GEORGE MACDONALD

ROBERT FALCONER

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Содержание

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PART I.—HIS BOYHOOD

CHAPTER I. A RECOLLECTION

Robert Falconer, school-boy, aged fourteen, thought he had never seen his father; that is, thought he had no recollection of having ever seen him. But the moment when my story begins, he had begun to doubt whether his belief in the matter was correct. And, as he went on thinking, he became more and more assured that he had seen his father somewhere about six years before, as near as a thoughtful boy of his age could judge of the lapse of a period that would form half of that portion of his existence which was bound into one by the reticulations of memory.

For there dawned upon his mind the vision of one Sunday afternoon. Betty had gone to church, and he was alone with his grandmother, reading The Pilgrim's Progress to her, when, just as Christian knocked at the wicket-gate, a tap came to the street door, and he went to open it. There he saw a tall, somewhat haggard-looking man, in a shabby black coat (the vision gradually dawned upon him till it reached the minuteness

of all these particulars), his hat pulled down on to his projecting eyebrows, and his shoes very dusty, as with a long journey on foot—it was a hot Sunday, he remembered that—who looked at him very strangely, and without a word pushed him aside, and went straight into his grandmother's parlour, shutting the door behind him. He followed, not doubting that the man must have a right to go there, but questioning very much his right to shut him out. When he reached the door, however, he found it bolted; and outside he had to stay all alone, in the desolate remainder of the house, till Betty came home from church.

He could even recall, as he thought about it, how drearily the afternoon had passed. First he had opened the street door, and stood in it. There was nothing alive to be seen, except a sparrow picking up crumbs, and he would not stop till he was tired of him. The Royal Oak, down the street to the right, had not even a horseless gig or cart standing before it; and King Charles, grinning awfully in its branches on the signboard, was invisible from the distance at which he stood. In at the other end of the empty street, looked the distant uplands, whose waving corn and grass were likewise invisible, and beyond them rose one blue truncated peak in the distance, all of them wearily at rest this weary Sabbath day. However, there was one thing than which this was better, and that was being at church, which, to this boy at least, was the very fifth essence of dreariness.

He closed the door and went into the kitchen. That was nearly as bad. The kettle was on the fire, to be sure, in anticipation

of tea; but the coals under it were black on the top, and it made only faint efforts, after immeasurable intervals of silence, to break into a song, giving a hum like that of a bee a mile off, and then relapsing into hopeless inactivity. Having just had his dinner, he was not hungry enough to find any resource in the drawer where the oatcakes lay, and, unfortunately, the old wooden clock in the corner was going, else there would have been some amusement in trying to torment it into demonstrations of life, as he had often done in less desperate circumstances than the present. At last he went up-stairs to the very room in which he now was, and sat down upon the floor, just as he was sitting now. He had not even brought his Pilgrim's Progress with him from his grandmother's room. But, searching about in all holes and corners, he at length found Klopstock's Messiah translated into English, and took refuge there till Betty came home. Nor did he go down till she called him to tea, when, expecting to join his grandmother and the stranger, he found, on the contrary, that he was to have his tea with Betty in the kitchen, after which he again took refuge with Klopstock in the garret, and remained there till it grew dark, when Betty came in search of him, and put him to bed in the gable-room, and not in his usual chamber. In the morning, every trace of the visitor had vanished, even to the thorn stick which he had set down behind the door as he entered.

All this Robert Falconer saw slowly revive on the palimpsest of his memory, as he washed it with the vivifying waters of recollection.

CHAPTER II. A VISITOR

It was a very bare little room in which the boy sat, but it was his favourite retreat. Behind the door, in a recess, stood an empty bedstead, without even a mattress upon it. This was the only piece of furniture in the room, unless some shelves crowded with papers tied up in bundles, and a cupboard in the wall, likewise filled with papers, could be called furniture. There was no carpet on the floor, no windows in the walls. The only light came from the door, and from a small skylight in the sloping roof, which showed that it was a garret-room. Nor did much light come from the open door, for there was no window on the walled stair to which it opened; only opposite the door a few steps led up into another garret, larger, but with a lower roof, unceiled, and perforated with two or three holes, the panes of glass filling which were no larger than the small blue slates which covered the roof: from these panes a little dim brown light tumbled into the room where the boy sat on the floor, with his head almost between his knees, thinking.

