ow! ye call dress yersel! can ye?"

"Ay, weel that," answered Annie, as cheerily as she could. "But," she added, "I want some water to wash mysel' wi'."

"Come doon to the pump, than," said Mrs Bruce.

Annie followed her to the pump, where she washed in a tub. She then ran dripping into the house for a towel, and was dried by the hands of Mrs Bruce in her dirty apron.—This mode of washing lasted till the first hoar-frost, after which there was a basin to be had in the kitchen, with plenty of water and not much soap.

By this time breakfast was nearly ready, and in a few minutes more, Mrs Bruce called Mr Bruce from the shop, and the children from the yard, and they all sat round the table in the kitchen —Mr Bruce to his tea and oat-cake and butter—Mrs Bruce and the children to badly-made oatmeal porridge and sky-blue milk. This quality of the milk was remarkable, seeing they had cows of their own. But then they sold milk. And if any customer had accused her of watering it, Mrs Bruce's best answer would have been to show how much better what she sold was than what she retained; for she put twice as much water in what she used for her own family—with the exception of the portion destined for her husband's tea, whose two graces were long and strong enough for a better breakfast. But then his own was good enough.

There were three children, two boys with great jaws—the elder rather older than Annie—and a very little baby. After Mr Bruce had prayed for the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon their food, they gobbled down their breakfasts with all noises except articulate ones. When they had finished —that is, eaten everything up—the Bible was brought; a psalm was sung, after a fashion not very extraordinary to the ears of Annie, or, indeed, of any one brought up in Scotland; a chapter was read —it happened to tell the story of Jacob's speculations in the money-market of his day and generation; and the *exercise* concluded with a prayer of a quarter of an hour, in which the God of Jacob especially was invoked to bless the Bruces, His servants, in their basket and in their store, and to prosper the labours of that day in particular. The prayer would have been longer, but for the click of the latch of the shop-door, which brought it to a speedier close than one might have supposed even Mr Bruce's

notions of decency would have permitted. And almost before the *Amen* was out of his month, he was out of the kitchen.

When he had served the early customer, he returned, and sitting down, drew Annie towards him—between his knees, in fact, and addressed her with great solemnity.

"Noo, Annie," said he, "ye s' get the day to play yersel'; but ye maun gang to the school the morn. We can hae no idle fowk i' this hoose, sae we maun hae nae words aboot it."

Annie was not one to make words about that or anything. She was only too glad to get away from him. Indeed the prospect of school, after what she had seen of the economy of her home, was rather enticing. So she only answered,

"Verra weel, sir. Will I gang the day?"

Whereupon, finding her so tractable, Mr Bruce added, in the tone of one conferring a great favour, and knowing that he did so,

"Ye can come into the shop for the day, and see what's gaein on. Whan ye're a muckle woman, ye may be fit to stan' ahin' the coonter some day yersel'—wha kens?"

Robert Bruce regarded the shop as his Bannockburn, where all his enemies, namely customers, were to be defeated, that he might be enriched with their spoils. It was, therefore, a place of so great interest in his eyes, that he thought it must be interesting to everybody else. And, indeed, the permission did awake some ill-grounded expectations in the mind of Annie.

She followed him into the shop, and saw quite a fabulous wealth of good things around her; of which, however, lest she should put forth her hand and take, the militant eyes of Robert Bruce never ceased watching her, with quick-recurring glances, even while he was cajoling some customer into a doubtful purchase.

Long before dinner-time arrived, she was heartily sick of the monotony of buying and selling in which she had no share. Not even a picture-book was taken down from the window for her to look at; so that she soon ceased to admire even the picture-books—a natural result of the conviction that they belonged to a sphere above her reach. Mr Bruce, on the other hand, looked upon them as far below the notice of his children, although he derived a keen enjoyment from the transference, by their allurements, of the half-pence of other children from their pockets into his till.

"Naisty trash o' lees," he remarked, apparently for Annie's behoof, as he hung the fresh bait up in his window, after two little urchins, with *bawbees* to spend, had bought a couple of the radiant results of literature and art combined. "Naisty trash o' lees—only fit for dirrty laddies and lassies."

He stood on the watch in his shop like a great spider that ate children; and his windows were his web.

They dined off salt herrings and potatoes—much better fare than bad porridge and watered milk. Robert Bruce the younger, who inherited his father's name and disposition, made faces at Annie across the table as often as he judged it prudent to run the risk of discovery; but Annie was too stupefied with the awful change to mind it much, and indeed required all the attention she had at command, for the arrest of herring bones on their way to her throat.

After dinner, business was resumed in the shop, with at least the resemblance of an increase of vigour, for Mrs Bruce went behind the counter, and gave her husband time to sit down at the desk to write letters and make out bills. Not that there was much of either sort of clerkship necessary; but Bruce, like Chaucer's Man of Law, was so fond of business, that he liked to seem busier than he was. As it happened to be a half-holiday, Annie was sent with the rest of the children into the garden to play up and down the walks.

"An' min'," said Bruce, "an' haud oot ower frae the dog."

In the garden Annie soon found herself at the mercy of those who had none.

It is marvellous what an amount of latent torment there is in boys, ready to come out the moment an object presents itself. It is not exactly cruelty. The child that tears the fly to pieces does not represent to himself the sufferings the insect undergoes; he merely yields to an impulse to disintegrate.

So children, even ordinarily good children, are ready to tease any child who simply looks teasable, and so provokes the act. Now the Bruces were not good children, as was natural; and they despised Annie because she was a girl, and because she had no self-assertion. If she had shown herself aggressively disagreeable, they would have made some attempt to conciliate her; but as it was, she became at once the object of a succession of spiteful annoyances, varying in intensity with the fluctuating invention of the two boys. At one time they satisfied themselves with making grimaces of as insulting a character as they could produce; at another they rose to the rubbing of her face with dirt, or the tripping up of her heels. Their persecution bewildered her, and the resulting stupefaction was a kind of support to her for a time; but at last she could endure it no longer, being really hurt by a fall, and ran crying into the shop, where she sobbed out,

"Please, sir, they winna lat me be."

"Dinna come into the chop wi' yer stories. Mak' it up amo' yersels."

"But they winna mak' it up."

Robert Bruce rose indignant at such an interruption of his high calling, and went out with the assumption of much parental grandeur. He was instantly greeted with a torrent of assurances that Annie had fallen, and then laid the blame upon them; whereupon he turned sternly to her, and said—

"Annie, gin ye tell lees, ye'll go to hell."

But paternal partiality did not prevent him from reading them also a lesson, though of a quite different tone.

"Mind, boys," he said, in a condescending whine, "that poor Annie has neither father nor mither; an' ye maun be kind till her."

He then turned and left them for the more important concerns within-doors; and the persecution recommenced, though in a somewhat mitigated form. The little wretches were perfectly unable to abstain from indulging in a pleasure of such intensity. Annie had indeed fallen upon evil days.

I am thus minute in my description of her first day, that my reader, understanding something similar of many following days, may be able to give due weight to the influence of other events, when, in due time, they come to be recorded. But I must not conclude the account without mentioning something which befell her at the close of the same day, and threatened to be productive of yet more suffering.

After *worship*, the boys crawled away to bed, half-asleep already; or, I should rather say, only half-awake from their prayers. Annie lingered.

"Can ye no tak' aff yer ain claes, as weel as pit them on, Annie?" asked Mrs Bruce.

"Ay, weel eneuch. Only I wad sair like a bittie o' can'le," was Annie's trembling reply, for she had a sad foreboding instinct now.

"Can'le! Na, na, bairn," answered Mrs Bruce. "Ye s' get no can'le here. Ye wad hae the hoose in a low (flame) aboot oor lugs (ears). I canna affoord can'les. Ye can jist mak' a can'le o' yer han's, and fin (feel) yer gait up the twa stairs. There's thirteen steps to the firs, and twal to the neist."

With choking heart, but without reply, Annie went.

Groping her way up the steep ascent, she found her room without any difficulty. As it was again a clear, starlit night, there was light enough for her to find everything she wanted; and the trouble at her heart kept her imagination from being as active as it would otherwise have been, in recalling the terrible stories of ghosts and dead people with which she was far too familiar. She soon got into bed, and, as a precautionary measure, buried her head under the clothes before she began to say her prayers, which, under the circumstances, she had thought she might be excused for leaving till she had lain down. But her prayers were suddenly interrupted by a terrible noise of scrambling and scratching and scampering in the very room beside her.

"I tried to cry oot," she said afterwards, "for I kent 'at it was rottans; but my tongue booed i' my mou' for fear, and I cudna speak ae word."

The child's fear of rats amounted to a frenzied horror. She dared not move a finger. To get out of bed with those creatures running about the room was as impossible as it was to cry out. But her heart did what her tongue could not do—cried out with a great and bitter cry to one who was more ready to hear than Robert and Nancy Bruce. And what her heart cried was this:

"O God, tak care o' me frae the rottans."

There was no need to send an angel from heaven in answer to this little one's prayer: the cat would do. Annie heard a scratch and a mew at the door. The rats made one frantic scramble and were still.

"It's pussy!" she cried, recovering the voice for joy that had failed her for fear.

Fortified by her arrival, and still more by the feeling that she was a divine messenger sent to succour her because she had prayed, she sprang out of bed, darted across the room, and opened the door to let her in. A few moments and she was fast asleep, guarded by God's angel, the cat, for whose entrance she took good care ever after to leave the door ajar.

There are ways of keeping the door of the mind also, ready as it is to fall to, ajar for the cat.

CHAPTER IX

"Noo, Annie, pit on yer bonnet, an' gang to the schuil wi' the lave (rest); an' be a good girrl."

This was the Bruce's parting address to Annie, before he left the kitchen for the shop, after breakfast and worship had been duly observed; and having just risen from his knees, his voice, as he stooped over the child, retained all the sanctity of its last occupation. It was a quarter to ten o'clock, and the school was some five minutes distant.

With a flutter of fearful hope, Annie obeyed. She ran upstairs, made herself as tidy, as she could, smoothed her hair, put on her bonnet, and had been waiting a long time at the door when her companions joined her. It was very exciting to look forward to something that might not be disagreeable.

As they went, the boys got one on each side of her in a rather sociable manner. But they had gone half the distance and not a word had been spoken, when Robert Bruce, junior, opened the conversation abruptly.

"Ye'll get it!" he said, as if he had been brooding upon the fact for some time, and now it had broken out.

"What'll I get?" asked Annie timidly, for his tone had already filled her with apprehension.

"Sic lickins," answered the little wretch, drawing back his lips till his canine teeth were fully disclosed, as if he gloated in a carnivorous sort of way over the prospect. "Wonna she, Johnnie?"

"Ay wull she," answered Johnnie, following his leader with confidence.

Annie's heart sank within her. The poor little heart was used to sinking now. But she said nothing, resolved, if possible, to avoid all occasion for "getting it."

Not another word was spoken before they reached the school, the door of which was not yet open. A good many boys and a few girls were assembled, waiting for the master, and filling the lane, at the end of which the school stood, with the sound of voices fluctuating through a very comprehensive scale. In general the school-door was opened a few minutes before the master's arrival, but on this occasion no one happened to have gone to his house to fetch the key, and the scholars had therefore to wait in the street. None of them took any notice of Annie; so she was left to study the outside of the school. It was a long, low, thatched building, of one story and a garret, with five windows to the lane, and some behind, for she could see light through. It had been a weaving-shop originally, full of hand-looms, when the trade in linen was more prosperous than it was now. From the thatch some of the night's frost was already dripping in slow clear drops. Past the door, which was in a line with the windows, went a gutter, the waters of which sank through a small grating a few steps further on. But there was no water running in it now.

Suddenly a boy cried out: "The maister's comin'!" and instantly the noise sunk to a low murmur. Looking up the lane, which rose considerably towards the other end, Annie saw the figure of the descending dominie. He was dressed in what seemed to be black, but was in reality gray, almost as good as black, and much more thrifty. He came down the hill swinging his arms, like opposing pendulums, in a manner that made the rapid pace at which he approached like a long slow trot. With the door-key in his hand, already pointed towards the key-hole, he went right through the little crowd, which cleared a wide path for him, without word or gesture of greeting on either side. I might almost say he swooped upon the door, for with one hand on the key, and the other on the latch, he seemed to wrench it open the moment he touched it. In he strode, followed at the heels by the troop of boys, big and little, and lastly by the girls—last of all, at a short distance, by Annie, like a motherless lamb that followed the flock, because she did not know what else to do. She found she had to go down a step into a sunk passage or lobby, and then up another step, through a door on the left, into the school. There she saw a double row of desks, with a clear space down the middle between the rows. Each scholar was hurrying to his place at one of the desks, where, as he arrived, he stood. The master

already stood in solemn posture at the nearer end of the room on a platform behind his desk, prepared to commence the extempore prayer, which was printed in a kind of blotted stereotype upon every one of their brains. Annie had hardly succeeded in reaching a vacant place among the girls when he began. The boys were as still as death while the master prayed; but a spectator might easily have discovered that the chief good some of them got from the ceremony was a perfect command of the organs of sound; for the restraint was limited to those organs; and projected tongues, deprived of their natural exercise, turned themselves, along with winking eyes, contorted features, and a wild use of hands and arms, into the means of telegraphic despatches to all parts of the room, throughout the ceremony. The master, afraid of being himself detected in the attempt to combine prayer and vision, kept his "eyelids screwed together tight," and played the spy with his ears alone. The boys and girls, understanding the source of their security perfectly, believed that the eyelids of the master would keep faith with them, and so disported themselves without fear in the delights of dumb show.

As soon as the prayer was over they dropped, with no little noise and bustle, into their seats. But presently Annie was rudely pushed out of her seat by a hoydenish girl, who, arriving late, had stood outside the door till the prayer was over, and then entered unperceived during the subsequent confusion. Some little ones on the opposite form, however, liking the look of her, and so wishing to have her for a companion, made room for her beside them. The desks were double, so that the two rows at each desk faced each other.

"Bible-class come up," were the first words of the master, ringing through the room, and resounding awfully in Annie's ears.

A moment of chaos followed, during which all the boys and girls, considered capable of reading the Bible, were arranging themselves in one great crescent across the room in front of the master's desk. Each read a verse—neither more nor less—often leaving the half of a sentence to be taken up as a new subject in a new key; thus perverting what was intended as an assistance to find the truth into a means of hiding it—a process constantly repeated, and with far more serious results, when the words of truth fall, not into the hands of the incapable, but under the protection of the ambitious.

The chapter that came in its turn was one to be pondered over by the earnest student of human nature, not one to be blundered over by boys who had still less reverence for humanity than they had for Scripture. It was a good thing that they were not the sacred fountains of the New Testament that were thus dabbled in—not, however, that the latter were considered at all more precious or worthy; as Saturday and the Shorter Catechism would show.

Not knowing the will of the master, Annie had not dared to stand up with the class, although she could read very fairly. A few moments after it was dismissed she felt herself overshadowed by an awful presence, and, looking up, saw, as she had expected, the face of the master bending down over her. He proceeded to question her, but for some time she was too frightened to give a rational account of her acquirements, the best of which were certainly not of a kind to be appreciated by the master, even if she had understood them herself sufficiently to set them out before him. For, besides her aunt, who had taught her to read, and nothing more, her only instructors had been Nature, with her whole staff, including the sun, moon, and wind; the grass, the corn, Brownie the cow, and her own faithful subject, Dowie. Still, it was a great mortification to her to be put into the spelling-book, which excluded her from the Bible-class. She was also condemned to follow with an uncut quill, over and over again, a single straight stroke, set her by the master. Dreadfully dreary she found it, and over it she fell fast asleep. Her head dropped on her outstretched arm, and the quill dropped from her sleeping fingers—for when Annie slept she all slept. But she was soon roused by the voice of the master. "Ann Anderson!" it called in a burst of thunder to her ear; and she awoke to shame and confusion, amidst the titters of those around her.

Before the morning was over she was called up, along with some children considerably younger than herself, to read and spell. The master stood before them, armed with a long, thick strap of horse-

hide, prepared by steeping in brine, black and supple with constant use, and cut into fingers at one end, which had been hardened in the fire.

Now there was a little pale-faced, delicate-looking boy in the class, who blundered a good deal. Every time he did so the cruel serpent of leather went at him, coiling round his legs with a sudden, hissing swash. This made him cry, and his tears blinded him so that he could not even see the words which he had been unable to read before. But he still attempted to go on, and still the instrument of torture went swish-swash round his little thin legs, raising upon them, no doubt, plentiful blue wales, to be revealed, when he was undressed for the night, to the indignant eyes of pitying mother or aunt, who would yet send him back to the school the next morning without fail.

At length either the heart of the master was touched by the sight of his sufferings and repressed weeping, or he saw that he was compelling the impossible; for he stayed execution, and passed on to the next, who was Annie.

It was no wonder that the trembling child, who could read very fairly, should yet, after such an introduction to the ways of school, fail utterly in making anything like coherence of the sentence before her. What she would have done, had she been left to herself, would have been to take the little boy in her arms and cry too. As it was, she struggled mightily with her tears, and yet she did not read to much better purpose than the poor boy, who was still busy wiping his eyes with his sleeves, alternately, for he never had had a handkerchief. But being a new-comer, and a girl to boot, and her long frock affording no facilities for this kind of incentive to learning, she escaped for the time.

It was a dreadful experience of life, though, that first day at school. Well might the children have prayed with David—"Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great; and let us not fall into the hand of man." And well might the children at many another school respond with a loud *Amen*!

At one o'clock they were dismissed, and went home to dinner, to return at three.

In the afternoon she was set to make figures on a slate. She made figures till her back ached. The monotony of this occupation was relieved only by the sight of the execution of criminal law upon various offending boys; for, as must be already partially evident, the master was a hard man, with a severe, if not an altogether cruel temper, and a quite savage sense of duty. The punishment was mostly in the form of *pandies*,—blows delivered with varying force, but generally with the full swing of the *tag*, as it was commonly called, thrown over the master's shoulder, and brought down with the whole strength of his powerful right arm upon the outstretched hand of the culprit. But there were other modes of punishment, of which the restraints of art would forbid the description, even if it were possible for any writer to conquer his disgust so far as to attempt it.

Annie shivered and quaked. Once she burst out crying, but managed to choke her sobs, if she could not hide her tears.

A fine-looking boy, three or four years older than herself, whose open countenance was set off by masses of dark brown hair, was called up to receive chastisement, merited or unmerited as the case might be; for such a disposition as that of Murdoch Malison must have been more than ordinarily liable to mistake. Justice, according to his idea, consisted in vengeance. And he was fond of justice. He did not want to punish the innocent, it is true; but I doubt whether the discovery of a boy's innocence was not a disappointment to him. Without a word of expostulation or defence, the boy held out his hand, with his arm at full length, received four stinging blows upon it, grew very red in the face, gave a kind of grotesque smile, and returned to his seat with the suffering hand sent into retirement in his trowsers-pocket. Annie's admiration of his courage as well as of his looks, though perhaps unrecognizable as such by herself, may have had its share with her pity in the tears that followed. Somehow or other, at all events, she made up her mind to bear more patiently the persecutions of the little Bruces, and, if ever her turn should come to be punished, as no doubt it would, whether she deserved it or not, to try to take the whipping as she had seen Alec Forbes take it. Poor Annie! If it should come to that—nervous organizations are so different!

At five, the school was dismissed for the day, not without another extempore prayer. A succession of jubilant shouts arose as the boys rushed out into the lane. Every day to them was a cycle of strife, suffering, and deliverance. Birth and death, with the life-struggle between, were shadowed out in it—with this difference, that the God of a corrupt Calvinism, in the person of Murdoch Malison, ruled that world, and not the God revealed in the man Christ Jesus. And most of them having felt the day more or less a burden, were now going home to heaven for the night.

Annie, having no home, was amongst the few exceptions. Dispirited and hopeless—a terrible condition for a child—she wondered how Alec Forbes could be so merry. But he had had his evil things, and they were over; while hers were all about her still. She had but one comfort left—that no one would prevent her from creeping up to her own desolate garret, which was now the dreary substitute for Brownie's stall. Thither the persecuting boys were not likely to follow her. And if the rats were in that garret, so was the cat; or at least the cat knew the way to it. There she might think in peace about some things about which she had never before seemed to have occasion to think.

CHAPTER X

Thus at home, if home it could be called, and at school, Annie's days passed—as most days pass—with family resemblance and individual difference wondrously mingled. She became interested in what she had to learn, if not from the manner in which it was presented to her comprehension, yet from the fact that she had to learn it. Happily or unhappily, too, she began to get used to the sight of the penal suffering of her schoolfellows. Nor had anything of the kind as yet visited her; for it would have been hard for even a more savage master than Mr Malison to find occasion, now that the first disabling influences had passed away, to punish the nervous, delicate, anxious little orphan, who was so diligent, and as quiet as a mouse that fears to awake a sleeping cat. She had a scared look too, that might have moved the heart of Malison even, if he had ever paid the least attention to the looks of children. For the absence of human companionship in bestial forms; the loss of green fields, free to her as to the winds of heaven, and of country sounds and odours; and an almost constant sense of oppression from the propinquity of one or another whom she had cause to fear, were speedily working sad effects upon her. The little colour she had died out of her cheek. Her face grew thin, and her blue eyes looked wistful and large out of their sulken cells. Not often were tears to be seen in them now, and yet they looked well acquainted with tears—like fountains that had been full yesterday. She never smiled, for there was nothing to make her smile.