But there was less light than usual in the room now, though it was only half-past two o'clock, and the sun would not set for more than half-an-hour yet; for if Robert had lifted his head and looked up, it would have been at, not through, the skylight. No sky was to be seen. A thick covering of snow lay over the glass. A partial thaw, followed by frost, had fixed it there—a mass of

imperfect cells and confused crystals. It was a cold place to sit in, but the boy had some faculty for enduring cold when it was the price to be paid for solitude. And besides, when he fell into one of his thinking moods, he forgot, for a season, cold and everything else but what he was thinking about—a faculty for which he was to be envied.

If he had gone down the stair, which described half the turn of a screw in its descent, and had crossed the landing to which it brought him, he could have entered another bedroom, called the gable or rather ga'le room, equally at his service for retirement; but, though carpeted and comfortably furnished, and having two windows at right angles, commanding two streets, for it was a corner house, the boy preferred the garret-room—he could not tell why. Possibly, windows to the streets were not congenial to the meditations in which, even now, as I have said, the boy indulged.

These meditations, however, though sometimes as abstruse, if not so continuous, as those of a metaphysician—for boys are not unfrequently more given to metaphysics than older people are able or, perhaps, willing to believe—were not by any means confined to such subjects: castle-building had its full share in the occupation of those lonely hours; and for this exercise of the constructive faculty, what he knew, or rather what he did not know, of his own history gave him scope enough, nor was his brain slow in supplying him with material corresponding in quantity to the space afforded. His mother had been dead for

so many years that he had only the vaguest recollections of her tenderness, and none of her person. All he was told of his father was that he had gone abroad. His grandmother would never talk about him, although he was her own son. When the boy ventured to ask a question about where he was, or when he would return, she always replied—'Bairns suld haud their tongues.' Nor would she vouchsafe another answer to any question that seemed to her from the farthest distance to bear down upon that subject. 'Bairns maun learn to haud their tongues,' was the sole variation of which the response admitted. And the boy did learn to hold his tongue. Perhaps he would have thought less about his father if he had had brothers or sisters, or even if the nature of his grandmother had been such as to admit of their relationship being drawn closer—into personal confidence, or some measure of familiarity. How they stood with regard to each other will soon appear.

Whether the visions vanished from his brain because of the thickening of his blood with cold, or he merely acted from one of those undefined and inexplicable impulses which occasion not a few of our actions, I cannot tell, but all at once Robert started to his feet and hurried from the room. At the foot of the garret stair, between it and the door of the gable-room already mentioned, stood another door at right angles to both, of the existence of which the boy was scarcely aware, simply because he had seen it all his life and had never seen it open. Turning his back on this last door, which he took for a blind one, he went down a short broad stair, at the foot of which was a window. He then turned to

the left into a long flagged passage or transe, passed the kitchen door on the one hand, and the double-leaved street door on the other; but, instead of going into the parlour, the door of which closed the transe, he stopped at the passage-window on the right, and there stood looking out.

What might be seen from this window certainly could not be called a very pleasant prospect. A broad street with low houses of cold gray stone is perhaps as uninteresting a form of street as any to be found in the world, and such was the street Robert looked out upon. Not a single member of the animal creation was to be seen in it, not a pair of eyes to be discovered looking out at any of the windows opposite. The sole motion was the occasional drift of a vapour-like film of white powder, which the wind would lift like dust from the snowy carpet that covered the street, and wafting it along for a few yards, drop again to its repose, till another stronger gust, prelusive of the wind about to rise at sun-down,—a wind cold and bitter as death—would rush over the street, and raise a denser cloud of the white water-dust to sting the face of any improbable person who might meet it in its passage. It was a keen, knife-edged frost, even in the house, and what Robert saw to make him stand at the desolate window, I do not know, and I believe he could not himself have told. There he did stand, however, for the space of five minutes or so, with nothing better filling his outer eyes at least than a bald spot on the crown of the street, whence the wind had swept away the snow, leaving it brown and bare, a spot of March in the middle

of January.

He heard the town drummer in the distance, and let the sound invade his passive ears, till it crossed the opening of the street, and vanished 'down the town.'

'There's Dooble Sanny,' he said to himself—'wi' siccan cauld han's, 'at he's playin' upo' the drum-heid as gin he was loupin' in a bowie (leaping in a cask).'

Then he stood silent once more, with a look as if anything would be welcome to break the monotony.

While he stood a gentle timorous tap came to the door, so gentle indeed that Betty in the kitchen did not hear it, or she, tall and Roman-nosed as she was, would have answered it before the long-legged dreamer could have reached the door, though he was not above three yards from it. In lack of anything better to do, Robert stalked to the summons. As he opened the door, these words greeted him:

'Is Robert at—eh! it's Bob himsel'! Bob, I'm byous (exceedingly) cauld.'

'What for dinna ye gang hame, than?'

'What for wasna ye at the schuil the day?'

'I spier ae queston at you, and ye answer me wi' anither.'

'Weel, I hae nae hame to gang till.'

'Weel, and I had a sair heid (a headache). But whaur's yer hame gane till than?'

'The hoose is there a' richt, but whaur my mither is I dinna ken. The door's lockit, an' Jeames Jaup, they tell me 's tane awa' the

key. I doobt my mither's awa' upo' the tramp again, and what's to come o' me, the Lord kens.'

'What's this o' 't?' interposed a severe but not unmelodious voice, breaking into the conversation between the two boys; for the parlour door had opened without Robert's hearing it, and Mrs. Falconer, his grandmother, had drawn near to the speakers.

'What's this o' 't?' she asked again. 'Wha's that ye're conversin' wi' at the door, Robert? Gin it be ony decent laddie, tell him to come in, and no stan' at the door in sic a day 's this.'

As Robert hesitated with his reply, she looked round the open half of the door, but no sooner saw with whom he was talking than her tone changed. By this time Betty, wiping her hands in her apron, had completed the group by taking her stand in the kitchen door.

'Na, na,' said Mrs. Falconer. 'We want nane sic-like here. What does he want wi' you, Robert? Gie him a piece, Betty, and lat him gang.—Eh, sirs! the callant hasna a stockin'-fit upo' 'im —and in sic weather!'

For, before she had finished her speech, the visitor, as if in terror of her nearer approach, had turned his back, and literally showed her, if not a clean pair of heels, yet a pair of naked heels from between the soles and uppers of his shoes: if he had any stockings at all, they ceased before they reached his ankles.

'What ails him at me?' continued Mrs. Falconer, 'that he rins as gin I war a boodie? But it's nae wonner he canna bide the sicht o' a decent body, for he's no used till 't. What does he want wi'

you, Robert?'

But Robert had a reason for not telling his grandmother what the boy had told him: he thought the news about his mother would only make her disapprove of him the more. In this he judged wrong. He did not know his grandmother yet.

'He's in my class at the schuil,' said Robert, evasively.

'Him? What class, noo?'

Robert hesitated one moment, but, compelled to give some answer, said, with confidence,

'The Bible-class.'

'I thocht as muckle! What gars ye play at hide and seek wi' me? Do ye think I dinna ken weel eneuch there's no a lad or a lass at the schuil but 's i' the Bible-class? What wants he here?'

'Ye hardly gae him time to tell me, grannie. Ye frichtit him.'

'Me fricht him! What for suld I fricht him, laddie? I'm no sic ferlie (wonder) that onybody needs be frichtit at me.'