But she gained one thing by this desolation: the thought of her dead father came to her, as it had never come before; and she began to love him with an intensity she had known nothing of till now. Her mother had died at her birth, and she had been her father's treasure; but in the last period of his illness she had seen less of him, and the blank left by his death had, therefore, come upon her gradually. Before she knew what it was, she had begun to forget. In the minds of children the grass grows very quickly over their buried dead. But now she learned what death meant, or rather what love had been; not, however, as an added grief: it comforted her to remember how her father had loved her; and she said her prayers the oftener, because they seemed to go somewhere near the place where her father was. She did not think of her father being where God was, but of God being where her father was.

The winter was drawing nearer too, and the days were now short and cold. A watery time began, and for many days together the rain kept falling without intermission. I almost think Annie would have died, but for her dead father to think about. On one of those rainy days, however, she began to find that it is in the nature of good things to come in odd ways. It had rained the whole day, not tamely and drizzingly, but in real earnest, dancing and rebounding from the pools, and raising a mist by the very "crash of water-drops." Now and then the school became silent, just to listen to the wide noise made by the busy cataract of the heavens, each drop a messenger of good, a sweet returning of earth's aspirations, in the form of Heaven's *Amen*! But the boys thought only of the fun of dabbling in the torrents as they went home; or the delights of net-fishing in the swollen and muddy rivers, when the fish no longer see their way, but go wandering about in perplexity, just as we human mortals do in a thick fog, whether of the atmosphere or of circumstance.

The afternoon was waning. It was nearly time to go; and still the rain was pouring and plashing around. In the gathering gloom there had been more than the usual amount of wandering from one part of the school to another, and the elder Bruce had stolen to a form occupied by some little boys, next to the one on which Annie sat with her back towards them. If it was not the real object of his expedition, at least he took the opportunity to give Annie a spiteful dig with his elbow; which, operating even more powerfully than he had intended, forced from her an involuntary cry. Now the master indulged in an occasional refinement of the executive, which consisted in this: he threw the *tawse* at the offender, not so much for the sake of hurting—although that, being a not infrequent result, may be supposed to have had a share in the intention—as of humiliating; for the culprit had

to bear the instrument of torture back to the hands of the executioner. He threw the tawse at Annie, half, let us suppose, in thoughtless cruelty, half in evil jest. It struck her rather sharply, before she had recovered breath after the blow Bruce had given her. Ready to faint with pain and terror, she rose, pale as death, and staggered up to the master, carrying the tawse with something of the same horror she would have felt had it been a snake. With a grim smile, he sent her back to her seat. The moment she reached it her self-control gave way, and she burst into despairing, though silent tears. The desk was still shaking with her sobs, and some of the girls were still laughing at her grief, when a new occurrence attracted their attention. Through the noise of the falling rain a still louder rushing of water was heard, and the ears and eyes of all sought the source of the sound. Even Annie turned her wet cheeks and overflowing eyes languidly towards the door. Mr Malison went and opened it. A flood of brown water was pouring into the sunk passage already described. The grating by which the rain-torrent that flowed past the door should have escaped, had got choked, the stream had been dammed back, and in a few moments more the room itself would be flooded. Perceiving this, the master hastily dismissed his pupils.

There could be no better fun for most of the boys and some of the girls, than to wade through the dirty water. Many of the boys dashed through it at once, shoes and all; but some of the boys, and almost all the girls, took off their shoes and stockings. When Annie got a peep of the water, writhing and tumbling in the passage, it looked so ugly, that she shrunk from fording it, especially if she must go in with her bare feet. She could not tell what might be sweeping about in that filthy whirlpool. She was still looking at it as it kept rising, in pale perplexity and dismay, with the forgotten tears still creeping down her checks, when she was caught up from behind by a boy, who, with his shoes and stockings in one hand, now seated her on the other arm. She peeped timidly round to see who it was, and the brave brown eyes of Alec Forbes met hers, lighted by a kind, pitying smile. In that smile the cloudy sky of the universe gently opened, and the face of God looked out upon Annie. It gave her, for the moment, all that she had been dying for want of for many weeks—weeks long as years. She could not help it—she threw her arms round Alec Forbes's neck, laid her wet cheek against his, and sobbed as if her heart would break. She did not care for the Bruces, or the rats, or even the schoolmaster now. Alec clasped her tighter, and vowed in his heart that if ever that brute Malison lifted the tag to her, he would fly at his throat. He would have carried her all the way home, for she was no great weight; but as soon as they were out of the house Annie begged him to set her down so earnestly, that he at once complied, and, bidding her good night, ran home barefoot through the flooded roads.

The Bruces had gone on with the two umbrellas, one of which, more to her discomfort than protection, Annie had shared in coming to the school; so that she was very wet before she got home. But no notice was taken of the condition she was in; the consequence of which was a severe cold and cough, which however, were not regarded as any obstacles to her going to school the next day.

That night she lay awake for a long time, and when at last she fell asleep, she dreamed that she took Alec Forbes home to see her father—out the street and the long road; over the black moor, and through the fields; in at the door of the house, and up the stair to her father's room, where he lay in bed. And she told him how kind Alec had been to her, and how happy she was going to be now. And her father put his hand out of the bed, and laid it on Alec's head, and said: "Thank ye, Alec for being kind to my poor Annie." And then she cried, and woke crying—strange tears out of dreamland, half of delicious sorrow and half of trembling joy.

With what altered feelings she seated herself after the prayer, next day, and glanced round the room to catch a glimpse of her new friend! There he was, radiant as usual. He took no notice of her, and she had not expected that he would. But it was not long before he found out, now that he was interested in her, that her cousins were by no means friendly to her; for their seats were not far from the girl's quarter, and they took every sheltered opportunity of giving her a pinch or a shove, or of making vile grimaces at her.

In the afternoon, while she was busy over an addition sum which was more than usually obstinate, Robert came stealthily behind her, and, licking his hand, watched his opportunity, and rubbed the sum from her slate. The same moment he received a box on the ear, that no doubt filled his head with more noises than that of the impact. He yelled with rage and pain, and, catching sight of the administrator of justice as he was returning to his seat, bawled out in a tone of fierce complaint: "Sanny Forbes!"

"Alexander Forbes! come up," responded the voice of the master. Forbes not being a first-rate scholar, was not a favourite with him, for Mr Malison had no sense for what was fine in character or disposition. Had the name been that of one of his better Latin scholars, the cry of Bruce would most likely have passed unheeded.

"Hold up your hand," he said, without requesting or waiting for an explanation.

Alec obeyed. Annie gave a smothered shriek, and, tumbling from her seat, rushed up to the master. When she found herself face to face with the tyrant, however, not one word could she speak. She opened her mouth, but throat and tongue refused their offices, and she stood gasping. The master stared, his arm arrested in act to strike, and his face turned over his left shoulder, with all the blackness of his anger at Forbes lowering upon Annie. He stood thus for one awful moment, then motioning her aside with a sweep of his head, brought down the tawse upon the hand which Alec had continued to hold outstretched, with the vehemence of accumulated wrath. Annie gave a choking cry, and Alec, so violent was the pain, involuntarily withdrew his hand. But instantly, ashamed of his weakness, he presented it again, and received the remainder of his punishment without flinching. The master then turned to Annie; and finding her still speechless, gave her a push that nearly threw her on her face, and said,

"Go to your seat, Ann Anderson. The next time you do that I will punish you severely."

Annie sat down, and neither sobbed nor cried. But it was days before she recovered from the shock. Once, long after, when she was reading about the smothering of the princes in the Tower, the whole of the physical sensations of those terrible moments returned upon her, and she sprang from her seat in a choking agony.

CHAPTER XI

For some time neither of the Bruces ventured even to make a wry face at her in school; but their behaviour to her at home was only so much the worse.

Two days after the events recorded, as Annie was leaving the kitchen, after worship, to go up to bed, Mr Bruce called her.

"Annie Anderson," he said, "I want to speak to ye."

Annie turned, trembling.

"I see ye ken what it's aboot," he went on, staring her full in the pale face, which grew paler as he stared. "Ye canna luik me i' the face. Whaur's the candy-sugar an' the prunes? I ken weel eneuch whaur they are, and sae do ye."

"I ken naething aboot them," answered Annie, with a sudden revival of energy.

"Dinna lee, Annie. It's ill eneuch to steal, without leein'."

"I'm no leein'," answered she, bursting into tears of indignation. "Wha said 'at I took them?"

"That's naething to the pint. Ye wadna greit that gait gin ye war innocent. I never missed onything afore. And ye ken weel eneuch there's an ee that sees a' thing, and ye canna hide frae hit."

Bruce could hardly have intended that it was by inspiration from on high that he had discovered the thief of his sweets. But he thought it better to avoid mentioning that the informer was his own son Johnnie. Johnnie, on his part, had thought it better not to mention that he had been incited to the act by his brother Robert. And Robert had thought it better not to mention that he did so partly to shield himself, and partly out of revenge for the box on the ear which Alec Forbes had given him. The information had been yielded to the inquisition of the parent, who said with truth that he had never missed anything before; although I suspect that a course of petty and cautious pilfering had at length passed the narrow bounds within which it could be concealed from the lynx eyes inherited from the kingly general. Possibly a bilious attack, which confined the elder boy to the house for two or three days, may have had something to do with the theft; but if Bruce had any suspicions of the sort, he never gave utterance to them.

"I dinna want to hide frae 't," cried Annie. "Guid kens," she went on in desperation, "that I wadna touch a grain o' saut wantin' leave."

"It's a pity, Annie, that some fowk dinna get their ain share o' Mr Malison's tards." (*Tards* was considered a more dignified word than *tag*.) "I dinna like to lick ye mysel', 'cause ye're ither fowk's bairn; but I can hardly haud my han's aff o' ye."

It must not be supposed from this speech that Robert Bruce ever ventured to lay his hands on his own children. He was too much afraid of their mother, who, perfectly submissive and sympathetic in ordinary, would have flown into the rage of a hen with chickens if even her own husband had dared to chastise one of *her* children. The shop might be more Robert's than hers, but the children were more hers than Robert's.

Overcome with shame and righteous anger, Annie burst out in the midst of fresh tears:

"I wish Auntie, wad come an tak me awa'! It's an ill hoose to be in."

These words had a visible effect upon Bruce. He expected a visit from Marget Anderson within a day or two; and he did not know what the effect of the representations of Annie might be. The use of her money had not been secured to him for any lengthened period—Dowie, anxious to take all precautions for his little mistress, having consulted a friendly lawyer on the subject, lest she should be left defenceless in the hands of a man of whose moral qualities Dowie had no exalted opinion. The sale having turned out better than had been expected, the sum committed to Bruce was two hundred pounds, to lose which now would be hardly less than ruin. He thought it better, therefore, not doubting Annie to be the guilty person, to count the few lumps of sugar he might lose, as an additional trifle of interest, and not quarrel with his creditor for extorting it. So with the weak cunning of his kind,

he went to the shop, and bringing back a bit of sugar-candy, about the size of a pigeon's egg, said to the still weeping child:

"Dinna greit, Annie. I canna bide to see ye greitin'. Gin ye want a bittie o' sugar ony time, jist tell me, an' dinna gang helpin' yoursel'. That's a'. Hae."

He thrust the lump into Annie's hand; but she dropped it on the floor with disgust, and rushed up-stairs to her bed as fast as the darkness would let her: where, notwithstanding her indignation, she was soon fast asleep.

Bruce searched for the sugar-candy which she had rejected, until he found it. He then restored it to the drawer whence he had taken it—which he could find in the dark with perfect ease—resolving as he did so, to be more careful in future of offending little Annie Anderson.

When the day arrived upon which he expected Marget's visit, that being a Saturday, Bruce was on the watch the whole afternoon. From his shop-door he could see all along the street, and a good way beyond it; and being very quick-sighted, he recognized Marget at a great distance by her shawl, as she sat in a slow-nearing cart.

"Annie!" he called, opening the inner door, as he returned behind the counter.

Annie, who was up-stairs in her own room, immediately appeared.

"Annie," he said, "rin oot at the back door, and through the yard, and ower to Laurie Lumley's, and tell him to come ower to me direckly. Dinna come back withoot him. There's a guid bairn!"

He sent her upon this message, knowing well enough that the man had gone into the country that day, and that there was no one at his house who would be likely to know where he had gone. He hoped, therefore, that she would go and look for him in the town, and so be absent during her aunt's visit.

"Weel, Marget," he said, with his customary greeting, in which the foreign oil sought to overcome the home-bred vinegar, "hoo are ye the day?"

"Ow! nae that ill," answered Marget with a sigh.

"And hoo's Mr and Mistress Peterson?"

"Brawly. Hoo's Annie comin' on?"

"Nae that ill. She's some royt (riotous) jist."

He thought to please her by the remark, because she had been in the habit of saying so herself. But distance had made Annie dearer; and her aunt's nose took fire with indignation, as she replied:

"The lassie's weel eneuch. *I* saw naething o' the sort aboot her. Gin ye canna guide her, that's *your* wyte."

Bruce was abashed, but not confounded. He was ready in a moment.

"I never kent ony guid come o' bein' ower sair upo' bairns," said he. "She's as easy guidit as a coo gaein' hame at nicht, only ye maun jist lat her ken that ye're there, ye ken."

"Ow! ay," said Marget, a little nonplussed in her turn.

"Wad ye like to see her?"

"What ither did I come for?"

"Weel, I s' gang and luik for her."

He went to the back door, and called aloud: "Annie, yer auntie's here and wants to see ye."

"She'll be here in a minute," he said to Marget, as he re-entered the shop.

After a little more desultory conversation, he pretended to be surprised that she she did not make her appearance, and going once more to the door, called her name several times. He then pretended to search for her in the garden and all over the house, and returned with the news that she was nowhere to be seen.

"She's feared that ye're come to tak her wi' ye, and she's run awa oot aboot some gait. I'll sen' the laddies to luik for her."

"Na, na, never min'. Gin she disna want to see me, I'm sure I needna want to see her. I'll awa doon the toon," said Margaret, her face growing very red as she spoke.

She bustled out of the shop, too angry with Annie to say farewell to Bruce. She had not gone far, however, before Annie came running out of a narrow close, almost into her aunt's arms. But there was no refuge for her there.

"Ye little limmer!" cried Margaret, seizing her by the shoulder, "what gart ye rin awa'? I dinna want ye, ye brat!"

"I didna rin awa', Auntie."

"Robert Bruce cried on ye to come in, himsel'."

"It wis himsel' that sent me to Laurie Lumley's to tell him to come till him direckly."

Margaret could not make "head or tail" of it. But as Annie had never told her a lie, she could not doubt her. So taking time to think about it, she gave her some rough advice and a smooth penny, and went away on her errands. She was not long in coming to the conclusion that Bruce wanted to sunder her and the child; and this offended her so much, that she did not go near the shop for a long time. Thus Annie was forsaken, and Bruce had what he wanted.

He needed not have been so full of scheming, though. Annie never said a word to her aunt about their treatment of her. It is one of the marvels in the constitution of children, how much they will bear without complaining. Parents and guardians have no right to suppose that all is well in the nursery or school-room, merely from the fact that the children do not complain. Servants and tutors may be cruel, and children will be silent—partly, I presume, because they forget so soon.

But vengeance of a sort soon overtook Robert Bruce the younger; for the evil spirit in him, derived from no such remote ancestor as the king, would not allow him a long respite from evil-doing, even in school. He knew Annie better than his father, that she was not likely to complain of anything, and that the only danger lay in the chance of being discovered in the deed. One day when the master had left the room to confer with some visitor at the door, he spied Annie in the act of tying her shoe. Perceiving, as he believed, at a glance, that Alec Forbes was totally unobservant, he gave her an ignominious push from behind, which threw her out on her face in the middle of the floor. But Alec did catch sight of him in the very deed, was down upon him in a moment, and, having already proved that a box on the ear was of no lasting effect, gave him a downright good thrashing. He howled vigorously, partly from pain, partly in the hope that the same consequences as before would overtake Forbes; and therefore was still howling when Mr Malison re-entered.

"Robert Bruce, come up," bawled he, the moment he opened the door.

And Robert Bruce went up, and notwithstanding his protestations, received a second, and far more painful punishment from the master, who, perhaps, had been put out of temper by his visitor. But there is no good in speculating on that or any other possibility in the matter; for, as far at least as the boys could see, the master had no fixed principle as to the party on whom the punishment should fall. Punishment, in his eyes, was perhaps enough in itself. If he was capable of seeing that *punishment*, as he called it, falling on the wrong person, was not *punishment*, but only *suffering*, certainly he had not seen the value of the distinction.

If Bruce howled before, he howled tenfold now, and went home howling. Annie was sorry for him, and tried to say a word of comfort to him; but he repelled her advances with hatred and blows. As soon as he reached the shop he told his father that Forbes had beaten him without his having even spoken to him, which was as correct as it was untrue, and that the master had taken Forbes's part, and *licked* him over again, of which latter assertion there was proof enough on his person. Robert the elder was instantly filled with smouldering wrath, and from that moment hated Alec Forbes. For, like many others of low nature, he had yet some animal affection for his children, combined with an endless amount of partisanship on their behalf, which latter gave him a full right to the national motto of Scotland. Indeed, for nothing in the world but money, would he have sacrificed what seemed to him their interests.

A man must learn to love his children, not because they are his, but because they are *children*, else his love will be scarcely a better thing at last than the party-spirit of the faithful politician. I doubt if it will prove even so good a thing.

From this hatred to Alec Forbes came some small consequences at length. But for the present it found no outlet save in sneers and prophetic hints of an "ill hinner en'."

CHAPTER XII

In her inmost heart Annie dedicated herself to the service of Alec

Forbes. Nor was it long before she had an opportunity of helping him.

One Saturday the master made his appearance in black instead of white stockings, which was regarded by the scholars as a bad omen; and fully were their prognostications justified, on this occasion, at least. The joy of the half-holiday for Scotch boys and girls has a terrible weight laid in the opposite scale—I mean the other half of the day. This weight, which brings the day pretty much on a level with all other days, consists in a free use of the Shorter Catechism. This, of course, made them hate the Catechism, though I am not aware that that was of any great consequence, or much to be regretted. For my part, I wish the spiritual engineers who constructed it had, after laying the grandest foundation-stone that truth could afford them, glorified God by going no further. Certainly many a man would have enjoyed Him sooner, if it had not been for their work. But, alas! the Catechism was not enough, even of the kind. The tormentors of youth had gone further, and provided what they called Scripture proofs of the various assertions of the Catechism; a support of which it stood greatly in need. Alas! I say, for the boys and girls who had to learn these proofs, called texts of Scripture, but too frequently only morsels torn bleeding and shapeless from "the lovely form of the Virgin Truth!" For these tasks, combined with the pains and penalties which accompanied failure, taught them to dislike the Bible as well as the Catechism, and that was a matter of altogether different import.

Every Saturday, then, Murdoch Malison's pupils had to learn so many questions of the Shorter Catechism, with proofs from Scripture; and whoever failed in this task was condemmed to imprisonment for the remainder of the day, or, at least, till the task should be accomplished. The imprisonment was sometimes commuted for chastisement—or finished off with it, when it did not suit the convenience of the master to enforce the full term of a school-day. Upon certain Saturdays, moreover, one in each month, I think, a repetition was required of all the questions and proofs that had been, or ought to have been, learned since the last observance of the same sort.

Now the day in question was one of these of accumulated labour, and Alec Forbes only succeeded in bringing proof of his inability for the task, and was in consequence condemned "to be keepit in"—a trial hard enough for one whose chief delights were the open air and the active exertion of every bodily power.

Annie caught sight of his mortified countenance, the expression of which, though she had not heard his doom, so filled her with concern and indignation, that—her eyes and thoughts fixed upon him, at the other end of the class—she did not know when her turn came, but allowed the master to stand before her in bootless expectation. He did not interrupt her, but with a refinement of cruelty that ought to have done him credit in his own eyes, waited till the universal silence had at length aroused Annie to self-consciousness and a sense of annihilating confusion. Then, with a smile on his thin lips, but a lowering thunder-cloud on his brow, he repeated the question:

"What doth every sin deserve?"

Annie, bewildered, and burning with shame at finding herself the core of the silence—feeling is if her poor little spirit stood there naked to the scoffs and jeers around—could not recall a word of the answer given in the Catechism. So, in her bewilderment, she fell back on her common sense and experience, which, she ought to have known, had nothing to do with the matter in hand.

"What doth every sin deserve?" again repeated the tyrant.

"A lickin'," whimpered Annie, and burst into tears.