The old lady turned with visible, though by no means profound offence upon her calm forehead, and walking back into her parlour, where Robert could see the fire burning right cheerily, shut the door, and left him and Betty standing together in the transe. The latter returned to the kitchen, to resume the washing of the dinner-dishes; and the former returned to his post at the window. He had not stood more than half a minute, thinking what was to be done with his school-fellow deserted of his mother, when the sound of a coach-horn drew his attention to the right, down the street, where he could see part of the other

street which crossed it at right angles, and in which the gable of the house stood. A minute after, the mail came in sight—scarlet, spotted with snow—and disappeared, going up the hill towards the chief hostelry of the town, as fast as four horses, tired with the bad footing they had had through the whole of the stage, could draw it after them. By this time the twilight was falling; for though the sun had not yet set, miles of frozen vapour came between him and this part of the world, and his light was never very powerful so far north at this season of the year.

Robert turned into the kitchen, and began to put on his shoes. He had made up his mind what to do.

'Ye're never gaein' oot, Robert?' said Betty, in a hoarse tone of expostulation.

"Deed am I, Betty. What for no?'

'You 'at's been in a' day wi' a sair heid! I'll jist gang benn the hoose and tell the mistress, and syne we'll see what she'll please to say till 't.'

'Ye'll do naething o' the kin', Betty. Are ye gaein' to turn clash-pyet (tell-tale) at your age?'

'What ken ye aboot my age? There's never a man-body i' the toon kens aught aboot my age.'

'It's ower muckle for onybody to min' upo' (remember), is 't, Betty?'

'Dinna be ill-tongued, Robert, or I'll jist gang benn the hoose to the mistress.'

'Betty, wha began wi' bein' ill-tongued? Gin ye tell my

grandmither that I gaed oot the nicht, I'll gang to the schuilmaister o' Muckledrum, and get a sicht o' the kirstenin' buik; an' gin yer name binna there, I'll tell ilkabody I meet 'at oor Betty was never kirstened; and that'll be a sair affront, Betty.'

'Hoot! was there ever sic a laddie!' said Betty, attempting to laugh it off. 'Be sure ye be back afore tay-time, 'cause yer grannie 'ill be speirin' efter ye, and ye wadna hae me lee aboot ye?'

'I wad hae naebody lee about me. Ye jist needna lat on 'at ye hear her. Ye can be deif eneuch when ye like, Betty. But I s' be back afore tay-time, or come on the waur.'

Betty, who was in far greater fear of her age being discovered than of being unchristianized in the search, though the fact was that she knew nothing certain about the matter, and had no desire to be enlightened, feeling as if she was thus left at liberty to hint what she pleased,—Betty, I say, never had any intention of going 'benn the hoose to the mistress.' For the threat was merely the rod of terror which she thought it convenient to hold over the back of the boy, whom she always supposed to be about some mischief except he were in her own presence and visibly reading a book: if he were reading aloud, so much the better. But Robert likewise kept a rod for his defence, and that was Betty's age, which he had discovered to be such a precious secret that one would have thought her virtue depended in some cabalistic manner upon the concealment of it. And, certainly, nature herself seemed to favour Betty's weakness, casting such a mist about the number of her years as the goddesses of old were wont to cast about a

wounded favourite; for some said Betty was forty, others said she was sixty-five, and, in fact, almost everybody who knew her had a different belief on the matter.

By this time Robert had conquered the difficulty of induing boots as hard as a thorough wetting and as thorough a drying could make them, and now stood prepared to go. His object in setting out was to find the boy whom his grandmother had driven from the door with a hastier and more abject flight than she had in the least intended. But, if his grandmother should miss him, as Betty suggested, and inquire where he had been, what was he to say? He did not mind misleading his grannie, but he had a great objection to telling her a lie. His grandmother herself delivered him from this difficulty.

'Robert, come here,' she called from the parlour door. And Robert obeyed.

'Is 't dingin' on, Robert?' she asked.

'No, grannie; it's only a starnie o' drift.'

The meaning of this was that there was no fresh snow falling, or beating on, only a little surface snow blowing about.

'Weel, jist pit yer shune on, man, and rin up to Miss Naper's upo' the Squaur, and say to Miss Naper, wi' my compliments, that I wad be sair obleeged till her gin she wad len' me that fine receipt o' hers for crappit heids, and I'll sen' 't back safe the morn's mornin'. Rin, noo.'

This commission fell in admirably with Robert's plans, and he started at once.

CHAPTER III. THE BOAR'S HEAD

Miss Napier was the eldest of three maiden sisters who kept the principal hostelry of Rothieden, called The Boar's Head; from which, as Robert reached the square in the dusk, the mail-coach was moving away with a fresh quaternion of horses. He found a good many boxes standing upon the pavement close by the archway that led to the inn-yard, and around them had gathered a group of loungers, not too cold to be interested. These were looking towards the windows of the inn, where the owner of the boxes had evidently disappeared.

'Saw ye ever sic a sicht in oor toon afore!' said Dooble Sanny, as people generally called him, his name being Alexander Alexander, pronounced, by those who chose to speak of him with the ordinary respect due from one mortal to another, Sandy Elshender. Double Sandy was a soutar, or shoemaker, remarkable for his love of sweet sounds and whisky. He was, besides, the town-crier, who went about with a drum at certain hours of the morning and evening, like a perambulating clock, and also made public announcements of sales, losses, &c.; for the rest—a fierce, fighting fellow when in anger or in drink, which latter included the former.

'What's the sicht, Sandy?' asked Robert, coming up with his hands in the pockets of his trowsers.

'Sic a sicht as ye never saw, man,' returned Sandy; 'the

bonniest leddy ever man set his ee upo'. I culd na hae thocht there had been sic a woman i' this warl'.'

'Hoot, Sandy!' said Robert, 'a body wad think she was tint (lost) and ye had the cryin' o' her. Speyk laicher, man; she'll maybe hear ye. Is she i' the inn there?'

'Ay is she,' answered Sandy. 'See sic a warl' o' kists as she's brocht wi' her,' he continued, pointing towards the pile of luggage. 'Saw ye ever sic a bourach (heap)? It jist blecks (beats) me to think what ae body can du wi' sae mony kists. For I mayna doobt but there's something or ither in ilka ane o' them. Naebody wad carry aboot toom (empty) kists wi' them. I cannot mak' it oot.'

The boxes might well surprise Sandy, if we may draw any conclusions from the fact that the sole implement of personal adornment which he possessed was two inches of a broken comb, for which he had to search when he happened to want it, in the drawer of his stool, among awls, lumps of rosin for his violin, masses of the same substance wrought into shoemaker's wax for his ends, and packets of boar's bristles, commonly called birse, for the same.

'Are thae a' ae body's?' asked Robert.

'Troth are they. They're a' hers, I wat. Ye wad hae thocht she had been gaein' to The Bothie; but gin she had been that, there wad hae been a cairriage to meet her,' said Crookit Caumill, the ostler.

The Bothie was the name facetiously given by Alexander,

Baron Rothie, son of the Marquis of Boarshead, to a house he had built in the neighbourhood, chiefly for the accommodation of his bachelor friends from London during the shooting-season.

'Haud yer tongue, Caumill,' said the shoemaker. 'She's nae sic cattle, yon.'

'Haud up the bit bowat (stable-lantern), man, and lat Robert here see the direction upo' them. Maybe he'll mak' something o't. He's a fine scholar, ye ken,' said another of the bystanders.

The ostler held the lantern to the card upon one of the boxes, but Robert found only an M., followed by something not very definite, and a J., which might have been an I., Rothieden, Driftshire, Scotland.

As he was not immediate with his answer, Peter Lumley, one of the group, a lazy ne'er-do-weel, who had known better days, but never better manners, and was seldom quite drunk, and seldomer still quite sober, struck in with,

'Ye dinna ken a' thing yet, ye see, Robbie.'

From Sandy this would have been nothing but a good-humoured attempt at facetiousness. From Lumley it meant spite, because Robert's praise was in his ears.