The master seemed much inclined to consider her condemned out of her own mouth, and give her a whipping at once; for it argued more than ignorance to answer *a whipping*, instead of *the wrath and curse of God*, &c., &c., as plainly set down in the Scotch Targum. But reflecting, perhaps, that she was a girl, and a little one, and that although it would be more gratification to him to whip her,

it might be equal suffering to her to be *kept in*, he gave that side wave of his head which sealed the culprit's doom, and Annie took her place among the condemned, with a flutter of joy at her heart that Alec Forbes would not be left without a servant to wait upon him. A few more boys made up the unfortunate party, but they were all little ones, and so there was no companion for Forbes, who evidently felt the added degradation of being alone. The hour arrived; the school was dismissed; the master strode out, locking the door behind him; and the defaulters were left alone, to chew the bitter cud of ill-cooked Theology.

For some time a dreary silence reigned. Alec sat with his elbows on his desk, biting his nails, and gnawing his hands. Annie sat dividing her silent attention between her book and Alec. The other boys were, or seemed to be, busy with their catechisms, in the hope of getting out as soon as the master returned. At length Alec took out his knife, and began, for very vacancy, to whittle away at the desk before him. When Annie saw that, she crept across to his form, and sat down on the end of it. Alec looked up at her, smiled, and went on with his whittling. Annie slid a little nearer to him, and asked him to hear her say her catechism. He consented, and she repeated the lesson perfectly.

"Now let me hear you, Alec," she said.

"Na, thank ye, Annie. I canna say't. And I wonna say't for a' the dominies in creation."

"But he'll lick ye, Alec; an' I 'canna bide it," said Annie, the tears beginning to fill her eyes.

"Weel, I'll try—to please you, Annie," said Alec, seeing that the little thing was in earnest.

How her heart bounded with delight! That great boy, so strong and so brave, trying to learn a lesson to please her!

But it would not do.

"I canna min' a word o' 't, Annie. I'm dreidfu' hungry, forbye. I was in a hurry wi' my brakfast the day. Gin I had kent what was comin', I wad hae laid in a better stock," he added, laughing rather drearily.

As he spoke he looked up; and his eyes wandered from one window to another for a few moments after he had ceased speaking.

"Na; it's no use," he resumed at last. "I hae eaten ower muckle for that, ony gait."

Annie was as pitiful over Alec's hunger as any mother over her child's. She felt it pure injustice that he should ever be hungry. But, unable to devise any help, she could only say,

"I dinna ken what ye mean, Alec."

"Whan I was na bigger than you, Annie, I could win oot at a less hole than that," answered he, and pointed to the open wooden pane in an upper corner of one the windows; "but I hae eaten ower muckle sin syne."

And he laughed again; but it was again an unsuccessful laugh.

Annie sprang to her feet.

"Gin ye could win throu that hole ance, I can win throu't noo, Alec.

Jist haud me up a bit. Ye *can* lift me, ye ken."

And she looked up at him shyly and gratefully.

"But what will ye do when ye *are* oot, Annie?"

"Rin hame, and fess a loaf wi' me direckly."

"But Rob Bruce'll see yer heid atween yer feet afore he'll gie ye a loaf, or a mou'fu' o' cakes either; an' it's ower far to rin to my mither's. Murdoch wad be back lang or that."

"Jist help me oot, an' lea' the lave to me," said Annie, confidently. "Gin I dinna fess a loaf o' white breid, never lippen (trust) to me again."

The idea of the bread, always a rarity and consequent delicacy to Scotch country boys, so early in the century as the date of my story, was too much for Alec's imagination. He jumped up, and put his head out of one of those open panes to reconnoitre. He saw a woman approaching whom he knew.

"I say, Lizzie," he called.

The woman stopped.

"What's yer wull, Maister Alec?"

"Jist stan' there an' pu' this lassie oot. We're a' keepit in thegither, and nearhan' hungert."

"The Lord preserve 's! I'll gang for the key."

"Na, na; *we* wad hae to pay for that. Tak her oot—that's a' we want."

"He's a coorse crayter—that maister o' yours. I wad gang to see him hangt."

"Bide a wee; that'll come in guid time," said Alec, pseudo-prophetically.

"Weel I s' hae a pu' at the legs o' him, to help him to jeedgement; for he'll be the deith o' ane or twa o' ye afore lang."

"Never min' Murder Malison. Will ye tak oot the bit lassie?"

"Od will I! Whaur is she?"

Alec jumped down and held her up to the open pane, not a foot square. He told her to put her arms through first. Then between them they got her head through, whereupon Lizzie caught hold of her—so low was the school-room—and dragged her out, and set her on her feet. But alas, a window was broken in the process!

"Noo, Annie," cried Alec, "never min' the window. Rin."

She was off like a live bullet.

She scampered home prepared to encounter all dangers. The worst of them all to her mind was the danger of not succeeding, and of so breaking faith with Alec. She had sixpence of her own in coppers in her box,—the only difficulty was to get into the house and out again without being seen. By employing the utmost care and circumspection, she got in by the back or house door unperceived, and so up to her room. In a moment more the six pennies were in her hand, and she in the street; for she did not use the same amount of precaution in getting out again, not minding discovery so much now, if she could only have a fair start. No one followed her, however. She bolted into a baker's shop.

"A saxpenny-loaf," she panted out.

"Wha wants it?" asked the baker's wife.

"There's the bawbees," answered Annie, laying them on the counter.

The baker's wife gave her the loaf, with the biscuit which, from time immemorial, had always graced a purchase to the amount of sixpence; and Annie sped back to the school like a runaway horse to his stable.

As she approached, out popped the head of Alec Forbes. He had been listening for the sound of her feet. She held up the loaf as high as she could, and he stretched down as low as he could, and so their hands met on the loaf.

"Thank ye, Annie," said Alec with earnestness. "I shanna forget this.

Hoo got ye't?"

"Never ye min' that. I didna steal't," answered Annie. "But I maun win in again," she added, suddenly awaking to that difficult necessity, and looking up at the window above her head.

"I'm a predestined idiot!" said Alec, with an impious allusion to the Shorter Catechism, as he scratched his helpless head. "I never thocht o' that."

It was clearly impossible.

"Ye'll catch't," said one of the urchins to Annie, with his nose flattened against the window.

The roses of Annie's face turned pale, but she answered stoutly,

"Weel! I care as little as the lave o' ye, I'm thinkin'."

By this time the "idiot" had made up his mind. He never could make up any other than a bull-headed mind.

"Rin hame, Annie," he said; "and gin Murder offers to lay a finger o' ye upo' Monday, *I'll* murder him. Faith! I'll kill him. Rin hame afore he comes and catches ye at the window."

"No, no, Alec," pleaded Annie.

"Haud yer tongue," interrupted Alec, "and rin, will ye?"

Seeing he was quite determined, Annie, though loath to leave him, and in terror of what was implied in the threats he uttered against the master and might be involved in the execution of them, obeyed him and walked leisurely home, avoiding the quarters in which there was a chance of meeting her gaoler.

She found that no one had observed her former visit; the only remarks made being some *goody* ones about the disgrace of being kept in.

When Mr Malison returned to the school about four o'clock, he found all quiet as death. The boys appeared totally absorbed in *committing* the Shorter Catechism, as if the Shorter Catechism was a sin, which perhaps it was not. But, to his surprise, which he pretended to be considerably greater than it really was, the girl was absent.

"Where is Ann Anderson?" were the first words he condescended to utter.

"Gane hame," cried two of the little prisoners.

"Gone home!" echoed the master in a tone of savage incredulity; although not only was it plain that she was gone, but he must have known well enough, from former experience, how her escape had been effected.

"Yes," said Forbes; "it was me made her go. I put her out at the window. And I broke the window," he added, knowing that it must soon be found out, "but I'll get it mended on Monday."

Malison turned as white as a sheet with venomous rage. Indeed, the hopelessness of the situation had made Alec speak with too much nonchalance.

Anxious to curry favour, the third youngster now called out,

"Sandy Forbes gart her gang an' fess a loaf o' white breid."

Of this bread, the wretched informer had still some of the crumbs sticking to his jacket—so vitiating is the influence of a reign of terror. The bread was eaten, and the giver might be betrayed in the hope of gaining a little favour with the tyrant.

"Alexander Forbes, come up."

Beyond this point I will not here prosecute the narrative.

Alec bore his punishment with great firmness, although there were few beholders, and none of them worth considering. After he had spent his wrath, the master allowed them all to depart without further reference to the Shorter Catechism.

CHAPTER XIII

The Sunday following was anything but a day of repose for Annie—she looked with such frightful anticipation to the coming Monday. Nor was the assurance with which Alec Forbes had sent her away, and which she was far from forgetting, by any means productive of unmingled consolation; for, in a conflict with such a power of darkness as Mr Malison, how could Alec, even if sure to be victorious as any knight of old story, come off without injury terrible and not to be contemplated! Yet, strange to tell—or was it really strange?—as she listened to the evening sermon, a sermon quietly and gently enforcing the fate of the ungodly, it was not with exultation at the tardy justice that would overtake such men as Murdock Malison or Robert Bruce, nor yet with pity for their fate, that she listened; but with anxious heart-aching fear for her friend, the noble, the generous Alec Forbes, who withstood authority, and was therefore in danger of hell-fire. About her own doom, speculation was uninteresting.

The awful morning dawned. When she woke, and the thought of what she had to meet came back on her, though it could hardly be said to have been a moment absent all night long, she turned, not metaphorically, but physically sick. Yet breakfast time would come, and worship did not fail to follow, and then to school she must go. There all went on as usual for some time. The Bible-class was called up, heard, and dismissed; and Annie was beginning to hope that the whole affair was somehow or other wrapt up and laid by. She had heard nothing of Alec's fate after she had left him imprisoned, and except a certain stoniness in his look, which a single glance discovered, his face gave no sign. She dared not lift her eyes from the spelling-book before her, to look in the direction of the master. No murderer could have felt more keenly as if all the universe were one eye, and that eye fixed on him, than Annie.

Suddenly the awful voice resounded through the school, and the words it uttered—though even after she heard them it seemed too terrible to be true—were,

"Ann Anderson, come up."

For a moment she lost consciousness—or at least memory. When she recovered herself, she found herself standing before the master. His voice seemed to have left two or three unanswered questions somewhere in her head. What they were she had no idea. But presently he spoke again, and, from the tone, what he said was evidently the repetition of a question—probably put more than once before.

"Did you, or did you not, go out at the window on Saturday?"

She did not see that Alec Forbes had left his seat, and was slowly lessening the distance between them and him.

"Yes," she answered, trembling from head to foot.

"Did you, or did you not, bring a loaf of bread to those who were kept in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you get it?"

"I bought it, sir."

"Where did you get the money?"

Of course every eye in the school was fixed upon her, those of her cousins sparkling with delight.

"I got it oot o' my ain kist, sir."

"Hold up your hand."

Annie obeyed, with a most pathetic dumb terror pleading in her face.

"Don't touch her," said Alec Forbes, stepping between the executioner and his victim. "You know well enough it was all my fault. I told you so on Saturday."

Murder Malison, as the boys called him, turned with the tawse over his shoulder, whence it had been on the point of swooping upon Annie, and answered him with a hissing blow over his down-bent head, followed by a succession of furious blows upon every part of his person, as it twisted and writhed and doubled; till, making no attempt at resistance, he was knocked down by the storm, and lay prostrate under the fierce lashes, the master holding him down with one foot, and laying on with the whole force of the opposite arm. At length Malison stopped, exhausted, and turning, white with rage, towards Annie, who was almost in a fit with agony, repeated the order:

"Hold up your hand."

But as he turned Alec bounded to his feet, his face glowing, and his eyes flashing, and getting round in front, sprang at the master's throat, just as the tawse was descending. Malison threw him off, and lifting his weapon once more, swept it with a stinging lash round his head and face. Alec, feeling that this was no occasion on which to regard the rules of fair fight, stooped his head, and rushed, like a ram, or a negro, full tilt against the pit of Malison's stomach, and doubling him up, sent him with a crash into the peat fire which was glowing on the hearth. In the attempt to save himself, he thrust his hand right into it, and Alec and Annie were avenged.

Alec rushed to drag him off the fire; but he was up before he reached him.

"Go home!" he bawled to the scholars generally, and sat down at his desk to hide his suffering.

For one brief moment there was silence. Then a tumult arose, a shouting, and holloing, and screeching, and the whole school rushed to the door, as if the devil had been after them to catch the hindmost. Strange uproar invaded the ears of Glamerton—strange, that is, at eleven o'clock in the forenoon of Monday—the uproar of jubilant freedom.

But the culprits, Annie and Alec, stood and stared at the master, whose face was covered with one hand, while the other hung helpless at his side. Annie stopped partly out of pity for the despot, and partly because Alec stopped. Alec stopped because he was the author of the situation—at least he never could give any better reason.

At length Mr Malison lifted his head, and made a movement towards his hat. He started when he saw the two standing there. But the moment he looked at them their courage failed them.

"Rin, Annie!" said Alec.

Away she bolted, and he after her, as well as he could, which was not with his usual fleetness by any means. When Annie had rounded a corner, not in the master's way home, she stopped, and looked back for Alec. He was a good many paces behind her; and then first she discovered the condition of her champion. For now that the excitement was over, he could scarcely walk, and evidence in kind was not wanting that from head to foot he must be one mass of wales and bruises. He put his hand on her shoulder to help him along, and made no opposition to her accompanying him as far as the gate of his mother's garden, which was nearly a mile from the town, on the further bank of one of the rivers watering the valley-plain in which Glamerton had stood for hundreds of years. Then she went slowly home, bearing with her the memory of the smile which, in spite of pain, had illuminated his tawse-waled cheeks, as she took her leave.

"Good-bye, dear Alec!" she had said.

"Good-bye, Annie dear," he had answered, with the smile; and she had watched him crawl into the house before she turned away.

When she got home, she saw at once, from the black looks of the Bruce, that the story, whether in its trite shape or not, had arrived before her.

Nothing was said, however, till after worship; when Bruce gave her a long lecture, as impressive as the creature was capable of making it, on the wickedness and certain punishment of "takin' up wi' ill loons like Sandy Forbes, wha was brakin' his mither's hert wi' his baad behaviour." But he came to the conclusion, as he confided to his wife that night, that the lassie "was growin' hardent already;" probably from her being in a state of too great excitement from the events of the day to waste a tear upon his lecture; for, as she said in the hearing of the rottans, when she went up to bed, she "*didna*

care a flee for't." But the moment she lay down she fell to weeping bitterly over the sufferings of Alec. She was asleep in a moment after, however. If it had not been for the power of sleeping that there was in the child, she must long before now have given way to the hostile influences around her, and died.

There was considerable excitement about the hearths of Glamerton, generally, in consequence of the news of the master's defeat carried home by the children. For, although it was amazing how little of the doings at school the children were in the habit of reporting—so little, indeed, that this account involved revelations of the character and proceedings of Mr Malison which appeared to many of the parents quite incredible—the present occurrence so far surpassed the ordinary, and had excited the beholders so much, that they could not be quiet about it. Various were the judgments elicited by the story. The religious portion of the community seemed to their children to side with the master; the worldly—namely, those who did not profess to be particularly religious—all sided with Alec Forbes; with the exception of a fish-cadger, who had one son, the plague of his life.

Amongst the religious, there was, at least, one exception, too; but he had no children of his own, and had a fancy for Alec Forbes. That exception was Thomas Crann, the stone-mason.

CHAPTER XIV

Thomas Crann was building a house; for he was both contractor—in a small way, it is true, not undertaking to do anything without the advance of a good part of the estimate—and day-labourer at his own job. Having arrived at the point in the process where the assistance of a carpenter was necessary, he went to George Macwha, whom he found at his bench, planing. This bench was in a work-shop, with two or three more benches in it, some deals set up against the wall, a couple of red cart-wheels sent in for repair, and the tools and materials of his trade all about. The floor was covered with shavings, or *spales*, as they are called by northern consent, which a poor woman was busy gathering into a sack. After a short and gruff greeting on the part of Crann, and a more cordial reply from Macwha, who ceased his labour to attend to his visitor, they entered on the business-question, which having been carefully and satisfactorily discussed, with the aid of various diagrams upon the half-planed deal, Macwha returned to his work, and the conversation took a more general scope, accompanied by the sounds of Macwha's busy instrument.

"A terrible laddie, that Sandy Forbes!" said the carpenter, with a sort of laugh in the *whishk* of his plane, as he threw off a splendid *spale*. "They say he's lickit the dominie, and 'maist been the deid o' him."

"I hae kent waur laddies nor Sandy Forbes," was Thomas's curt reply.

"Ow, deed ay! I ken naething agen the laddie. Him an' oor Willie's unco throng."

To this the sole answer Thomas gave was a grunt, and a silence of a few seconds followed before he spoke, reverting to the point from which they had started.

"I'm no clear but Alec micht hae committed a waur sin than thrashin' the dominie. He's a dour crater, that Murdoch Malison, wi' his fair face and his picket words. I doot the bairns hae the warst o' 't in general. And for Alec I hae great houpes. He comes o' a guid stock. His father, honest man, was ane o' the Lord's ain, although he didna mak' sic a stan' as, maybe, he ought to hae dune; and gin his mither has been jist raither saft wi' him, and gi'en him ower lang a tether, he'll come a' richt afore lang, for he's worth luikin efter."

"I dinna richtly unnerstan' ye, Thamas."

"I dinna think the Lord 'll tyne the grip o' his father's son. He's no convertit yet, but he's weel worth convertin', for there's guid stuff in him."

Thomas did not consider how his common sense was running away with his theology. But Macwha was not the man to bring him to book on that score. His only reply lay in the careless *whishk whashk* of his plane. Thomas resumed:

"He jist wants what ye want, Gleorge Macwha."

"What's that, Thamas?" asked George, with a grim attempt at a smile, as if to say: "I know what's coming, but I'm not going to mind it."

"He jist wants to be weel shaken ower the mou' o' the pit. He maun smell the brunstane o' the everlastin' burnin's. He's nane o' yer saft buirds, that ye can sleek wi' a sweyp o' yer airm; he's a blue whunstane that's hard to dress, but, anes dressed, it bides the weather bonnie. I like to work upo' hard stane mysel. Nane o' yer saft freestane, 'at ye cud cut wi' a k-nife, for me!"

"Weel, I daursay ye're richt, Thamas."

"And, forbye, they say he took a' his ain licks ohn said a word, and flew at the maister only whan he was gaein to lick the puir orphan lassie—Jeames Anderson's lassie, ye ken."

"Ow! ay. It's the same tale they a' tell. I hae nae doobt it's correck."

"Weel, lat him tak it, than, an' be thankfu'! for it's no more than was weel waured (spent) on him."

With these conclusive words, Thomas departed. He was no sooner out of the shop, than out started, from behind the deal boards that stood against the wall, Willie, the eldest hope of the

house of Macwha, a dusky-skinned, black-eyed, curly-headed, roguish-looking boy, Alec Forbes's companion and occasional accomplice. He was more mischievous than Alec, and sometimes led him into unforeseen scrapes; but whenever anything extensive had to be executed, Alec was always the leader.

"What are ye hidin' for, ye rascal?" said his father. "What mischeef hae ye been efter noo?"

"Naething by ordinar'," was Willie's cool reply.

"What garred ye hide, than?"

"Tam Crann never sets ee upo' me, but he misca's me, an' I dinna like to be misca'd, mair nor ither fowk."

"Ye get nae mair nor ye deserve, I doobt," returned George. "Here, tak the chisel, and cut that beadin' into len'ths."

"I'm gaein' ower the water to speir efter Alec," was the excusatory rejoinder.

"Ay, ay! pot and pan!—What ails Alec noo?"

"Mr Malison's nearhan' killed him. He hasna been at the schuil this twa days."

With these words Willie bolted from the shop, and set off at full speed. The latter part of his statement was perfectly true.

The day after the fight, Mr Malison came to the school as usual, but with his arm in a sling. To Annie's dismay, Alec did not make his appearance.

It had of course been impossible to conceal his corporal condition from his mother; and the heart of the widow so yearned over the suffering of her son, though no confession of suffering escaped Alec's lips, that she vowed in anger that he should never cross the door of that school again. For three or four days she held immovably to her resolution, much to Alec's annoyance, and to the consternation of Mr Malison, who feared that he had not only lost a pupil, but made an enemy. For Mr Malison had every reason for being as smooth-faced with the parents as he always was: he had ulterior hopes in Glamerton. The clergyman was getting old, and Mr Malison was a licentiate of the Church; and although the people had no direct voice in the filling of the pulpit, it was very desirable that a candidate should have none but friends in the parish.

Mr Malison made no allusion whatever to the events of Monday, and things went on as usual in the school, with just one exception: for a whole week the tawse did not make its appearance. This was owing in part at least to the state of his hand; but if he had ever wished to be freed from the necessity of using the lash, he might have derived hope from the fact that somehow or other the boys were during this week no worse than usual. I do not pretend to explain the fact, and beg leave to refer it to occult meteorological influences.