'I dinna preten' to ken ae hair mair than ye do yersel', Mr. Lumley; and that's nae sayin' muckle, surely,' returned Robert, irritated at his tone more than at his words.

The bystanders laughed, and Lumley flew into a rage.

'Haud yer ill tongue, ye brat,' he said. 'Wha' are ye to mak' sic remarks upo' yer betters? A'body kens yer gran'father was

naething but the blin' piper o' Portcloddie.'

This was news to Robert—probably false, considering the quarter whence it came. But his mother-wit did not forsake him.

'Weel, Mr. Lumley,' he answered, 'didna he pipe weel? Daur ye tell me 'at he didna pipe weel?—as weel's ye cud hae dune 't yersel', noo, Mr. Lumley?'

The laugh again rose at Lumley's expense, who was well known to have tried his hand at most things, and succeeded in nothing. Dooble Sanny was especially delighted.

'De'il hae ye for a de'il's brat! 'At I suld sweer!' was all Lumley's reply, as he sought to conceal his mortification by attempting to join in the laugh against himself. Robert seized the opportunity of turning away and entering the house.

'That ane's no to be droont or brunt aither,' said Lumley, as he disappeared.

'He'll no be hang't for closin' your mou', Mr. Lumley,' said the shoemaker.

Thereupon Lumley turned and followed Robert into the inn.

Robert had delivered his message to Miss Napier, who sat in an arm-chair by the fire, in a little comfortable parlour, held sacred by all about the house. She was paralytic, and unable to attend to her guests further than by giving orders when anything especial was referred to her decision. She was an old lady—nearly as old as Mrs. Falconer—and wore glasses, but they could not conceal the kindness of her kindly eyes. Probably from giving less heed to a systematic theology, she had nothing of

that sternness which first struck a stranger on seeing Robert's grandmother. But then she did not know what it was to be contradicted; and if she had been married, and had had sons, perhaps a sternness not dissimilar might have shown itself in her nature.

'Noo ye maunna gang awa' till ye get something,' she said, after taking the receipt in request from a drawer within her reach, and laying it upon the table. But ere she could ring the bell which stood by her side, one of her servants came in.

'Please, mem,' she said, 'Miss Letty and Miss Lizzy's seein' efter the bonny leddy; and sae I maun come to you.'

'Is she a' that bonny, Meg?' asked her mistress.

'Na, na, she's nae sae fearsome bonny; but Miss Letty's unco ta'en wi' her, ye ken. An' we a' say as Miss Letty says i' this hoose. But that's no the pint. Mr. Lumley's here, seekin' a gill: is he to hae't?'

'Has he had eneuch already, do ye think, Meg?'

'I dinna ken aboot eneuch, mem; that's ill to mizzer; but I dinna think he's had ower muckle.'

'Weel, lat him tak' it. But dinna lat him sit doon.'

'Verra weel, mem,' said Meg, and departed.

'What gars Mr. Lumley say 'at my gran'father was the blin' piper o' Portcloddie? Can ye tell me, Miss Naper?' asked Robert.

'Whan said he that, Robert?'

'Jist as I cam in.'

Miss Napier rang the bell. Another maid appeared.

'Sen' Meg here direckly.'

Meg came, her eyes full of interrogation.

'Dinna gie Lumley a drap. Set him up to insult a young gentleman at my door-cheek! He s' no hae a drap here the nicht. He 's had ower muckle, Meg, already, an' ye oucht to hae seen that.'

"Deed, mem, he 's had mair than ower muckle, than; for there's anither gill ower the thrapple o' 'm. I div my best, mem, but, never tastin' mysel', I canna aye tell hoo muckle 's i' the wame o' a' body 'at comes in.'

'Ye're no fit for the place, Meg; that's a fac'.'

At this charge Meg took no offence, for she had been in the place for twenty years. And both mistress and maid laughed the moment they parted company.

'Wha's this 'at's come the nicht, Miss Naper, 'at they're sae ta'en wi'?' asked Robert.

'Atweel, I dinna ken yet. She's ower bonnie by a' accoonts to be gaein' about her lane (alone). It's a mercy the baron's no at hame. I wad hae to lock her up wi' the forks and spunes.'

'What for that?' asked Robert.

But Miss Napier vouchsafed no further explanation. She stuffed his pockets with sweet biscuits instead, dismissed him in haste, and rang the bell.

'Meg, whaur hae they putten the stranger-leddy?'

'She's no gaein' to bide at our hoose, mem.'

'What say ye, lass? She's never gaein' ower to Lucky Happit's,

is she?'

'Ow na, mem. She's a leddy, ilka inch o' her. But she's some sib (relation) to the auld captain, and she's gaein' doon the street as sune's Caumill's ready to tak her bit boxes i' the barrow. But I doobt there'll be maist three barrowfu's o' them.'

'Atweel. Ye can gang.'

CHAPTER IV. SHARGAR

Robert went out into the thin drift, and again crossing the wide desolate-looking square, turned down an entry leading to a kind of court, which had once been inhabited by a well-to-do class of the townspeople, but had now fallen in estimation. Upon a stone at the door of what seemed an outhouse he discovered the object of his search.

'What are ye sittin' there for, Shargar?'

Shargar is a word of Gaelic origin, applied, with some sense of the ridiculous, to a thin, wasted, dried-up creature. In the present case it was the nickname by which the boy was known at school; and, indeed, where he was known at all.

'What are ye sittin' there for, Shargar? Did naebody offer to tak ye in?'

'Na, nane o' them. I think they maun be a' i' their beds. I'm most dreidfu' cauld.'

The fact was, that Shargar's character, whether by imputation from his mother, or derived from his own actions, was none of the best. The consequence was, that, although scarcely one of the neighbours would have allowed him to sit there all night, each was willing to wait yet a while, in the hope that somebody else's humanity would give in first, and save her from the necessity of offering him a seat by the fireside, and a share of the oatmeal porridge which probably would be scanty enough for her own

household. For it must be borne in mind that all the houses in the place were occupied by poor people, with whom the one virtue, Charity, was, in a measure, at home, and amidst many sins, cardinal and other, managed to live in even some degree of comfort.

'Get up, than, Shargar, ye lazy beggar! Or are ye frozen to the door-stane? I s' awa' for a kettle o' bilin' water to lowse ye.'

'Na, na, Bob. I'm no stucken. I'm only some stiff wi' the cauld; for wow, but I am cauld!' said Shargar, rising with difficulty. 'Gie 's a haud o' yer han', Bob.'

Robert gave him his hand, and Shargar was straightway upon his feet.

'Come awa' noo, as fest and as quaiet 's ye can.'

'What are ye gaein' to du wi' me, Bob?'

'What's that to you, Shargar?'

'Naything. Only I wad like to ken.'

'Hae patience, and ye will ken. Only mind ye do as I tell ye, and dinna speik a word.'

Shargar followed in silence.

On the way Robert remembered that Miss Napier had not, after all, given him the receipt for which his grandmother had sent him. So he returned to The Boar's Head, and, while he went in, left Shargar in the archway, to shiver, and try in vain to warm his hands by the alternate plans of slapping them on the opposite arms, and hiding them under them.

When Robert came out, he saw a man talking to him under the

lamp. The moment his eyes fell upon the two, he was struck by a resemblance between them. Shargar was right under the lamp, the man to the side of it, so that Shargar was shadowed by its frame, and the man was in its full light. The latter turned away, and passing Robert, went into the inn.

'Wha's that?' asked Robert.

'I dinna ken,' answered Shargar. 'He spak to me or ever I kent he was there, and garred my hert gie sic a loup 'at it maist fell into my breeks.'

'And what said he to ye?'

'He said was the deevil at my lug, that I did naething but caw my han's to bits upo' my shoothers.'

'And what said ye to that?'

'I said I wissed he was, for he wad aiblins hae some spare heat aboot him, an' I hadna freely (quite) eneuch.'