As soon as school was over on that first day of Alec's absence, Annie darted off on the road to Howglen, where he lived, and never dropped into a walk till she reached the garden-gate. Fully conscious of the inferiority of her position, she went to the kitchen door. The door was opened to her knock before she had recovered breath enough to speak. The servant, seeing a girl with a shabby dress, and a dirty bonnet, from underneath which hung disorderly masses of hair—they would have *glinted* in the eye of the sun, but in the eye of the maid they looked only dusky and disreputable—for Annie was not kept so tidy on the interest of her money as she had been at the farm—the girl, I say, seeing this, and finding besides, as she thought, that Annie had nothing to say, took her for a beggar, and returning into the kitchen, brought her a piece of oat-cake, the common dole to the young mendicants of the time. Annie's face flushed crimson, but she said gently, having by this time got her runaway breath a little more under control,

"No, I thank ye; I'm no a beggar. I only wanted to ken hoo Alec was the day."

"Come in," said the girl, anxious to make some amends for her blunder, "and I'll tell the mistress."

Annie would gladly have objected, contenting herself with the maid's own account; but she felt rather than understood that there would be something undignified in refusing to face Alec's mother;

so she followed the maid into the kitchen, and sat down on the edge of a wooden chair, like a perching bird, till she should return.

"Please, mem, here's a lassie wantin' to ken hoo Maister Alec is the day," said Mary, with the handle of the parlour door in her hand.

"That must be little Annie Anderson, mamma," said Alec, who was lying on the sofa very comfortable, considering what he had to lie upon.

It may be guessed at once that Scotch was quite discouraged at home.

Alec had told his mother all about the affair; and some of her friends from Glamerton, who likewise had sons at the school, had called and given their versions of the story, in which the prowess of Alec made more of than in his own account. Indeed, all his fellow-scholars except the young Bruces, sung his praises aloud; for, whatever the degree of their affection for Alec, every one of them hated the master—a terrible thought for him, if he had been able to appreciate it; but I do not believe he had any suspicion of the fact that he was the centre of converging thoughts of revengeful dislike. So the mother was proud of her boy—far prouder than she was willing for him to see: indeed, she put on the guise of the offended proprieties as much as she could in his presence, thus making Alec feel like a culprit in hers, which was more than she intended, or would have liked, could she have peeped into his mind. So she could not help feeling some interest in Annie, and some curiosity to see her. She had known James Anderson, her father, and he had been her guest more than once when he had called upon business. Everybody had liked him; and this general approbation was owing to no lack of character, but to his genuine kindness of heart. So Mrs Forbes was prejudiced in Annie's favour—but far more by her own recollections of the father, than by her son's representations of the daughter.

"Tell her to come up, Mary," she said.

So Annie, with all the disorganization of school about her, was shown, considerably to her discomfort, into Mrs Forbes's dining-room.

There was nothing remarkable in the room; but to Annie's eyes it seemed magnificent, for carpet and curtains, sideboard and sofa, were luxuries altogether strange to her eyes. So she entered very timidly, and stood trembling and pale—for she rarely blushed except when angry—close to the door. But Alec scrambled from the sofa, and taking hold of her by both hands, pulled her up to his mother.

"There she is, mamma!" he said.

And Mrs Forbes, although her sense of the fitness of things was not gratified at seeing her son treat with such familiarity a girl so neglectedly attired, yet received her kindly and shook hands with her.

"How do you do, Annie?" she said.

"Quite well, I thank ye, mem," answered Annie, showing in her voice that she was owerawed by the grand lady, yet mistress enough of her manners not to forget a pretty modest courtesy as she spoke.

"What's gaein' on at the school the day, Annie?" asked Alec.

"Naething by ordidar," answered Annie, the sweetness of her tones contrasting with the roughness of the dialect. "The maister's a hantle quaieter than usual. I fancy he's a' the better behaved for's brunt fingers. But, oh, Alec!"

And here the little maiden burst into a passionate fit of crying.

"What's the matter, Annie," said Mrs Forbes, as she drew her nearer, genuinely concerned at the child's tears.

"Oh! mem, ye didna see hoo the maister lickit him, or ye wad hae grutten yersel'."

Tears from some mysterious source sprang to Mrs Forbes's eyes. But at the moment Mary opened the door, and said—

"Here's Maister Bruce, mem, wantin' to see ye."

"Tell him to walk up, Mary."

"Oh! no, no, mem; dinna lat him come till I'm out o' this. He'll tak' me wi' him," cried Annie.

Mary stood waiting the result.

"But you must go home, you know, Annie," said Mrs Forbes, kindly.

"Ay, but no wi' *him*," pleaded Annie.

From what Mrs Forbes knew of the manners and character of Bruce, she was not altogether surprised at Annie's reluctance. So, turning to the maid, she said—

"Have you told Mr Bruce that Miss Anderson is here?"

"Me tell him! No, mem. What's *his* business?"

"Mary, you forget yourself."

"Weel, mem, I canna bide him."

"Hold your tongue, Mary," said her mistress, hardly able to restrain her own amusement, "and take the child into my room till he is gone. But perhaps he knows you are here, Annie?"

"He canna ken that, mem. He jumps at things whiles, though, sharp eneuch."

"Well, well! We shall see."

So Mary led Annie away to the sanctuary of Mrs Forbes's bed-room.

But the Bruce was not upon Annie's track at all. His visit wants a few words of explanation.

Bruce's father had been a faithful servant to Mr Forbes's father, who held the same farm before his son, both having been what are called gentlemen-farmers. The younger Bruce, being anxious to set up a shop, had, for his father's sake, been assisted with money by the elder Forbes. This money he had repaid before the death of the old man, who had never asked any interest for it. More than a few years had not passed before Bruce, who had a wonderful capacity for petty business, was known to have accumulated some savings in the bank. Now the younger Forbes, being considerably more enterprising than his father, had spent all his capital upon improvements—draining, fencing, and such like—when a younger brother, to whom he was greatly attached, applied to him for help in an emergency, and he had nothing of his own within his reach wherewith to aid him. In this difficulty he bethought him of Bruce, to borrow from whom would not involve the exposure of the fact that he was in any embarrassment, however temporary—an exposure very undesirable in a country town like Glamerton.

After a thorough investigation of the solvency of Mr Forbes, and a proper delay for consideration besides, Bruce supplied him with a hundred pounds upon personal bond, at the usual rate of interest, for a certain term of years. Mr Forbes died soon after, leaving his affairs in some embarrassment in consequence of his outlay. Mrs Forbes had paid the interest of the debt now for two years; but, as the rent of the farm was heavy, she found this additional trifle a burden. She had good reason, however, to hope for better times, as the farm must soon increase its yield. Mr Bruce, on his part, regarded the widow with somewhat jealous eyes, because he very much doubted whether, when the day arrived, she would be able to pay him the money she owed him. That day was, however, not just at hand. It was this diversion of his resources, and not the moral necessity for a nest-egg, as he had represented the case to Margaret Anderson, which had urged him to show hospitality to Annie Anderson and her little fortune.

So neither was it anxiety for the welfare of Alec that induced him to call on Mrs Forbes. Indeed if Malison had killed him outright, he would have been rather pleased than otherwise. But he was in the habit of reminding the widow of his existence by all occasional call, especially when the time approached for the half-yearly payment of the interest. And now the report of Alec's condition gave him a suitable pretext for looking in upon his debtor, without, as he thought, appearing too greedy after his money.

"Weel, mem, hoo are ye the day?" said he, as he entered, rubbing his hands.

"Quite well, thank you, Mr Bruce. Take a seat."

"An' hoo's Mr Alec?"

"There he is to answer for himself," said Mrs Forbes, looking towards the sofa.

"Hoo are ye, Mr Alec, efter a' this?" said Bruce, turning towards him.

"Quite well, thank you," answered Alec, in a tone that did not altogether please either of the listeners.

"I thocht ye had been raither sair, sir," returned Bruce, in an acid tone.

"I've got a wale or two, that's all," said Alec.

"Weel, I houp it'll be a lesson to ye."

"To Mr Malison, you should have said, Mr Bruce. I am perfectly satisfied, for my part."

His mother was surprised to hear him speak like a grown man, as well as annoyed at his behaviour to Bruce, in whose power she feared they might one day find themselves to their cost. But she said nothing. Bruce, likewise, was rather nonplussed. He grinned a smile and was silent.

"I hear you have taken James Anderson's daughter into your family now,

Mr Bruce."

"Ow, ay, mem. There was nobody to luik efter the bit lassie; sae, though I cud but ill affoord it, wi' my ain sma' faimily comin' up, I was jist in a mainner obleeged to tak' her, Jeames Anderson bein' a cousin o' my ain, ye ken, mem."

"Well, I am sure it was very kind of you and Mrs Bruce. How does the child get on?"

"Middlin', mem, middlin'. She's jist some ill for takin' up wi' loons."

Here he glanced at Alec, with an expression of successful spite. He certainly had the best of it now.

Alec was on the point of exclaiming "That's a lie," but he had prudence enough to restrain himself, perceiving that the contradiction would have a better chance with his mother if he delayed its utterance till after the departure of Bruce. So, meantime, the subject was not pursued. A little desultory conversation followed, and the visitor departed, with a laugh from between his teeth as he took leave of Alec, which I can only describe as embodying an *I told you so* sort of satisfaction.

Almost as soon as he was out of the house the parlour-door opened, and Mary brought in Annie. Mrs Forbes's eyes were instantly fixed on her with mild astonishment, and something of a mother's tenderness awoke in her heart towards the little maid-child. What would she not have given for such a daughter! During Bruce's call, Mary had been busy with the child. She had combed and brushed her thick brown hair, and, taken with its exceeding beauty, had ventured on a stroke of originality no one would have expected of her: she had left it hanging loose on her shoulders. Any one would think such an impropriety impossible to a Scotchwoman. But then she had been handling the hair, and contact with anything alters so much one's theories about it. If Mary had found it so, instead of making it so, she would have said it was "no dacent." But the hair gave her its own theory before she had done with it, and this was the result. She had also washed her face and hands and neck, made the best she could of her poor, dingy dress, and put one of her own Sunday collars upon her.

Annie had submitted to it all without question; and thus adorned, Mary introduced her again to the dining-room. Before Mrs Forbes had time to discover that she was shocked, she was captivated by the pale, patient face, and the longing blue eyes, that looked at her as if the child felt that she ought to have been her mother, but somehow they had missed each other. They gazed out of the shadows of the mass of dark brown wavy hair that fell to her waist, and there was no more any need for Alec to contradict Bruce's calumny. But Mrs Forbes was speedily recalled to a sense of propriety by observing that Alec too was staring at Annie with a mingling of amusement, admiration, and respect.

"What have you been about, Mary?" she said, in a tone of attempted reproof. "You have made a perfect fright of the child. Take her away."

When Annie was once more brought back, with her hair restored to its net, silent tears of mortification were still flowing down her cheeks.—When Annie cried, the tears always rose and flowed without any sound or convulsion. Rarely did she sob even.—This completed the conquest of Mrs Forbes's heart. She drew the little one to her, and kissed her, and Annie's tears instantly ceased to rise, while Mrs Forbes wiped away those still lingering on her face. Mary then went to get the tea, and Mrs Forbes having left the room for a moment to recover that self-possession, the loss of which

is peculiarly objectionable to a Scotchwoman, Annie was left seated on a footstool before the bright fire, the shadows from which were now dancing about the darkening room, and Alec lay on the sofa looking at her. There was no great occasion for his lying on the sofa, but his mother desired it, and Alec had at present no particular objection.

"I wadna like to be gran' fowk," mused Annie aloud, for getting that she was not alone.

"We're no gran' fowk, Annie," said Alec.

"Ay are ye," returned Annie, persistently.

"Weel, what for wadna ye like it?"

"Ye maun be aye feared for blaudin' things."

"Mamma wad tell ye a different story," rejoined Alec laughing. "There's naething here to blaud (spoil)."

Mrs Forbes returned. Tea was brought in. Annie comported herself like a lady, and, after tea, ran home with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain. For, notwithstanding her assertion that she would not like to be "gran' fowk," the kitchen fire, small and dull, the smelling shop, and her own dreary garret-room, did not seem more desirable from her peep into the warmth and comfort of the house at Howglen.

Questioned as to what had delayed her return from school, she told the truth; that she had gone to ask after Alec Forbes, and that they had kept her to tea.

"I tauld them that ye ran efter the loons!" said Bruce triumphantly. Then stung with the reflection that *he* had not been asked to stay to tea, he added: "It's no for the likes o' you, Annie, to gang to gentlefowk's hooses, makin' free whaur ye're no wantit. Sae dinna lat me hear the like again."

But it was wonderful how Bruce's influence over Annie, an influence of distress, was growing gradually weaker. He could make her uncomfortable enough; but as to his opinion of her, she had almost reached the point of not caring a straw for that. And she had faith enough in Alec to hope that he would defend her from whatever Bruce might have said against her.

Whether Mary had been talking in the town, as is not improbable, about little Annie Anderson's visit to her mistress, and so the story of the hair came to be known, or not, I cannot tell; but it was a notable coincidence that a few days after, Mrs Bruce came to the back-door, with a great pair of shears in her hand, and calling Annie, said:

"Here, Annie! Yer hair's ower lang. I maun jist clip it. It's giein ye sair een."

"There's naething the maitter wi' my een," said Annie gently.

"Dinna answer back. Sit doon," returned Mrs Bruce, leading her into the kitchen.

Annie cared very little for her hair, and well enough remembered that Mrs Forbes had said it made a fright of her; so it was with no great reluctance that she submitted to the operation. Mrs Bruce chopped it short off all round. As, however, this permitted what there was of it to fall about her face, there being too little to confine in the usual prison of the net, her appearance did not bear such marks of deprivation, or, in other and Scotch words, "she didna luik sae dockit," as might have been expected.

Her wavy locks of rich brown were borne that night, by the careful hand of Mrs Bruce, to Rob Guddle, the barber. Nor was the hand less careful that brought back their equivalent in money. With a smile to her husband, half loving and half cunning, Mrs Bruce dropped the amount into the till.

CHAPTER XV

Although Alec Forbes was not a boy of quick receptivity as far as books were concerned, and therefore was no favourite with Mr Malison, he was not by any means a common or a stupid boy. His own eyes could teach him more than books could, for he had a very quick observation of things about him, both in what is commonly called nature and in humanity. He knew all the birds, all their habits, and all their eggs. Not a boy in Glamerton could find a nest quicker than he, or when found treated it with such respect. For he never took young birds, and seldom more than half of the eggs. Indeed he was rather an uncommon boy, having, along with more than the usual amount of activity even for a boy, a tenderness of heart altogether rare in boys. He was as familiar with the domestic animals and their ways of feeling and acting as Annie herself. Anything like cruelty he detested; and yet, as occasion will show, he could execute stern justice. With the world of men around him, he was equally conversant. He knew the characters of the simple people wonderfully well; and *took to* Thomas Crann more than to any one else, notwithstanding that Thomas would read him a long lecture sometimes. To these lectures Alec would listen seriously enough, believing Thomas to be right; though he could never make up his mind to give any after attention to what he required of him.

The first time Alec met Thomas after the affair with the dominie, was on the day before he was to go back to school; for his mother had yielded at last to his entreaties. Thomas was building an addition to a water-mill on the banks of the Glamour not far from where Alec lived, and Alec had strolled along thither to see how the structure was going on. He expected a sharp rebuke for his behaviour to Mr Malison, but somehow he was not afraid of Thomas, and was resolved to face it out. The first words Thomas uttered, however, were:

"Weel, Alec, can ye tell me what was the name o' King Dawvid's mither?"

"I can_not_, Thomas," answered Alec. "What was it?"

"Fin' ye that oot. Turn ower yer Bible. Hae ye been back to the school yet?"

"No. I'm gaein the morn."

"Ye're no gaein to strive wi' the maister afore nicht, are ye?"

"I dinna ken," answered Alec. "Maybe he'll strive wi' me.—But ye ken, Thomas," he continued, defending himself from what he supposed Thomas was thinking, "King Dawvid himsel' killed the giant."

"Ow! ay; a' richt. I'm no referrin' to that. Maybe ye did verra richt. But tak care, Alec—" here Thomas paused from his work, and turning towards the boy with a trowelful of mortar in his hand, spoke very slowly and solemnly—"tak ye care that ye beir no malice against the maister. Justice itsel," dune for the sake o' a private grudge, will bunce back upo' the doer. I hae little doobt the maister'll be the better for't; but gin ye be the waur, it'll be an ill job, Alec, my man."

"I hae no ill-will at him, Thomas."

"Weel, jist watch yer ain hert, and bewaur ye o' that. I wad coonsel ye to try and please him a grainie mair nor ordinar'. It's no that easy to the carnal man, but ye ken we ought to crucify the auld man, wi' his affections and lusts."

"Weel, I'll try," said Alec, to whom it was not nearly so difficult as

Thomas imagined. His *man* apparently was not very old yet.

And he did try; and the master seemed to appreciate his endeavours, and to accept them as a peace-offering, thus showing that he really was the better for the punishment he had received.

It would be great injustice to Mr Malison to judge him by the feeling of the present day. It was the custom of the time and of the country to use the tawse unsparingly; for *law* having been, and still, in a great measure, being, the highest idea generated of the divine by the ordinary Scotch mind, it must be supported, at all risks even, by means of the leather strap. In the hands of a wise and even-tempered man, no harm could result from the use of this instrument of justice; but in the hands of a

fierce-tempered and therefore changeable man, of small moral stature, and liable to prejudices and offence, it became the means of unspeakable injury to those under his care; not the least of which was the production, in delicate natures, of doubt and hesitancy, sometimes deepening into cowardice and lying.

Mr Malison had nothing of the childlike in himself, and consequently never saw the mind of the child whose person he was assailing with a battery of excruciating blows. A *man* ought to be able to endure grief suffering wrongfully, and be none the worse; but who dares demand that of a child? Well it is for such masters that even they are judged by the heart of a father, and not by the law of a king, that worst of all the fictions of an ignorant and low theology. And if they must receive punishment, at least it will not be the heartless punishment which they inflicted on the boys and girls under their law.

Annie began to be regarded as a protegee of Alec Forbes, and as Alec was a favourite with most of his schoolfellows, and was feared where he was not loved, even her cousins began to look upon her with something like respect, and mitigate their persecutions. But she did not therefore become much more reconciled to her position; for the habits and customs of her home were distasteful to her, and its whole atmosphere uncongenial. Nor could it have been otherwise in any house where the entire anxiety was, first, to make money, and next, not to spend it. The heads did not in the least know that they were unkind to her. On the contrary, Bruce thought himself a pattern of generosity if he gave her a scrap of string; and Mrs Bruce, when she said to inquiring gossips "The bairn's like ither bairns—she's weel eneuch," thought herself a pattern of justice or even of forbearance. But both were jealous of her, in relation to their own children; and when Mrs Forbes sent for her one Saturday, soon after her first visit, they hardly concealed their annoyance at the preference shown her by one who was under such great obligation to the parents of other children every way superior to her whose very presence somehow or other made them uncomfortable.

CHAPTER XVI

The winter drew on—a season as different from the summer in those northern latitudes, as if it belonged to another solar system. Cold and stormy, it is yet full of delight for all beings that can either romp, sleep, or think it through. But alas for the old and sickly, in poor homes, with scanty food and firing! Little children suffer too, though the gift of forgetfulness does for them what the gift of faith does for their parents—helps them over many troubles, besides tingling fingers and stony feet. There would be many tracks of those small feet in the morning snow, leading away across the fresh-fallen clouds from the house and cottage doors; for the barbarity of *morning-school*, that is, an hour and a half of dreary lessons before breakfast, was in full operation at Glamerton.

The winter came. One morning, all the children awoke, and saw a white world around them. Alec jumped out of bed in delight. It was a sunny, frosty morning. The snow had fallen all night, with its own silence, and no wind had interfered with the gracious alighting of the feathery water. Every branch, every twig, was laden with its sparkling burden of down-flickered flakes, and threw long lovely shadows on the smooth featureless dazzle below. Away, away, stretched the outspread glory, the only darkness in it being the line of the winding river. All the snow that fell on it vanished, as death and hell shall one day vanish in the fire of God. It flowed on, black through its banks of white. Away again stretched the shine to the town, where every roof had the sheet that was let down from heaven spread over it, and the streets lay a foot deep in yet unsullied snow, soon, like the story of the ages, to be trampled, soiled, wrought, and driven with human feet, till, at last, God's strong sun would wipe it all away.

From the door opening into this fairy-land, Alec sprang into the untrodden space, as into a new America. He had discovered a world, without even the print of human foot upon it. The keen air made him happy; and the face of nature, looking as peaceful as the face of a dead man dreaming of heaven, wrought in him jubilation and leaping. He was at the school door before a human being had appeared in the streets of Glamerton. Its dwellers all lay still under those sheets of snow, which seemed to hold them asleep in its cold enchantment.

Before any of his fellows made their appearance, he had kneaded and piled a great heap of snowballs, and stood by his pyramid, prepared for the offensive. He attacked the first that came, and soon there was a troop of boys pelting away at him. But with his store of balls at his foot, he was able to pay pretty fairly for what he received; till, that being exhausted, he was forced to yield the unequal combat. By-and-by the little ones gathered, with Annie amongst them; but they kept aloof, for fear of the flying balls, for the boys had divided into two equal parties, and were pelting away at each other. At length the woman who had charge of the school-room, having finished lighting the fire, opened the door, and Annie, who was very cold, made a run for it, during a lull in the fury of the battle.

"Stop," cried Alec; and the balling ceased, that Annie, followed by a few others, might pass in safety through the midst of the combatants. One boy, however, just as Annie was entering, threw a ball after her. He missed her, but Alec did not miss him; for scarcely was the ball out of his hand when he received another, right between his eyes. Over he went, amidst a shout of satisfaction.

When the master appeared at the top of the lane the fight came to a close; and as he entered the school, the group round the fire broke up and dispersed. Alec, having entered close behind the master, overtook Annie as she went to her seat, for he had observed, as she ran into the school, that she was lame—indeed limping considerably.

"What's the maitter wi' ye, Annie?" he said. "What gars ye hirple?"

"Juno bitet me," answered Annie.

"Ay! Verra weel!" returned Alec, in a tone that had more meaning than the words.

Soon after the Bible-class was over, and they had all taken their seats, a strange quiet stir and excitement gradually arose, like the first motions of a whirlpool at the turn of the tide. The master

became aware of more than the usual flitting to and fro amongst the boys, just like the coming and going which preludes the swarming of bees. But as he had little or no constructive power, he never saw beyond the symptoms. They were to him mere isolated facts, signifying present disorder.

"John Morison, go to your seat," he cried.

John went.

"Robert Rennie, go to your seat."

Robert went. And this continued till, six having been thus passed by, and a seventh appearing three forms from his own, the master, who seldom stood it so long, could stand it no longer. The *tag* was thrown, and a *licking* followed, making matters a little better from the master's point of view.

Now I will try to give, from the scholars' side, a peep of what passed.

As soon as he was fairly seated, Alec said in a low voice across the double desk to one of the boys opposite, calling him by his nickname,

"I say, Divot, do ye ken Juno?"

"Maybe no!" answered Divot. "But gin I dinna, my left leg dis."

"I thocht ye kent the shape o' her teeth, man. Jist gie Scrumpie there a dig i' the ribs."

"What are ye efter, Divot? I'll gie ye a cloot o' the lug," growled

Scrumpie.

"Hoot man! The General wants ye."

The General was Alec's nickname.

"What is't, General?"

"Do ye ken Juno?"

"Hang the bitch! I ken her ower weel. She took her denner aff o' ane o' my hips, ae day last year."

"Jist creep ower to Cadger there, and speir gin he kens Juno. Maybe he's forgotten her."

Cadger's reply was interrupted by the interference of the master, but a pantomimic gesture conveyed to the General sufficient assurance of the retentiveness of Cadger's memory in regard to Juno and her favours. Such messages and replies, notwithstanding more than one licking, kept passing the whole of the morning.

Now Juno was an animal of the dog kind, belonging to Robert Brace. She had the nose and the legs of a bull-dog, but was not by any means thorough-bred, and her behaviour was worse than her breed. She was a great favourite with her master, who ostensibly kept her chained in his back-yard for the protection of his house and property. But she was not by any means popular with the rising generation. For she was given to biting, with or without provocation, and every now and then she got loose—upon sundry of which occasions she had bitten boys. Complaint had been made to her owner, but without avail; for he only professed great concern, and promised she should not get loose again, which promise had been repeatedly broken. Various vows of vengeance had been made, and forgotten. But now Alec Forbes had taken up the cause of humanity and justice: for the brute had bitten Annie, and *she* could have given no provocation.

It was soon understood throughout the school that war was to be made upon Juno, and that every able-bodied boy must be ready when called out by the General. The minute they were dismissed, which, at this season of the year, took place at three o'clock, no interval being given for dinner, because there was hardly any afternoon, the boys gathered in a knot at the door.

"What are ye gaein' to do, General?" asked one.

"Kill her," answered Alec.

"What way?"

"Stane her to death, loons, like the man 'at brak the Sabbath."

"Broken banes for broken skins—eh? Ay!"

"The damned ill-faured brute, to bite Annie Anderson!"

"But there's nae stanes to be gotten i' the snaw, General," said

Cadger.

"Ye gomeril! Ye'll get mair stanes nor ye'll carry, I doobt, up o' the side o' the toll-road yonner. Naething like road-metal!"

A confused chorus of suggestions and exclamations now arose, in the midst of which Willie Macwha, whose cognomen was Curly-pow, came up. He was not often the last in a conspiracy. His arrival had for the moment a sedative effect.

"Here's Curly! Here's Curly!"

"Weel, is't a' sattled?" asked he.

"She's condemned, but no execute yet," said Grumpie.

"Hoo are we to win at her?" asked Cadger.

"That's jist the pint," said Divot.

"We canna weel kill her in her ain yard," suggested Houghie.

"Na. We maun bide our time, an' tak her when she's oot aboot," said the

General.

"But wha's to ken that? an' hoo are we to gather?" asked Cadger, who seemed both of a practical and a despondent turn of mind.

"Noo, jist haud yer tongues, an' hearken to me," said Alec.

The excited assembly was instantly silent.

"The first thing," began Alec, "is to store plenty o' ammunition."

"Ay, ay, General."

"Haud yer tongues.—Whaur had we best stow the stanes, Curly?"

"In oor yard. They'll never be noticed there."

"That'll do. Some time the nicht, ye'll a' carry what stanes ye can get—an' min' they're o' a serviceable natur'—to Curly's yard. He'll be o' the ootluik for ye. An,' I say, Curly, doesna your riggin-stane owerluik the maist o' the toon?"

"Ay, General."

"Ye can see our hoose frae't—canna ye?"

"Ay."

"Weel, ye jist buy a twa three blue lichts. Hae ye ony bawbees?"

"Deil ane, General."

"Hae than, there's fower an' a bawbee for expenses o' the war."

"Thank ye, General."

"Ye hae an auld gun, haena' ye?"

"Ay have I; but she's nearhan' the rivin'."

"Load her to the mou', and lat her rive. We'll may be hear't. But haud weel oot ower frae her. Ye can lay a train, ye ken."

"I s' tak care o' that, General."

"Scrumpie, ye bide no that far frae the draigon's den. Ye jist keep yer ee—nae the crookit ane—upo' her ootgoins an' incomins; or raither, ye luik efter her comin oot, an' we'll a' luik efter her gaein in again. Jist mak a regiment o' yer ain to watch her, and bring ye word o' her proceedins. Ye can easy luik roun the neuk o' the back-yett, an' nobody be a hair the wiser. As sune as ever ye spy her lowse i' the yard be aff wi' ye to Willie Macwha. Syne, Curly, ye fire yer gun, and burn the blue lichts o' the tap o' the hoose; and gin I see or hear the signal, I'll be ower in seven minutes an' a half. Ilka ane o' ye 'at hears, maun luik efter the neist; and sae we'll a' gether at Curly's. Fess yer bags for the stanes, them 'at has bags."

"But gin ye dinna see or hear, for it's a lang road, General?" interposed Cadger.

"Gin I'm no at your yard, Curly, in saiven minutes an' a half, sen' Linkum efter me. He's the only ane o' ye 'at can rin. It's a' that he can do, but he does't weel.—Whan Juno's ance oot, she's no in a hurry in again."

The boys separated and went home in a state of excitement, which probably, however, interfered very little with their appetites, seeing it was moderated in the mean time by the need and anticipation of their dinners.

The sun set now between two and three o'clock, and there were long forenights to favour the plot. Perhaps their hatred of the dog would not have driven them to such extreme measures, even although she had bitten Annie Anderson, had her master been a favourite, or even generally respected. But Alec knew well enough that the townsfolk were not likely to sympathize with Bruce on the ill-treatment of his cur.

When the dinner and the blazing fire had filled him so full of comfort that he was once more ready to encounter the cold, Alec could stay in the house no longer.

"Where are you going, Alec?" said his mother.

"Into the garden, mamma."

"What can you want in the garden—full of snow?"

"It's just the snow I want, mamma. It won't keep."

And, in another moment, he was under the clear blue night-heaven, with the keen frosty air blowing on his warm cheek, busy with a wheelbarrow and a spade, slicing and shovelling in the snow. He was building a hut of it, after the fashion of the Esquimaux hut, with a very thick circular wall, which began to lean towards its own centre as soon as it began to rise. This hut he had pitched at the foot of a flag-staff on the green- *lawn* would be too grand a word for the hundred square feet in front of his mother's house, though the grass which lay beneath the snowy carpet was very green and lovely grass, smooth enough for any lawn. In summer Alec had quite revelled in its greenness and softness, as he lay on it reading the *Arabian Nights* and the Ettrick Shepherd's stories: now it was "white with the whiteness of what is dead;" for is not the snow just dead water? The flag-staff he had got George Macwha to erect for him, at a very small outlay; and he had himself fitted it with shrouds and a cross-yard, and signal halliards; for he had always a fancy for the sea, and boats, and rigging of all sorts. And he had a great red flag, too, which he used to hoist on special occasions- on market-days and such like; and often besides when a good wind blew. And very grand it looked, as it floated in the tide of the wind.

Often he paused in his work, and turned- and oftener without raising himself he glanced towards the town; but no signal burned from the ridge of Curly's house, and he went on with his labour. When called in to tea, he gave a long wistful look townwards, but saw no sign. Out again he went, but no blue fire rejoiced him that night with the news that Juno was ranging the streets; and he was forced to go to bed at last, and take refuge from his disappointment in sleep.

The next day he strictly questioned all his officers as to the manner in which they had fulfilled their duty, and found no just cause of complaint.

"In future," he said to Curly, with the importance of one who had the affairs of boys and dogs upon his brain -so that his style rose into English -"in future, Curly, you may always know I am at home when you see the red flag flying from my flag-staff."

"That's o' sma' service, General, i' the lang forenichts. A body canna see freely so far."

"But Linkum wad see't fleein', lang or he wan to the yett (gate)."

"It wad flee nae mair nor a deid deuke i' this weather. It wad be frozen as stiff's a buird."

"Ye gowk! Do ye think fowk wash their flags afore they hing them oot, like sarks or sheets? Dinna ye be ower clever, Curly, my man."

Whereupon Curly shut up.

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"What are you in such a state about, Alec?" asked his mother.

"Nothing very particular, mamma," answered Alec, ashamed of his want of self-command.

"You've looked out at the window twenty times in the last half-hour," she persisted.

"Curly promised to burn a blue light, and I wanted to see if I could see it."

Suspecting more, his mother was forced to be content with this answer.

But that night was also passed without sight or sound. Juno kept safe in her barrel, little thinking of the machinations against her in the wide snow-covered country around. Alec finished the Esquimaux hut, and the snow falling all night, the hut looked the next morning as if it had been there all the winter. As it seemed likely that a long spell of white weather had set in, Alec resolved to extend his original plan, and carry a long snow passage, or covered vault, from the lattice-window of a small closet, almost on a level with the ground, to this retreat by the flag-staff. He was hard at work in the execution of this project, on the third night, or rather late afternoon: they called it *forenight* there.

CHAPTER XVII

"What can that be, mem, awa ower the toon there?" said Mary to her mistress, as in passing she peeped out of the window, the blind of which Alec had drawn up behind the curtain.

"What is it, Mary?"

"That's jist what I dinna ken, mem. It canna be the rory-bories, as Alec ca's them. It's ower blue.—It's oot.—It's in agin.—It's no canny.—And, preserves a'! it's crackin' as weel," cried Mary, as the subdued sound of a far-off explosion reached her.

This was of course no other than the roar of Curly's gun in the act of bursting and vanishing; for neither stock, lock, nor barrel was ever seen again. It left the world like a Norse king on his fire-ship. But, at the moment, Alec was too busy in the depths of his snow-vault to hear or see the signals.

By-and-by a knock came to the kitchen door, Mary went and opened it.

"Alec's at hame, I ken," said a rosy boy, almost breathless with past speed and present excitement.

"Hoo ken ye that, my man?" asked Mary.

"'Cause the flag's fleein'. Whaur is he?"

"Gin ye ken sae muckle aboot him already, ye can jist fin' him to yersel'!"

"The bick's oot!" panted Linkum.

But Mary shut the door.

"Here's a job!" said Linkum to himself. "I canna gang throu a steekit door. And there's Juno wi' the rin o' the haill toun. Deil tak her!"

But at the moment he heard Alec whistling a favourite tune, as he shovelled away at the snow.

"General!" cried Linkum, in ecstasy.

"Here!" answered Alec, flinging his spade twenty feet from him, and bolting in the direction of the call. "Is't you, Linkum?"

"She's oot, General."

"Deil hae her, gin ever she wins in again, the curst worryin' brute!

Did ye gang to Curly?"

"Ay did I. He fired the gun, and brunt three blue lichts, and waited seven minutes and a half; and syne he sent me for ye, General."

"_Con_foon' 't," cried Alec, and tore through shrubbery and hedge, the nearest way to the road, followed by Linkum, who even at full speed was not a match for Alec. Away they flew like the wind, along the well-beaten path to the town, over the footbridge that crossed the Glamour, and full speed up the hill to Willie Macwha, who, with a dozen or fifteen more, was anxiously waiting for the commander. They all had their book-bags, pockets, and arms filled with stones lately broken for mending the turnpike road, mostly granite, but partly whinstone and flint. One bag was ready filled for Alec.

"Noo," said the General, in the tone of Gideon of old, "gin ony o' ye be fleyt at the brute, jist gang hame."

"Ay! ay! General."

But nobody stirred, for those who were afraid had slunk away the moment they saw Alec coming up the hill, like the avenger of blood.

"Wha's watchin' her?"

"Doddles, Gapy, and Goat."

"Whaur was she last seen?"

"Takin' up wi' anither tyke on the squaure."

"Doddles 'll be at the pump, to tell whaur's the ither twa and the tyke."

"Come along, then. This is hoo ye're to gang. We maunna a' gang thegither. Some o' ye—you three—doon the Back Wynd; you sax, up Lucky Hunter's Close; and the lave by Gowan Street; an' first at the pump bides for the lave."

"Hoo are we to mak the attack, General?"

"I'll gie my orders as the case may demand," said Alec.

And away they shot.

The muffled sounds of the feet of the various companies as they thundered past upon the snow, roused the old wives dozing over their knitting by their fires of spent oak-bark; and according to her temper would be the remark with which each startled dame turned again to her former busy quiescence:—"Some mischeef o' the loons!" "Some ploy o' the laddies!" "Some deevilry o' thae rascals frae Malison's school!"

They reached the square almost together, and found Doddles at the pump; who reported that Juno had gone down the inn-yard, and Gapey and Goat were watching her. Now she must come out to get home again, for there was no back-way; so by Alec's orders they dispersed a little to avoid observation, and drew gradually between the entrance of the inn-yard, and the way Juno would take to go home.

The town was ordinarily lighted at night with oil lamps, but moonlight and snow had rendered them for some time unnecessary.

"Here she is! Here she is!" cried several at once in a hissing whisper of excitement. "Lat at her!"

"Haud still!" cried Alec. "Bide till I tell ye. Dinna ye see there's Lang Tam's dog wi' her, an' he's done naething. Ye maunna punish the innocent wi' the guilty."

A moment after the dogs took their leave of each other, and Juno went, at a slow slouching trot, in the direction of her own street.

"Close in!" cried Alec.

Juno found her way barred in a threatening manner, and sought to pass meekly by.

"Lat at her, boys!" cried the General.

A storm of stones was their answer to the order; and a howl of rage and pain burst from the animal. She turned; but found that she was the centre of a circle of enemies.

"Lat at her! Haud at her!" bawled Alec.

And thick as hail the well-aimed stones flew from practised hands; though of course in the frantic rushes of the dog to escape, not half of them took effect. She darted first at one and then at another, snapping wildly, and meeting with many a kick and blow in return.

The neighbours began to look out at their shop-doors and their windows; for the boys, rapt in the excitement of the sport, no longer laid any restraint upon their cries. Andrew Constable, the clothier, from his shop-door; Rob Guddle, the barber, from his window, with his face shadowed by Annie's curls; Redford, the bookseller, from the top of the stairs that led to his shop; in short, the whole of the shopkeepers on the square of Glamerton were regarding this battle of odds. The half-frozen place looked half-alive. But none of the good folks cared much to interfere, for flying stones are not pleasant to encounter. And indeed they could not clearly make out what was the matter.—In a minute more, a sudden lull came over the hubbub. They saw all the group gather together in a murmuring knot.

The fact was this. Although cowardly enough now, the brute, infuriated with pain, had made a determined rush at one of her antagonists, and a short hand-to-teeth struggle was now taking place, during which the stoning ceased.

"She has a grip o' my leg," said Alec quietly; "and I hae a grip o' her throat. Curly, pit yer han' i' my jacket-pooch, an' tak' oot a bit towie ye'll fin' there."

Curly did as he was desired, and drew out a yard and a half of garden-line.

"Jist pit it wi' ae single k-not roon' her neck, an' twa three o' ye tak' a haud at ilka en', and pu' for the life o' ye!"

They hauled with hearty vigour, Juno's teeth relaxed their hold of Alec's calf; in another minute her tongue was hanging out her mouth, and when they ceased the strain she lay limp on the snow. With a shout of triumph, they started off at full speed, dragging the brute by the neck through the street. Alec essayed to follow them; but found his leg too painful; and was forced to go limping home.

When the victors had run till they were out of breath, they stopped to confer; and the result of their conference was that in solemn silence they drew her home to the back gate, and finding all still in the yard, deputed two of their company to lay the dead body in its kennel.

Curly and Linkum drew her into the yard, tumbled her into her barrel, which they set up on end, undid the string, and left Juno lying neck and tail together in ignominious peace.

"Before Alec reached home his leg had swollen very much, and was so painful that he could hardly limp along; for Juno had taken no passing snap, but a great strong mouthful. He concealed his condition from his mother for that night; but next morning his leg was so bad, that there was no longer a possibility of hiding the fact. To tell a lie would have been so hard for Alec, that he had scarcely any merit in not telling one. So there was nothing for it but confession. His mother scolded him to a degree considerably beyond her own sense of the wrong, telling him he would get her into disgrace in the town as the mother of a lawless son, who meddled with other people's property in a way little better than stealing.

"I fancy, mamma, a loun's legs are aboot as muckle his ain property as the tyke was Rob Bruce's. It's no the first time she's bitten half a dizzen legs that were neither her ain nor her maister's."

Mrs Forbes could not well answer this argument; so she took advantage of the fact that Alec had, in the excitement of self-defence, lapsed into Scotch.

"Don't talk so vulgarly to me, Alec," she said; "keep that for your ill-behaved companions in the town."

"They are no worse than I am, mamma. *I* was at the bottom of it."

"I never said they were," she answered.

But in her heart she thought if they were not, there was little amiss with them.

CHAPTER XVIII

Alec was once more condemned to the sofa, and Annie had to miss him, and wonder what had become of him. She always felt safe when Alec was there, and when he was not she grew timid; although whole days would sometimes pass without either speaking to the other. But before the morning was over she learned the reason of his absence.

For about noon, when all was tolerably harmonious in the school, the door opened, and the face of Robert Bruce appeared, with gleaming eyes of wrath.

"Guid preserve's!" said Scrumpie to his next neighbour. "Sic a hidin' as we s' a' get! Here's Rob Bruce! Wha's gane and tell't him?"

But some of the gang of conspirators, standing in a class near the door, stared in horror. Amongst them was Curly. His companions declared afterwards that had it not been for the strength of the curl, his hair would have stood upright. For, following Bruce, led in fact by a string, came an awful apparition—Juno herself, a pitiable mass of caninity—looking like the resuscitated corpse of a dog that had been nine days buried, crowded with lumps, and speckled with cuts, going on three legs, and having her head and throat swollen to a size past recognition.

"She's no deid efter a'! Deil tak' her! for he's in her," said Doddles.

"We haena killed her eneuch," said Curly.

"I tell't ye, Curly! Ye had little ado to lowse the tow. She wad ha' been as deid afore the mornin' as Lucky Gordon's cat that ye cuttit the heid aff o'," said Linkum.

"Eh! but she luiks bonnie!" said Curly, trying to shake off his dismay.

"Man, we'll hae't a' to do ower again. Sic fun!"

But he could not help looking a little rueful when Linkum expressed a wish that they were themselves well through with their share of the killing.

And now the storm began to break. The master had gone to the door and shaken hands with his visitor, glancing a puzzled interrogation at the miserable animal in the string, which had just shape enough left to show that it was a dog.

"I'm verra sorry, Maister Malison, to come to you wi' my complaints," said Bruce; "but jist luik at the puir dumb animal! She cudna come hersel', an' sae I bude to bring her. Stan' still, ye brute!"

For Juno having caught sight of some boy-legs, through a corner of one eye not quite *bunged up*, began to tug at the string with feeble earnestness- no longer, however, regarding the said legs as made for dogs to bite, but as fearful instruments of vengeance, in league with stones and cords. So the straining and pulling was all homewards. But her master had brought her as chief witness against the boys, and she must remain where she was.

"Eh, lass!" he said, hauling her back by the string; "gin ye had but the tongue o' the prophet's ass, ye wad sune pint out the rascals that misguided and misgrugled ye that gait. But here's the just judge that'll gie ye yer richts, and that wi'oot fee or reward.—Mr Malison, she was ane o' the bonniest bicks ye cud set yer ee upo'—"

A smothered laugh gurgled through the room.

– "till some o' your loons—nae offence, sir—I ken weel eneuch they're no yours, nor a bit like ye—some o' your peowpils, sir, hae jist ca'd (driven) the sowl oot o' her wi' stanes."

"Whaur does the sowl o' a bitch bide?" asked Goat, in a whisper, of his neighbour.

"De'il kens," answered Gapey; "gin it binna i' the boddom o' Rob

Bruce's wame."

The master's wrath, ready enough to rise against boys and all their works, now showed itself in the growing redness of his face. This was not one of his worst passions—in them, he grew white —for the injury had not been done to himself.

"Can you tell me which of them did it?"

"No, sir. There maun hae been mair nor twa or three at it, or she wad hae worried them. The best-natered beast i' the toon!"

"William Macwha," cried Malison.

"Here, sir."

"Come up."

Willie ascended to the august presence. He had made up his mind that, seeing so many had known all about it, and some of them had turned cowards, it would be of no service to deny the deed.

"Do you know anything about this cruelty to the poor dog, William?" said the master.

Willie gave a Scotchman's answer, which, while evasive, was yet answer and more.

"She bet me, sir."

"When? While you were stoning her?"

"No, sir. A month ago."

"Ye're a leein' vratch, Willie Macwha, as ye weel ken i' yer ain conscience!" cried Bruce. "She's the quaietest, kin'list beast 'at ever was wholpit. See, sir; jist luik ye here. She'll lat me pit my han' in her mou', an' tak' no more notice nor gin it was her ain tongue."

Now whether it was that the said tongue was still swollen and painful, or that Juno, conscious of her own ill deserts, disapproved of the whole proceeding, I cannot tell; but the result of this proof of her temper was that she made her teeth meet through Bruce's hand.

"Damn the bitch!" he roared, snatching it away with the blood beginning to flow.

A laugh, not smothered this time, billowed and broke through the whole school; for the fact that Bruce should be caught swearing, added to the yet more delightful fact that Juno had bitten her master, was altogether too much.

"Eh! isna't weel we didna kill her efter a'?" said Curly.

"Guid doggie!" said another, patting his own knee, as if to entice her to come and be caressed.

"At him again, Juno!" said a third.

"I'll gie her a piece the neist time I see her," said Curly.

Bruce, writhing with pain, and mortified at the result of his ocular proof of Juno's incapability of biting, still more mortified at having so far forgotten himself as to utter an oath, and altogether discomfited by the laughter, turned away in confusion.

"It's a' their wyte, the baad boys! She never did the like afore. They hae ruined her temper," he said, as he left the school, following Juno, which was tugging away at the string as if she had been a blind man's dog.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself, William?" said Malison.

"She began 't, sir."

This best of excuses would not, however, satisfy the master. The punishing mania had possibly taken fresh hold upon him. But he would put more questions first.

"Who besides you tortured the poor animal?"

Curly was silent. He had neither a very high sense of honour, nor any principles to come and go upon; but he had a considerable amount of devotion to his party, which is the highest form of conscience to be found in many.

"Tell me their names, sir?"

Curly was still silent.

But a white-headed urchin, whom innumerable whippings, not bribes, had corrupted, cried out in a wavering voice:

"Sanny Forbes was ane o' them; an' he's no here, 'cause Juno worried him."

The poor creature gained little by his treachery; for the smallest of the conspirators fell on him when school was over, and gave him a thrashing, which he deserved more than ever one of Malison's.

But the effect of Alec's name on the master was talismanic. He changed his manner at once, sent Curly to his seat, and nothing more was heard of Juno or her master.

The opposite neighbours stared across, the next morning, in bewildered astonishment, at the place where the shop of Robert Bruce had been wont to invite the public to enter and buy. Had it been possible for an avalanche to fall like a thunderbolt from the heavens, they would have supposed that one had fallen in the night, and overwhelmed the house. Door and windows were invisible, buried with the rude pavement in front beneath a mass of snow. Spades and shovels in boys' hands had been busy for hours during the night, throwing it up against the house, the door having first been blocked up with a huge ball, which they had rolled in silence the whole length of the long street.

Bruce and his wife slept in a little room immediately behind the shop, that they might watch over their treasures; and Bruce's first movement in the morning was always into the shop to unbolt the door and take down the shutters. His astonishment when he looked upon a blank wall of snow may be imagined. He did not question that the whole town was similarly overwhelmed. Such a snow-storm had never been heard of before, and he thought with uneasy recollection of the oath he had uttered in the school-room; imagining for a moment that the whole of Glamerton lay overwhelmed by the divine wrath, because he had, under the agony of a bite from his own dog, consigned her to a quarter where dogs and children are not admitted. In his bewilderment, he called aloud:

"Nancy! Robbie! Johnnie! We're a' beeriet alive!"

"Preserve's a', Robert! what's happent?" cried his wife, rushing from the kitchen.

"I'm no beeriet, that I ken o'," cried Robert the younger, entering from the yard.

His father rushed to the back-door, and, to his astonishment and relief, saw the whole world about him. It was a private judgment, then, upon him and his shop. And so it was—a very private judgment. Probably it was the result of his meditations upon it, that he never after carried complaints to Murdoch Malison.

Alec Forbes had nothing to do with this revenge. But Bruce always thought he was at the bottom of it, and hated him the more. He disliked all *loons* but his own; for was not the spirit of *loons* the very antipodes to that of money-making? But Alec Forbes he hated, for he was the very antipode to Robert Bruce himself. Mrs Bruce always followed her husband's lead, being capable only of two devotions—the one to her husband and children, the other to the shop.—Of Annie they highly and righteously disapproved, partly because they had to feed her, and partly because she was friendly with Alec. This disapproval rose into dislike after their sons had told them that it was because Juno had bitten her that the boys of the school, with Alec for a leader, had served her as they had. But it was productive of no disadvantage to her; for it could not take any active form because of the money-bond between them, while its negative operation gave rise chiefly to neglect, and so left her more at liberty, to enjoy herself as she could after her own fashion.

For the rest of Juno's existence, the moment she caught sight of a boy she fled as fast as her four bow-legs would carry her, not daring even to let her tail stick out behind her, lest it should afford a handle against her.

CHAPTER XIX

When Annie heard that Alec had been bitten she was miserable. She knew his bite must be worse than hers, or he would not be kept at home. Might she not venture to go and see him again? The modesty of a maidenly child made her fear to intrude; but she could not constrain her feet from following the path to his house. And as it was very dusk, what harm could there be in going just inside the gate, and on to the green? Through the parlour windows she saw the fire burning bright, and a shadow moving across the walls and the ceiling; but she could not make up her mind to knock at the door, for she was afraid of Mrs Forbes, notwithstanding her kindness. So she wandered on—for here there was no dog—wondering what that curious long mound of snow, with the round heap at the end, by the flag-staff, could be? What could Alec have made it for? Examining it closely all along, she came to the end of it next the house, and looking round, saw that it was hollow. Without a moment's thought, for she had no fear of Alec, she entered. The passage was dark, but she groped her way, on and on, till she came to the cell at the end. Here a faint ghostly light glimmered; for Alec had cleared a small funnel upwards through the roof, almost to the outside, so that a thin light filtered through a film of snow. This light being reflected from the white surface of the cave, showed it all throbbing about her with a faint bluish white, ever and anon whelmed in the darkness and again glimmering out through its folds. She seated herself on a ledge of snow that ran all round the foundation. It was not so cold here as in the outer air, where a light frosty wind was blowing across the world of snow. And she had not sat long, before, according to her custom when left to herself, she fell fast asleep.

Meantime Alec, his mother having gone to the town, was sitting alone, finishing, by the light of the fire, the last of a story. At length the dreariness of an ended tale was about him, and he felt the inactivity to which he had been compelled all day no longer tolerable. He would go and see how his snow-chamber looked by candlelight. His mother had told him not to go out; but that, he reasoned, could hardly be called going out, when there was not more than a yard of open air to cross. So he got a candle, was out of the window in a moment, notwithstanding his lameness, and crept through the long vault of snow towards the inmost recess. As he approached the end he started. Could he believe his eyes? A figure was there—motionless—dead perhaps. He went on—he went in—and there he saw Annie, leaning against the white wall, with her white face turned up to the frozen ceiling. She might have been the frost-queen, the spirit that made the snow, and built the hut, and dwelt in it; for all the powers that vivify nature must be children. The popular imagination seems to have caught this truth, for all the fairies and gnomes and goblins, yes, the great giants too, are only different sizes, shapes, and characters of children. But I have wandered from Alec's thoughts into my own. He knew it was Annie, and no strange creature of the elements. And if he had not come, she might have slept on till her sleep was too deep for any voice of the world to rouse her.

It was, even then, with difficulty that he woke her. He took hold of her hands, but she did not move. He sat down, took her in his arms, spoke to her—got frightened and shook her, but she would not open her eyes. Her long dark eyelashes sloped still upon her white cheek, like the low branches of a cedar upon the lawn at its foot. But he knew she was not dead yet, for he could feel her heart beating. At length she lifted her eyelids, looked up in his face, gave a low happy laugh, like the laugh of a dreaming child, and was fast asleep again in a moment.

Alec hesitated no longer. He rose with her in his arms, carried her into the parlour, and laid her down on the rug before the fire, with a sofa-pillow under her head. There she might have her sleep out. When Mrs Forbes came home she found Alec reading, and Annie sleeping by the fireside. Before his mother had recovered from her surprise, and while she was yet staring at the lovely little apparition, Alec had the first word.

"Mamma!" he said, "I found her sleeping in my snow hut there; and if I had not brought her in, she would have been dead by this time."

"Poor little darling!" thought Mrs Forbes; but she was Scotch, and therefore she did not say it. But she stooped, and drew the child back from the fire, lest she should have her face scorched, and after making the tea, proceeded to put off her bonnet and shawl. By the time she had got rid of them, Annie was beginning to move, and Alec rose to go to her.

"Let her alone," said his mother. "Let her come to herself by degrees.

Come to the table."

Alec obeyed. They could see that Annie had opened her eyes, and lay staring at the fire. What was she thinking about? She had fallen asleep in the snow-hut, and here she was by a bright fire!

"Annie, dear, come to your tea," were the first words she heard. She rose and went, and sat down at the table with a smile, taking it all as the gift of God, or a good dream, and never asking how she had come to be so happy.

CHAPTER XX

The spirit of mischief had never been so thoroughly aroused in the youth of Glamerton as it was this winter. The snow lay very deep, while almost every day a fresh fall added to its depth, and this rendered some of their winter-amusements impossible; while not many of them had the imagination of Alec Forbes to suggest new ones. At the same time the cold increased, and strengthened their impulses to muscular exertion.

"Thae loons are jist growin' perfect deevils," said Charlie Chapman, the wool-carder, as he bolted into his own shop, with the remains of a snowball melting down the back of his neck. "We maun hae anither constable to haud them in order."

The existing force was composed of one long-legged, short-bodied, middle-aged man, who was so slow in his motions, apparently from the weight of his feet, which were always dragging behind him, that the boys called him Stumpin' Steenie (dim. for "Stephen"), and stood in no more awe of him than they did of his old cow—which, her owner being a widower, they called *Mrs Stephen*—when she went up the street, hardly able to waddle along for the weight of her udder. So there was some little ground for the wool-carder's remark. How much a second constable would have availed, however, is doubtful.

"I never saw sic widdiefows!" (gallows-birds), chimed in a farmer's wife who was standing in the shop. "They had a tow across the Wast Wynd i' the snaw, an' doon I cam o' my niz, as sure's your name's Charles Chapman—and mair o' my legs oot o' my coats, I doobt, than was a'thegither to my credit."

"I'm sure ye can hae no rizzon to tak' shame o' your legs, gude wife," was the gallant rejoinder; to which their owner replied, with a laugh:

"They warna made for public inspection, ony gait."

"Hoot! hoot! Naebody saw them. I s' warran' ye didna lie lang! But thae loons—they're jist past a'! Heard ye hoo they saired Rob Bruce?"

"Fegs! they tell me they a' but buried him alive."

"Ow! ay. But it's a later story, the last."

"It's a pity there's no a dizzen or twa o' them in Awbrahawm's boasom.—What did they till him neist?"

Here Andrew Constable dropped in, and Chapman turned towards him with the question:

"Did *ye* hear, Mr Constable, what the loons did to Robert Bruce the nicht afore last?"

"No. What was that? They hae a spite at puir Rob, I believe."

"Weel, it didna look a'thegither like respeck, I maun alloo.—I was stannin' at the coonter o' his shop waitin' for an unce o' sneeshin'; and Robert he was servin' a bit bairnie ower the coouter wi' a pennyworth o' triacle, when, in a jiffey, there cam' sic a blast, an' a reek fit to smore ye, oot o' the bit fire, an' the shop was fu' o' reek, afore ye could hae pitten the pint o' ae thoom upo' the pint o' the ither. 'Preserve's a'!' cried Rob; but or he could say anither word, butt the house, scushlin in her bauchles, comes Nancy, rinnin', an' opens the door wi' a scraich: 'Preserve's a'!' quo' she, 'Robert, the lum's in a low!' An' fegs! atween the twa reeks, to sunder them, there was nothing but Nancy hersel. The hoose was as fu' as it cud haud, frae cellar to garret, o' the blackest reek 'at ever crap oot o' coal. Oot we ran, an' it was a sicht to see the crater wi' his lang neck luikin' up at the chimleys. But deil a spark cam' oot o' them—or reek either, for that maitter. It was easy to see what was amiss. The loons had been o' the riggin, and flung a han'fu' o' blastin' powther down ilka smokin' chimley, and syne clappit a divot or a truf upo' the mou' o' 't. Deil ane o' them was in sicht, but I doobt gin ony o' them was far awa'. There was naething for't but get a ladder, and jist gang up an' tak aff the pot-lids. But eh! puir Robert was jist rampin' wi' rage! No 'at he said muckle, for he daur hardly open his mou' for sweerin'; and Robert wadna sweer, ye ken; but he was neither to haud nor bin'."

"What laddies war they, Charles, do ye ken?" asked Andrew.

"There's a heap o' them up to tricks. Gin I haena the rheumateese screwin' awa' atween my shoothers the nicht it wonna be their fau'ts; for as I cam' ower frae the ironmonger's there, I jist got a ba' i' the how o' my neck, 'at amaist sent me howkin' wi' my snoot i' the snaw. And there it stack, and at this preceese moment it's rinnin' doon the sma' o' my back as gin 't war a burnie doon a hillside. We maun hae mair constables!"

"Hoot! toot! Charles. Ye dinna want a constable to dry yer back. Gang to the gudewife wi' 't," said Andrew, "she'll gie ye a dry sark. Na, na. Lat the laddies work it aff. As lang's they haud their han's frae what doesna belang to them, I dinna min' a bit ploy noo and than. They'll noo turn oot the waur men for a pliskie or twa."

The fact was, none of the boys would have dreamed of interfering with Andrew Constable. Everybody respected him; not because he was an elder of the kirk, but because he was a good-tempered, kindly, honest man; or to sum up all in one word—*a douce chield*—by which word *douce* is indicated every sort of propriety of behaviour—a virtue greatly esteemed by the Scotch. This adjective was universally applied to Andrew.

While Alec was confined to the house, he had been busy inventing all kinds of employments for the period of the snow. His lessons never occupied much of his thoughts, and no pains having yet been taken to discover in what direction his tastes inclined him, he had of course to cater for himself. The first day of his return, when school was over, he set off rejoicing in his freedom, for a ramble through the snow, still revolving what he was to do next; for he wanted some steady employment with an end in view. In the course of his solitary walk, he came to the Wan Water, the other river that flowed through the wide valley—and wan enough it was now with its snow-sheet over it! As he stood looking at its still, dead face, and lamenting that the snow lay too deep over the ice to admit of skating, by a sudden reaction, a summer-vision of the live water arose before him; and he thought how delightful it would be to go sailing down the sparkling ripples, with the green fields all about him, and the hot afternoon sun over his head. That would be better even than scudding along it on his skates. His next thought was at once an idea and a resolve. Why should he not build a boat? He *would* build a boat. He would set about it directly.—Here was work for the rest of the winter!

His first step must be to go home and have his dinner; his next—to consult George Macwha, who had been a ship-carpenter in his youth. He would run over in the evening before George should have dropped work, and commit the plan to his judgment.

In the evening, then, Alec reached the town, on his way to George Macwha. It was a still lovely night, clear and frosty, with—yes, there were—millions of stars overhead. Away in the north, the streamers were shooting hither and thither, with marvellous evanescence and re-generation. No dance of goblins could be more lawless in its grotesqueness than this dance of the northern lights in their ethereal beauty, shining, with a wild ghostly changefulness and feebleness, all colours at once; now here, now there, like a row of slender organ-pipes, rolling out and in and along the sky. Or they might have been the chords of some gigantic stringed instrument, which chords became visible only when mighty hands of music struck their keys and set them vibrating; so that, as the hands swept up and down the Titanic key-board, the chords themselves seemed to roll along the heavens, though in truth some vanished here and others appeared yonder. Up and down they darted, and away and back—and always in the direction he did not expect them to take. He thought he heard them crackle, and he stood still to listen; but he could not be sure that it was not the snow sinking and *crisping* beneath his feet. All around him was still as a world too long frozen: in the heavens alone was there motion. There this entrancing dance of colour and shape went on, wide beneath, and tapering up to the zenith! Truly there was revelry in heaven! One might have thought that a prodigal son had just got home, and that the music and the dancing had begun, of which only the far-off rhythmic shine could reach the human sense; for a dance in heaven might well show itself in colour to the eyes of men.—Alec went on till the lights from the windows of the town began to throw shadows across the snow. The

street was empty. From end to end nothing moved but an occasional shadow. As he came near to Macwha's shop, he had to pass a row of cottages which stood with their backs to a steep slope. Here too all was silent as a frozen city. But when he was about opposite the middle of the row, he heard a stifled laugh, and then a kind of muffled sound as of hurrying steps, and, in a moment after, every door in the row was torn open, and out bolted the inhabitants—here an old woman, halting on a stick as she came, there a shoemaker, with last and awl in his hands, here a tailor with his shears, and there a whole family of several trades and ages. Every one rushed into the middle of the road, turned right round and looked up. Then arose such a clamour of tongues, that it broke on the still air like a storm.

"What's ado, Betty?" asked Alec of a decrepit old creature, bent almost double with rheumatism, who was trying hard to see something or other in the air or on the roof of her cottage.

But before she could speak, the answer came in another form, addressing itself to his nose instead of his ears. For out of the cottages floated clouds of smoke, pervading the air with a variety of scents—of burning oak-bark, of burning leather-cuttings, of damp fire-wood and peat, of the cooking of red herrings, of the boiling of porridge, of the baking of oat-cake, &c., &c. Happily for all the inhabitants, "thae deevils o' loons" had used no powder here.

But the old woman, looking round when Alec spoke, and seeing that he was one of the obnoxious school-boys, broke out thus:

"Gang an' tak the divot (turf) aff o' my lum, Alec, there's a good laad! Ye sudna play sic tricks on puir auld bodies like me, near brackin' in twa wi' the rheumateeze. I'm jist greetin' wi' the reek i' my auld een."

And as she spoke she wiped her eyes with her apron.

Alec did not wait to clear himself of an accusation so gently put, but was on the roof of Luckie Lapp's cottage before she had finished her appeal to his generosity. He took the "divot aff o' her lum" and pitched it half way down the brae, at the back of the cottage. Then he scrambled from one chimney to the other, and went on pitching the sods down the hill. At length two of the inhabitants, who had climbed up at the other end of the row, met him, and taking him for a repentant sinner at best, made him prisoner, much to his amusement, and brought him down, protesting that it was too bad of gentle-folk's sons to persecute the poor in that way.

"I didn't do it," said Alec.

"Dinna lee," was the curt rejoinder.

"I'm no leein'."

"Wha did it, than?"

"I can guiss; an' it shanna happen again, gin I can help it."

"Tell's wha did it, than."

"I wonno say names."

"He's ane o' them."

"The foul thief tak him! I s' gie him a hidin'," said a burly sutor (shoemaker) coming up. "Thae loons are no to be borne wi' ony langer."

And he caught Alec by the arm.

"I didn't do it," persisted Alec.

"Wha killed Rob Bruce's dog?" asked the sutor, squeezing Alec's arm to point the question.

"I did," answered Alec; "and I will do yours the same guid turn, gin he worries bairns."

"And quite richt, too!" said the sutor's wife. "Lat him gang, Donal.

I'll be boun' he's no ane o' them."

"Tell's a' aboot it, than. Hoo cam ye up there?"

"I gaed up to tak the divot aff o' Lucky Lapp's lum. Spier at her. Ance up I thocht I micht gie the lave o' ye a gude turn, and this is a' I get for't."

"Weel, weel! Come in and warm ye, than," said the shoemaker, convinced at last.

So Alec went in and had a chat with them, and then went on to George

Macwha's.

The carpenter took to his scheme at once. Alec was a fair hand at all sorts of tool-work; and being on the friendliest terms with Macwha, it was soon arranged that the keel should be laid in the end of the workshop, and that, under George's directions, and what help Willie chose to render, Alec should build his boat himself. Just as they concluded these preliminaries, in came Willie, wiping some traces of blood from his nose. He made a pantomimic gesture of vengeance at Alec.

"What hae ye been efter noo, laddie?" asked his father.

"Alec's jist gien me a bluidy nose," said Willie.

"Hoo cam' that aboot? Ye weel deserved it, I hae nae doobt. Jist gie him anither whan he wants it, Alec."

"What do ye mean, Curly?" asked Alec in amazement.

"Yon divot 'at ye flang aff o' Luckie Lapp's riggin'," said Curly, "cam' richt o' the back o' my heid, as I lay o' the brae, and dang the blude oot at my niz. That's a'.—Ye'll preten' ye didna see me, nae doobt."

"I say, Curly," said Alec, putting his arm round his shoulders, and leading him aside, "we maun hae nae mair o' this kin' o' wark. It's a dam't shame! Do ye see nae differ atween chokin' an ill-faured tyke an' chokin' a puir widow's lum?"

"'Twas only for fun."

"It's ill fun that baith sides canna lauch at, Curly."

"Rob Bruce wasna lauchin' whan he brocht the bick to the schuil, nor yet whan he gaed hame again."

"That was nae fun, Curly. That was doonricht earnest."

"Weel, weel, Alec; say nae mair aboot it."

"No more I will. But gin I was you, Curly, I wad tak Lucky a seck o' spales the morn."

"I'll tak them the nicht, Alec.—Father, hae ye an auld seck ony gait?"

"There's ane up i' the laft. What want ye wi' a seck?"

But Curly was in the loft almost before the question had left his father's lips. He was down again in a moment, and on his knees filling the sack with shavings and all the chips he could find.

"Gie's a han' up wi't, Alec," he said.

And in a moment more Curly was off to Widow Lapp with his bag of firing.

"He's a fine chield that Willie o' yours, George," said Alec to the father. "He only wants to hae a thing weel pitten afore him, an' he jist acts upo' 't direckly.

"It's weel he maks a cronie o' you, Alec. There's a heap o' mischeef in him. Whaur's he aff wi thae spells?"

Alec told the story, much to the satisfaction of George, who could appreciate the repentance of his son; although he was "nane o' the unco guid" himself. From that day he thought more of his son, and of Alec as well.

"Noo, Curly," said Alec, as soon as he re-appeared with the empty sack, "yer father's gaein to lat me big a boat, an' ye maun help me."

"What's the use o' a boat i' this weather?" said Curly.

"Ye gomeril!" returned his father; ye never luik an inch afore the pint o' yer ain neb. Ye wadna think o' a boat afore the spring; an' haith! the summer wad be ower, an' the water frozen again, afore ye had it biggit. Luik at Alec there. He's worth ten o' you.

"I ken that ilka bit as weel's ye do, father. Jist set's aff wi' 't, father."

"I canna attend till't jist i' the noo; but I s' set ye aff wi' 't the morn's nicht."

So here was an end to the troubles of the townsfolks from the *loons*, and without any increase of the constabulary force; for Curly being withdrawn, there was no one else of sufficiently inventive energy to take the lead, and the loons ceased to be dangerous to the peace of the community. Curly soon had both his head and his hands quite occupied with boat-building.

CHAPTER XXI

Every afternoon, now, the moment dinner was over, Alec set off for the workshop, and did not return till eight o'clock, or sometimes later. Mrs Forbes did not at all relish this change in his habits; but she had the good sense not to interfere.

One day he persuaded her to go with him, and see how the boat was getting on. This enticed her into some sympathy with his new pursuit. For there was the boat—a skeleton it is true, and not nearly ready yet for the clothing of its planks, or its final skin of paint—yet an undeniable boat to the motherly eye of hope. And there were Alec and Willie working away before her eyes, doing their best to fulfil the promise of its looks. A little quiet chat she had with George Macwha, in which he poured forth the praises of her boy, did not a little, as well, to reconcile her to his desertion of her.

"Deed, mem," said George, whose acquaintance with Scripture was neither extensive nor precise, "to my mind he's jist a fulfilment o' the prophecee, 'An auld heid upo' young shouthers;' though I canna richtly min' whilk o' the lesser prophets it is that conteens 't."

But Mrs Forbes never saw a little figure, lying in a corner, half-buried in wood-shavings, and utterly unconscious of her presence, being fast asleep.

This was, of course, Annie Anderson, who having heard of the new occupation of her hero, had, one afternoon, three weeks before Mrs Forbes's visit, found herself at George's shop door, she hardly knew how. It seemed to her that she had followed her feet, and they had taken her there before she knew where they were going. Peeping in, she watched Alec and Willie for some time at their work, without venturing to show herself. But George, who came up behind her as she stood, and perceived her interest in the operations of the boys, took her by the hand, and led her in, saying kindly:

"Here's a new apprentice, Alec. She wants to learn boat-biggin."

"Ou! Annie, is that you, lassie? Come awa'," said Alec. "There's a fine heap o' spales ye can sit upo', and see what we're aboot."

And so saying he seated her on the shavings, and half-buried her with an armful more to keep her warm.

"Put to the door, Willie," he added. "She'll be cauld. She's no workin', ye see."

Whereupon Willie shut the door, and Annie found herself very comfortable indeed. There she sat, in perfect contentment, watching the progress of the boat—a progress not very perceptible to her inexperienced eyes, for the building of a boat is like the building of a city or the making of a book: it turns out a boat at last. But after she had sat for a good while in silence, she looked up at Alec, and said:

"Is there naething I can do to help ye, Alec?"

"Naething, Annie. Lassies canna saw or plane, ye ken. Ye wad tak' aff yer ain lugs in a jiffey."

Again she was silent for a long time; and then, with a sigh, she looked up and said:

"Alec, I'm so cauld!"

"I'll bring my plaid to row ye in the morn's nicht."

Annie's heart bounded for joy; for here was what amounted to an express invitation for to-morrow.

"But," Alec went on, "come wi' me, and we'll sune get ye warm again.

Gie's yer han'."

Annie gave Alec her hand; and he lifted her out of her heap of spales, and led her away. She never thought of asking where he was leading her. They had not gone far down the *close*, when a roaring sound fell upon her ear, growing louder and louder as they went on; till, turning a sharp corner, there they saw the smithy fire. The door of the smithy was open, and they could see the smith at work some distance off. The fire glowed with gathered rage at the impudence of the bellows blowing in its face. The huge smith, with one arm flung affectionately over the shoulder of the insulting party,

urged it to the contest; while he stirred up the other to increased ferocity, by poking a piece of iron into the very middle of it. How the angry glare started out of it and stared all the murky *smiddy* in the face, showing such gloomy holes and corners in it, and such a lot of horse-shoes hung up close to the roof, ready to be fitted for unbelievable horse-wear; and making the smith's face and bare arms glow with a dusky red, like hot metal, as if he were the gnome-king of molten iron. Then he stooped, and took up some coal dust in a little shovel, and patted it down over the fire, and blew stronger than ever, and the sparks flew out with the rage of the fire. Annie was delighted to look at it; but there was a certain fierceness about the whole affair that made her shrink from going nearer; and she could not help feeling a little afraid of the giant smith in particular, with his brawny arms that twisted and tortured iron bars all day long,—and his black angry-looking face, that seemed for ever fighting with fire and stiff-necked metal His very look into the forge-fire ought to have been enough to put it out of countenance. Perhaps that was why it was so necessary to keep blowing and poking at it. Again he stooped, caught up a great iron spoon, dipped it into a tub of water, and poured the spoonful on the fire—a fresh insult, at which it hissed and sputtered, like one of the fiery flying serpents of which she had read in her Bible—gigantic, dragon-like creatures to her imagination—in a perfect insanity of fury. But not the slightest motion of her hand lying in Alec's, indicated reluctance, as he led her into the shop, and right up to the wrathful man, saying:

"Peter Whaup, here's a lassie 'at's 'maist frozen to deid wi' cauld. Will ye tak' her in and lat her stan' by your ingle-neuk, and warm hersel'?"

"I'll do that, Alec. Come in by, my bairn. What ca' they ye?"

"Annie Anderson."

"Ow, ay! I ken a' aboot ye weel eneuch. Ye can lea' her wi' me, Alec;

I'll luik efter her."

"I maun gang back to my boat, Annie," said Alec, then, apologetically, "but I'll come in for ye again."

So Annie was left with the smith, of whom she was not the least afraid, now that she had heard him speak. With his leathern apron, caught up in both hands, he swept a space on the front of the elevated hearth of the forge, clear of cinders and dust, and then, having wiped his hands on the same apron, lifted the girl as tenderly as if she had been a baby, and set her down on this spot, about a yard from the fire, on a level with it; and there she sat, in front of the smith, looking at the fire and the smith and the work he was about, in turns. He asked her a great many questions about herself and the Bruces, and her former life at home; and every question he asked he put in a yet kindlier voice. Sometimes he would stop in the middle of blowing, and lean forward with his arm on the handle of the bellows, and look full in the child's face till she had done answering him, with eyes that shone in the firelight as if the tears would have gathered, but could not for the heat.

"Ay! ay!" he would say, when she had answered him, and resume his blowing, slowly and dreamily. For this terrible smith's heart was just like his fire. He was a dreadful fellow for fighting and quarrelling when he got a drop too much, which was rather too often, if the truth must be told; but to this little woman-child his ways were as soft and tender as a woman's: he could burn or warm.

"An' sae ye likit bein' at the ferm best?" he said.

"Ay. But ye see my father deid—"

"I ken that, my bairn. The Lord haud a grip o' ye!"

It was not often that Peter Whaup indulged in a pious ejaculation. But this was a genuine one, and may be worth recording for the sake of Annie's answer:

"I'm thinkin' he hauds a grip o' us a', Mr Whaup."

And then she told him the story about the rats and the cat; for hardly a day passed just at this time without her not merely recalling it, but reflecting upon it. And the smith drew the back of his hand across both his eyes when she had done, and then pressed them both hard with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, as if they ached, while his other arm went blowing away as if nothing

was the matter but plenty of wind for the forge-fire. Then he pulled out the red-hot *gad*, or iron bar, which he seemed to have forgotten ever since Annie came in, and, standing with his back to her to protect her from the sparks, put it on his anvil, and began to lay on it, as if in a fury; while the sparks flew from his blows as if in mortal terror of the angry man that was pelting at the luminous glory laid thus submissive before him. In fact, Peter was attempting to hammer out more things than one, upon that *study* of his; for in Scotland they call a smith's anvil a study, so that he ranks with other artists in that respect. Then, as if anxious to hear the child speak yet again, he said, putting the iron once more in the fire, and proceeding to rouse the wrath of the coals:

"Ye kent Jeames Dow, than?"

"Ay; weel that. I kent Dooie as weel as Broonie."

"Wha was Broonie?"

"Ow! naebody but my ain coo."

"An' Jeames was kin' to ye?"

To this question no reply followed; but Peter, who stood looking at her, saw her lips and the muscles of her face quivering an answer, which if uttered at all, could come only in sobs and tears.

But the sound of approaching steps and voices restored her equanimity, and a listening look gradually displaced the emotion on her countenance. Over the half-door of the shop appeared two men, each bearing on his shoulder the socks (shares) of two ploughs, to be sharpened, or set. The instant she saw them she tumbled off her perch, and before they had got the door opened was half way to it, crying, "Dooie! Dooie!" Another instant and she was lifted high in Dowie's arms.

"My little mistress!" exclaimed he, kissing her. "Hoo cam ye here?"

"I'm safe eneuch here, Dooie; dinna be fleyt. I'll tell ye a' aboot it.

Alec's in George Macwha's shop yonner."

"And wha's Alec?" asked Dowie.

Leaving them now to their private communications, I will relate, for the sake of its result, what passed between James Dow's companion and the smith.

"The last time," said the youth, "that ye set my sock, Peter Whaup, ye turned it oot jist as saft's potty, and it wore oot raither suner."

"Hoot! man, ye mistak. It wasna the sock. It was the heid that cam' ahin' 't, and kentna hoo to haud it aff o' the stanes."

"Ha! ha! ha! My heid's nae sae saft's yer ain. It's no rosten a' day like yours, till it's birstled (scorched) and sung (singed) like a sheep's. Jist gie me a haud o' the taings, an' I s' set my sock to my ain min'."

Peter gave up the tongs at once, and the young fellow proceeded to put the share in the fire, and to work the bellows.

"Ye'll never mak ony thing o' 't that gait," said Peter, as he took the tongs from his hand, and altered the position of the share for him. "Ye wad hae 'it black upo' ae side and white upo' the ither. Noo ca (drive) steady, an' dinna blaw the fire aff o' the forge."

But when it came to the anvil part of the work, Peter found so many faults with the handling and the execution generally, that at length the lad threw down the tongs with a laugh and an oath intermingled, saying:

"Ye can mak' potty o' 't yersel, than, Peter.—Ye jist min' me o' the

Waesome Carl."

"What's that o' 't, Rory, man?"

"Ow! naething but a bit sang that I cam' upo' the ither day i' the neuk o' an auld newspaper."

"Lat's hear't," said Peter. "Sing't, Rory. Ye're better kent for a guid sang than for settin' socks."

"I canna sing 't, for I dinna ken the tune o' 't. I only got a glimp' o' 't, as I tell ye, in an auld news."

"Weel, say't, than. Ye're as weel kent for a guid memory, as a guid sang."

Without more preamble, Rory repeated, with appropriate gesture,

THE WAESOME CARL

There cam a man to oor toon-en',
An' a waesome carl was he;
Wi' a snubbert nose, an' a crookit mou',
An' a cock in his left ee.
And muckle he spied, and muckle he spak';
But the burden o' his sang
Was aye the same, and ower again:
There's nane o' ye a' but's wrang.
Ye're a' wrang, and a' wrang,
And a'thegither a' wrang;
There's no a man aboot the town,
But's a'thegither a' wrang.

That's no the gait to bake the breid,
Nor yet to brew the yill;
That's no the gait to haud the pleuch,
Nor yet to ca the mill.
That's no the gait to milk the coo,
Nor yet to spean the calf;
Nor yet to fill the girnel-kist—
Ye kenna yer wark by half.
Ye're a' wrang, &c.

The minister was na fit to pray,
And lat alane to preach;
He nowther had the gift o' grace,
Nor yet the gift o' speech.
He mind 't him o' Balaam's ass,
Wi' a differ ye may ken:
The Lord he open'd the ass's mou'
The minister open'd 's ain.
He's a' wrang, &c.

The puir precentor cudna sing,
He gruntit like a swine;
The verra elders cudna pass
The ladles till his min'.
And for the rulin' elder's grace,
It wasna worth a horn;
He didna half uncurse the meat,
Nor pray for mair the morn.
He's a' wrang, &c.

And aye he gied his nose a thraw,
And aye he crookit his mou';

And aye he cockit up his ee,
And said, "Tak' tent the noo."
We leuch ahint oor loof (palm), man,
And never said him nay:
And aye he spak'—jist lat him speik!
And aye he said his say:
Ye're a' wrang, &c.

Quo' oor guidman: "The crater's daft;
But wow! he has the claik;
Lat's see gin he can turn a han'
Or only luik and craik.
It's true we maunna lippen till him—
He's fairly crack wi' pride;
But he maun live, we canna kill him—
Gin he can work, he s' bide."
He was a' wrang, &c.

"It's true it's but a laddie's turn,
But we'll begin wi' a sma' thing;
There's a' thae weyds to gather an' burn—
An' he's the man for a' thing."
We gaed oor wa's, and loot him be,
To do jist as he micht;
We think to hear nae mair o' him,
Till we come hame at nicht;
But we're a' wrang, &c.

For, losh! or it was denner-time,
The lift (firmament) was in a low;
The reek rase up, as it had been
Frae Sodom-flames, I vow.
We ran like mad; but corn and byre
War blazin'—wae's the fell! -
As gin the deil had broucht the fire,
To mak' anither hell.
'Twas a' wrang, &c.

And by the blaze the carl stud,
Wi's han's aneath his tails;
And aye he said—"I tauld ye sae,
An' ye're to blame yersels.
It's a' your wite (blame), for ye're a' wrang—
Ye'll maybe own't at last:
What gart ye burn thae deevilich weyds,
Whan the win' blew frae the wast?
Ye're a' wrang, and a' wrang,
And a'thegither a' wrang;
There's no a man in a' the warl'

But's a'thegither a' wrang."

Before the recitation was over, which was performed with considerable spirit and truth, Annie and Dowie were listening attentively, along with Alec, who had returned to take Annie back, and who now joined loudly in the applause which followed the conclusion of the verses.

"Faith, that was a chield to haud oot ower frae," said Alec to Rory.

"And ye said the sang weel. Ye sud learn to sing't though."

"Maybe I may, some day; gin I cud only get a grainie saut to pit upo' the tail o' the bird that kens the tune o' 't. What ca' they you, noo?"

"Alec Forbes," answered the owner of the name.

"Ay," interposed Annie, addressing herself to Dowie, who still held her in his arms; "this is Alec, that I tell't ye aboot. He's richt guid to me. Alec, here's Dooie, 'at I like better nor onybody i' the warl'."

And she turned and kissed the bronzed face, which was a clean face, notwithstanding the contrary appearance given to it by a beard of three days' growth, which Annie's kiss was too full of love to mind.

Annie would have been yet more ready to tell Dowie and Alec each who the other was, had she not been occupied in her own mind with a discovery she had made. For had not those verses given evident delight to the company—Alec among the rest? Had he not applauded loudest of all?—Was there not here something she could do, and so contribute to the delight of the workmen, Alec and Willie, and thus have her part in the boat growing beneath their hands? She would then be no longer a tolerated beholder, indebted to their charity for permission to enjoy their society, but a contributing member of the working community—if not working herself, yet upholding those that wrought. The germ of all this found itself in her mind that moment, and she resolved before next night to be able to emulate Rory.

Dowie carried her home in his arms, and on the way she told him all about the kindness of Alec and his mother. He asked her many questions about the Bruces; but her patient nature, and the instinctive feeling that it would make Dowie unhappy, withheld her from representing the discomforts of her position in strong colours. Dowie, however, had his own thoughts on the matter.

"Hoo are ye the nicht, Mr Dow?" said Robert, who treated him with oily respect, because he was not only acquainted with all Annie's affairs, but was a kind of natural, if not legal, guardian of her and her property. "And whaur did ye fa' in wi' this stray lammie o' oors?"

"She's been wi' me this lang time," answered Dow, declining, with Scotch instinct, to give an answer, before he understood all the drift of the question. A Scotchman would always like the last question first.

"She's some ill for rinnin' oot," said Bruce, with soft words addressed to Dow, and a cutting look flung at Annie, "withoot speirin' leave, and we dinna ken whaur she gangs; and that's no richt for lass-bairns."

"Never ye min' her, Mr Bruce," replied Dow. "I ken her better nor you, no meanin' ony offence, seein' she was i' my airms afore she was a week auld. Lat her gang whaur she likes, and gin she does what she sudna do, I'll tak a' the wyte o' 't."

Now there was no great anxiety about Annie's welfare in the mind of Mr or Mrs Bruce. The shop and their own children, chiefly the former occupied their thoughts, and the less trouble they had from the presence of Annie, the better pleased they were—always provided they could escape the censure of neglect. Hence it came that Annie's absences were but little inquired into. All the attention they did show her, seemed to them to be of free grace and to the credit of their charity.

But Bruce did not like the influence that James Dow had with her; and before they retired for the night, he had another lecture ready for Annie.

"Annie," he said, "it's no becomin' for ane i' your station to be sae familiar. Ye'll be a young leddy some day, and it's no richt to tak up wi' servan's. There's Jeames Doo, jist a labourin' man, and aneath your station a'thegether, and he taks ye up in's airms, as gin ye war a bairn o' 's ain. It's no proaper."

"I like Jamie Doo better nor onybody i' the haill warl," said Annie, "excep'—"

Here she stopped short. She would not expose her heart to the gaze of that man.

"Excep' wha?" urged Bruce.

"I'm no gaein to say," returned Annie firmly.

"Ye're a camstairie (perverse) lassie," said Bruce, pushing her away with a forceful acidity in the combination of tone and push.

She walked off to bed, caring nothing for his rebuke. For since Alec's kindness had opened to her a well of the water of life, she had almost ceased to suffer from the ungeniality of her guardians. She forgot them as soon as she was out of their sight. And certainly they were nicer to forget than to remember.

CHAPTER XVIII. [sic, should be XXII.]

As soon as she was alone in her room she drew from her pocket a parcel containing something which Dowie had bought for her on their way home. When undone it revealed two or three tallow candles, a precious present in view of her hopes. But how should she get a light—for this was long before lucifer matches had risen even upon the horizon of Glamerton? There was but one way.

She waited, sitting on the edge of her bed, in the cold and darkness, until every sound in the house had ceased. Then she stepped cautiously down the old stair, which would crack now and then, use what care and gentleness she might.

It was the custom in all the houses of Glamerton to *rest* the fire; that is, to keep it gently alive all night by the help of a *truff*, or sod cut from the top of a peat-moss—a coarse peat in fact, more loose and porous than the peat proper—which they laid close down upon the fire, destroying almost all remaining draught by means of coal-dust. To this sealed fountain of light the little maiden was creeping through the dark house, with one of her *dips* in her hand—the pitcher with which she was about to draw from the fountain.

And a pretty study she would have made for any child-loving artist, when, with her face close to the grate, her mouth puckered up to do duty as the nozzle of a pair of bellows, one hand holding a twisted piece of paper between the bars, and the other buttressing the whole position from the floor, she blew at the live but reluctant fire, a glow spreading at each breath over her face, and then fading as the breath ceased, till at last the paper caught, and lighting it up from without with flame, and from within with the shine of success, made the lovely child-countenance like the face of one that has found the truth after the search of weary days.

Thus she lighted her candle, and again with careful steps she made her way to her own room. Setting the candle in a hole in the floor, left by the departure of a resinous knot, she opened her box, in which lay the few books her aunt had thrown into it when she left her old home. She had not yet learned to care much about books; but one of these had now become precious in her eyes, because she knew it contained poems that her father had been fond of reading. She soon found it—a volume by some Scotch poet of little fame, whose inward commotions had generated their own alleviation in the harmonies of ordered words in which they embodied themselves. In it Annie searched for something to learn before the following night, and found a ballad the look of which she liked, and which she very soon remembered as one she had heard her father read. It was very cold work to learn it at midnight, in winter, and in a garret too; but so intent was she, that before she went to bed, she had learned four or five verses so thoroughly that she could repeat them without thinking of what came next, and these she kept saying over and over again even in her dreams.

As soon as she woke in the dark morning she put her hand under her pillow to feel the precious volume, which she hoped would be the bond to bind her yet more closely to the boat and its builders. She took it to school in her pocket, learning the whole way as she went, and taking a roundabout road that her cousins might not interrupt her. She kept repeating and peeping every possible moment during school hours, and then all the way home again. So that by the time she had had her dinner, and the gauzy twilight had thickened to the "blanket of the dark," she felt quite ready to carry her offering of "the song that lightens toil," to George Macwha's workshop.

How clever they must be, she thought, as she went along, to make such a beautiful thing as the boat was now growing to! And she felt in her heart a kind of love for the look of living grace that the little craft already wore. Indeed before it was finished she had learned to regard it with a feeling of mingled awe, affection, and admiration, and the little boat had made for itself a place in her brain.

When she entered, she found the two boys already in busy talk; and without interrupting them by a word, she took her place on the heap of shavings which had remained undisturbed since last night. After the immediate consultation was over, and the young carpenters had settled to their work

—not knowing what introduction to give to her offering, she produced it without any at all. The boys did not know what to make of it at first, hearing something come all at once from Annie's lips which was neither question nor remark, and broke upon the silence like an alien sound. But they said nothing —only gave a glance at each other and at her, and settled down to listen and to work. Nor did they speak one word until she had finished the ballad.

"THE LAST WOOING,"

said Annie, all at once, and went on:

"O lat me in, my bonny lass!
It's a lang road ower the hill;
And the flauchterin' snaw began to fa',
As I cam by the mill."

"This is nae change-hoose, John Munro,
And ye needna come nae mair:
Ye crookit yer mou', and lichtlied me,
Last Wednesday, at the fair."

"I lichtlied ye!" "Aboon the glass."
"Foul-fa' the ill-faured mouth
That made the leein' word to pass,
By rowin' 't (wrapping) in the truth.

The fac' was this: I dochtna bide
To hear yer bonnie name,
Whaur muckle mous war opened wide
Wi' lawless mirth and shame.

And a' I said was: 'Hoot! lat sit;
She's but a bairn, the lass.'
It turned the spait (flood) o' words a bit,
And loot yer fair name pass."

"Thank ye for naething, John Munro!
My name can gang or bide;
It's no a sough o' drucken words
Wad turn my heid aside."

"O Elsie, lassie o' my ain!
The drift is cauld and strang;
O tak me in ae hour, and syne
I'll gather me and gang."

"Ye're guid at fleechin' (wheedling), Jock Munro.
For ye heedna fause and true:
Gang in to Katie at the Mill,
She lo'es sic like as you."

He turned his fit; he spak nae mair.
The lift was like to fa';
And Elsie's heart grew grit and sair (big and sore),
At sicht o' the drivin' snaw.

She laid her doun, but no to sleep,
For her verra heart was cauld;
And the sheets war like a frozen heap
O' snaw aboot her faul'd.

She rase fu' ear'. And a' theroot
Was ae braid windin' sheet;
At the door-sill, or winnock-lug (window-corner),
Was never a mark o' feet.

She crap a' day aboot the hoose,
Slow-fittit and hert-sair,
Aye keekin' oot like a frichtit moose,—
But Johnnie cam nae mair!

When saft the thow begud to melt
Awa' the ghaistly snaw,
Her hert was safter nor the thow,
Her pride had ta'en a fa.'

And she oot ower the hill wad gang,
Whaur the sun was blinkin' bonnie,
To see his auld minnie (mother) in her cot,
And speir aboot her Johnnie.

But as alang the hill she gaed,
Through snaw und slush and weet,
She stoppit wi' a chokin' cry—
'Twas Johnnie at her feet.

His heid was smoored aneath the snaw,
But his breist was maistly bare;
And 'twixt his breist and his richt han',
He claisp't a lock o' hair.

'Twas gowden hair: she kent it weel.
Alack, the sobs and sighs!
The warm win' blew, the laverock flew,
But Johnnie wadna rise.

The spring cam ower the wastlin (westward) hill,
And the frost it fled awa';
And the green grass luikit smilin' up,

Nane the waur for a' the snaw.

And saft it grew on Johnnie's grave,
Whaur deep the sunshine lay;
But, lang or that, on Elsie's heid
The gowden hair was gray.

George Macwha, who was at work in the other end of the shop when she began, had drawn near, chisel in hand, and joined the listeners.

"Weel dune, Annie!" exclaimed he, as soon as she had finished -feeling very shy and awkward, now that her experiment had been made. But she had not long to wait for the result.

"Say't ower again, Annie," said Alec, after a moment's pause.

Could she have wished for more?

She did say it over again.

"Eh, Annie! that's rale bonnie. Whaur did ye get it?" he asked.

"In an auld buikie o' my father's," answered she.

"Is there ony mair in't like it?"

"Ay, lots."

"Jist learn anither, will ye, afore the morn's nicht?"

"I'll do that, Alec."

"Dinna ye like it, Curly?" asked Alec, for Curly had said nothing.

"Ay, fegs! (faith)" was Curly's emphatic and uncritical reply.

Annie therefore learned and repeated a few more, which, if not received with equal satisfaction, yet gave sufficient pleasure to the listeners. They often, however, returned to the first, demanding it over and over again, till at length they knew it as well as she.

Hut a check was given for a while to these forenight meetings.

CHAPTER XXIII

A rapid thaw set in, and up through the vanishing whiteness dawned the dark colours of the wintry landscape. For a day or two the soft wet snow lay mixed with water over all the road. After that came mire and dirt. But it was still so far off spring, that nobody cared to be reminded of it yet. So when, after the snow had vanished, a hard black frost set in, it was welcomed by the schoolboys at least, whatever the old people and the poor people, and especially those who were both old and poor, may have thought of the change. Under the binding power of this frost, the surface of the slow-flowing Glamour and of the swifter Wan-Water, were once more chilled and stiffened to ice, which every day grew thicker and stronger. And now, there being no coverlet of snow upon it, the boys came out in troops, in their iron-shod shoes and their clumsy skates, to skim along those floors of delight that the winter had laid for them. To the fishes the ice was a warm blanket cast over them to keep them from the frost. But they must have been dismayed at the dim rush of so many huge forms above them, as if another river with other and awful fishes had buried theirs. Alec and Willie left their boat—almost for a time forgot it—repaired their skates, joined their school-fellows, and shot along the solid water with the banks flying past them. It was strange to see the banks thus from the middle surface of the water. All was strange about them; and the delight of the strangeness increased the delight of the motion, and sent the blood through their veins swift as their flight along the frozen rivers.

For many afternoons and into the early nights, Alec and Curly held on the joyful sport, and Annie was for the time left lonely. But she was neither disconsolate nor idle. The boat was a sure pledge for them. To the boat and her they must return. She went to the shop still, now and then, to see George Macwha, who, of an age beyond the seduction of ice and skates, kept on steadily at his work. To him she would repeat a ballad or two, at his request, and then go home to increase her stock. This was now a work of some difficulty, for her provision of candles was exhausted, and she had no money with which to buy more. The last candle had come to a tragical end. For, hearing steps approaching her room one morning, before she had put it away in its usual safety in her box, she hastily poked it into one of the holes in the floor and forgot it. When she sought it at night, it was gone. Her first dread was that she had been found out; but hearing nothing of it, she concluded at last that her enemies the *rottans* had carried it off and devoured it.

"Deil choke them upo' the wick o' 't!" exclaimed Curly, when she told him the next day, seeking a partner in her grief.

But a greater difficulty had to be encountered. It was not long before she had exhausted her book, from which she had chosen the right poems by insight, wonderfully avoiding by instinct the unsuitable, without knowing why, and repelled by the mere tone.

She thought day and night where additional *pabulum* might be procured, and at last came to the resolution of applying to Mr Cowie the clergyman. Without consulting any one, she knocked on an afternoon at Mr Cowie's door.

"Cud I see the minister?" she said to the maid.

"I dinna ken. What do you want?" was the maid's reply.

But Annie was Scotch too, and perhaps perceived that she would have but a small chance of being admitted into the minister's presence if she communicated the object of her request to the servant. So she only replied,

"I want to see himsel', gin ye please."

"Weel, come in, and I'll tell him. What's yer name?"

"Annie Anderson"

"Whaur do ye bide?"

"At Mr Bruce's, i' the Wast Wynd."

The maid went, and presently returning with the message that she was to "gang up the stair," conducted her to the study where the minister sat—a room, to Annie's amazement, filled with books from the top to the bottom of every wall. Mr Cowie held out his hand to her, and said,

"Well, my little maiden, what do you want?"

"Please, sir, wad ye len' me a sang-buik?"

"A psalm-book?" said the minister, hesitatingly, supposing he had not heard aright, and yet doubting if this could be the correction of his auricular blunder.

"Na, sir; I hae a psalm-buik at hame. It's a sang-buik that I want the len' o'."

Now the minister was one of an old school—a very worthy kind-hearted man, with nothing of what has been called *religious experience*. But he knew what some of his Lord's words meant, and amongst them certain words about little children. He had a feeling likewise, of more instinctive origin, that to be kind to little children was an important branch of his office. So he drew Annie close to him, as he sat in his easy-chair, laid his plump cheek against her thin white one, and said in the gentlest way:

"And what do you want a song-book for, dawtie?"

"To learn bonnie sangs oot o', sir. Dinna ye think they're the bonniest things in a' the warl', —sangs, sir?"

For Annie had by this time learned to love ballad-verse above everything but Alec and Dowie.

"And what kind o' sangs do ye like?" the clergyman asked, instead of replying.

"I like them best that gar ye greit, sir."

At every answer, she looked up in his face with her open clear blue eyes. And the minister began to love her not merely because she was a child, but because she was this child.

"Do ye sing them?" he asked, after a little pause of pleased gazing into the face of the child.

"Na, na; I only say them. I dinna ken the tunes o' them."

"And do you say them to Mr Bruce?"

"Mr Bruce, sir! Mr Bruce wad say I was daft. I wadna say a sang to him, sir, for—for—for a' the sweeties i' the shop."

"Well, who do you say them to?"

"To Alec Forbes and Willie Macwha. They're biggin a boat, sir; and they like to hae me by them, as they big, to say sangs to them. And I like it richt weel."

"It'll be a lucky boat, surely," said the minister, "to rise to the sound of rhyme, like some old Norse war-ship."

"I dinna ken, sir," said Annie, who certainly did not know what he meant.

Now the minister's acquaintance with any but the classic poets was very small indeed; so that, when he got up and stood before his book-shelves, with the design of trying what he could do for her, he could think of nobody but Milton.

So he brought the *Paradise Lost* from its place, where it had not been disturbed for years, and placing it before her on the table, for it was a quarto copy, asked her if that would do. She opened it slowly and gently, with a reverential circumspection, and for the space of about five minutes, remained silent over it, turning leaves, and tasting, and turning, and tasting again. At length, with one hand resting on the book, she turned to Mr Cowie, who was watching with much interest and a little anxiety the result of the experiment, and said gently and sorrowfully:

"I dinna think this is the richt buik for me, sir. There's nae sang in't that I can fin' out. It gangs a' straucht on, and never turns or halts a bit. Noo ye see, sir, a sang aye turns roun', and begins again, and afore lang it comes fairly to an en', jist like a day, sir, whan we gang to oor beds an' fa' asleep. But this hauds on and on, and there's no end till't ava (at all). It's jist like the sun that 'never tires nor stops to rest.'"

"'But round the world he shines,'" said the clergyman, completing the quotation, right good-humouredly, though he was somewhat bewildered; for he had begun to fall a-marvelling at the little

dingy maiden, with the untidy hair and dirty frock, who had thoughts of her own, and would not concede the faculty of song to the greatest of epic poets.

Doubtless if he had tried her with some of the short poems at the end of the *Paradise Regained*, which I doubt if he had ever even read, she would at least have allowed that they were not devoid of song. But it was better perhaps that she should be left free to follow her own instincts. The true teacher is the one who is able to guide those instincts, strengthen them with authority, and illuminate them with revelation of their own fundamental truth. The best this good minister could do was not to interfere with them. He was so anxious to help her, however, that, partly to gain some minutes for reflection, partly to get the assistance of his daughters, he took her by the hand, and led her to the dining-room, where tea was laid for himself and his two grown-up girls. She went without a thought of question or a feeling of doubt; for however capable she was of ordering her own way, nothing delighted her more than blind submission, wherever she felt justified in yielding it. It was a profound pleasure to her not to know what was coming next, provided some one whom she loved did. So she sat down to tea with the perfect composure of submission to a superior will. It never occurred to her that she had no right to be there; for had not the minister himself led her there? And his daughters were very kind and friendly. In the course of the meal, Mr Cowie having told them the difficulty he was in, they said that perhaps they might be able to find what she wanted, or something that might take the place of it; and after tea, one of them brought two volumes of ballads of all sorts, some old, some new, some Scotch, some English, and put them into Annie's hands, asking her if that book would do. The child eagerly opened one of the volumes, and glanced at a page: It sparkled with the right ore of ballad-words. The Red, the colour always of delight, grew in her face. She closed the book as if she could not trust herself to look at it while others were looking at her, and said with a sigh:

"Eh, mem! Ye wonna lippen them *baith* to me?"

"Yes, I will," said Miss Cowie. "I am sure you will take care of them."

"*That—I—will*," returned Annie, with an honesty and determination of purpose that made a great impression upon Mr Cowie especially. And she ran home with a feeling of richness of possession such as she had never before experienced.

Her first business was to scamper up to her room, and hide the precious treasures in her *kist*, there to wait all night, like the buried dead, for the coming morning.

When she confessed to Mr Bruce that she had had tea with the minister, he held up his hands in the manner which commonly expresses amazement; but what the peculiar character or ground of the amazement might be remained entirely unrevealed, for he said not a word to elucidate the gesture.

The next time Annie went to see the minister it was on a very different quest from the loan of a song-book.

CHAPTER XXIV

One afternoon, as Alec went home to dinner, he was considerably surprised to find Mr Malison leaning on one of the rails of the foot-bridge over the Glamour, looking down upon its frozen surface. There was nothing supernatural or alarming in this, seeing that, after school was over, Alec had run up the town to the saddler's, to get a new strap for one of his skates. What made the fact surprising was, that the scholars so seldom encountered the master anywhere except in school. Alec thought to pass, but the moment his foot was on the bridge the master lifted himself up, and faced round.

"Well, Alec," he said, "where have *you* been?"

"To get a new strap for my skatcher," answered Alec.

"You're fond of skating—are you, Alec?"

"Yes, sir."

"I used to be when I was a boy. Have you had your dinner?"

"No, sir."

"Then I suppose your mother has not dined, either?"

"She never does till I go home, sir."

"Then I won't intrude upon her. I did mean to call this afternoon."

"She will be very glad to see you, sir. Come and take a share of what there is."

"I think I had better not, Alec."

"Do, sir. I am sure she will make you welcome."

Mr Malison hesitated. Alec pressed him. He yielded; and they went along the road together.

I shall not have to show much more than half of Mr Malison's life—the school half, which, both inwardly and outwardly, was very different from the other. The moment he was out of the school, the moment, that is, that he ceased for the day to be responsible for the moral and intellectual condition of his turbulent subjects, the whole character—certainly the whole deportment—of the man changed. He was now as meek and gentle in speech and behaviour as any mother could have desired.

Nor was the change a hypocritical one. The master never interfered, or only upon the rarest occasions when pressure from without was brought to bear upon him, as in the case of Juno, with what the boys did out of school. He was glad enough to accept utter irresponsibility for that portion of his time; so that between the two parts of the day, as they passed through the life of the master, there was almost as little connection as between the waking and sleeping hours of a somnambulist.

But, as he leaned over the rail of the bridge, whither a rare impulse to movement had driven him, his thoughts had turned upon Alec Forbes and his antagonism. Out of school, he could not help feeling that the boy had not been very far wrong, however subversive of authority his behaviour had been; but it was not therefore the less mortifying to think how signally he had been discomfited by him. And he was compelled moreover to acknowledge to himself that it was a mercy that Alec was not the boy to follow up his advantage by heading—not a party against the master, but the whole school, which would have been ready enough to follow such a victorious leader. So there was but one way of setting matters right, as Mr Malison had generosity enough left in him to perceive; and that was, to make a friend of his adversary. Indeed there is that in the depths of every human breast which makes a reconciliation the only victory that can give true satisfaction. Nor was the master the only gainer by the resolve which thus arose in his mind the very moment before he felt Alec's tread upon the bridge.

They walked together to Howglen, talking kindly the whole way; to which talk, and most likely to which kindness between them, a little incident had contributed as well. Alec had that day rendered a passage of Virgil with a remarkable accuracy, greatly pleasing to the master, who, however, had no idea to what this isolated success was attributable. I forget the passage; but it had reference to the setting of sails, and Alec could not rest till he had satisfied himself about its meaning; for when we are once interested in anything, we want to see it nearer as often as it looms in sight. So he had

with some difficulty cleared away the mists that clung about the words, till at length he beheld and understood the fact embodied in them.

Alec had never had praise from Mr Malison before—at least none that had made any impression on him—and he found it very sweet. And through the pleasure dawned the notion that perhaps he might be a scholar after all if he gave his mind to it. In this he was so far right: a fair scholar he might be, though a learned man he never could be, without developing an amount of will, and effecting a degree of self-conquest, sufficient for a Jesuit,—losing at the same time not only what he was especially made for knowing, but, in a great measure, what he was especially made for being. Few, however, are in danger of going so grievously against the intellectual impulses of their nature: far more are in danger of following them without earnestness, or if earnestly, then with the absorption of an eagerness only worldly.

Mrs Forbes, seeing the pleasure expressed on Alec's countenance, received Mr Malison with more than the usual cordiality, forgetting when he was present before her eyes what she had never failed to think of with bitterness when he was only present to her mind.

As soon as dinner was over Alec rushed off to the river, leaving his mother and the master together. Mrs Forbes brought out the whisky-bottle, and Mr Malison, mixing a tumbler of toddy, filled a wine-glass for his hostess.

"We'll make a man of Alec some day yet," said he, giving an ill-considered form to his thoughts.

"'Deed!" returned Mrs Forbes, irritated at the suggestion of any difficulty in the way of Alec's ultimate manhood, and perhaps glad of the opportunity of speaking her mind—"'Deed! Mr Malison, ye made a bonnie munsie (monsieur) o' him a month ago. It wad set ye weel to try yer hand at makin' a man o' him noo."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.