'Weel dune, Shargar! What said he to that?'

'He leuch, and speirt gin I wad list, and gae me a shillin'.'

'Ye didna tak it, Shargar?' asked Robert in some alarm.

'Ay did I. Catch me no taking a shillin'!'

'But they'll haud ye till 't.'

'Na, na. I'm ower shochlin' (in-kneed) for a sodger. But that man was nae sodger.'

'And what mair said he?'

'He speirt what I wad do wi' the shillin'.'

'And what said ye?'

'Ow! syne ye cam' oot, and he gaed awa'.'

'And ye dinna ken wha it was?' repeated Robert.

'It was some like my brither, Lord Sandy; but I dinna ken,' said Shargar.

By this time they had arrived at Yule the baker's shop.

'Bide ye here,' said Robert, who happened to possess a few coppers, 'till I gang into Eel's.'

Shargar stood again and shivered at the door, till Robert came out with a penny loaf in one hand, and a twopenny loaf in the other.

'Gie's a bit, Bob,' said Shargar. 'I'm as hungry as I am cauld.'

'Bide ye still,' returned Robert. 'There's a time for a' thing, and your time 's no come to forgather wi' this loaf yet. Does na it smell fine? It's new frae the bakehoose no ten minutes ago. I ken by the fin' (feel) o' 't.'

'Lat me fin' 't,' said Shargar, stretching out one hand, and feeling his shilling with the other.

'Na. Yer han's canna be clean. And fowk suld aye eat clean, whether they gang clean or no.'

'I'll awa' in an' buy ane oot o' my ain shillin',' said Shargar, in a tone of resolute eagerness.

'Ye'll do naething o' the kin',' returned Robert, darting his hand at his collar. 'Gie me the shillin'. Ye'll want it a' or lang.'

Shargar yielded the coin and slunk behind, while Robert again led the way till they came to his grandmother's door.

'Gang to the ga'le o' the hoose there, Shargar, and jist keek roon' the neuk at me; and gin I whustle upo' ye, come up as quaiet

's ye can. Gin I dinna, bide till I come to ye.'

Robert opened the door cautiously. It was never locked except at night, or when Betty had gone to the well for water, or to the butcher's or baker's, or the prayer-meeting, upon which occasions she put the key in her pocket, and left her mistress a prisoner. He looked first to the right, along the passage, and saw that his grandmother's door was shut; then across the passage to the left, and saw that the kitchen door was likewise shut, because of the cold, for its normal position was against the wall. Thereupon, closing the door, but keeping the handle in his hand, and the bolt drawn back, he turned to the street and whistled soft and low. Shargar had, in a moment, dragged his heavy feet, ready to part company with their shoes at any instant, to Robert's side. He bent his ear to Robert's whisper.

'Gang in there, and creep like a moose to the fit o' the stair. I maun close the door ahin' 's,' said he, opening the door as he spoke.

'I'm fleyt (frightened), Robert.'

'Dinna be a fule. Grannie winna bite aff yer heid. She had ane till her denner, the day, an' it was ill sung (singed).'

'What ane o'?'

'A sheep's heid, ye gowk (fool). Gang in direckly.'

Shargar persisted no longer, but, taking about four steps a minute, slunk past the kitchen like a thief—not so carefully, however, but that one of his soles yet looser than the other gave one clap upon the flagged passage, when Betty straightway stood

in the kitchen door, a fierce picture in a deal frame. By this time Robert had closed the outer door, and was following at Shargar's heels.

'What's this?' she cried, but not so loud as to reach the ears of Mrs. Falconer; for, with true Scotch foresight, she would not willingly call in another power before the situation clearly demanded it. 'Whaur's Shargar gaein' that gait?'

'Wi' me. Dinna ye see me wi' him? I'm nae a thief, nor yet's Shargar.'

'There may be twa opingons upo' that, Robert. I s' jist awa' benn to the mistress. I s' hae nae sic doin's i' my hoose.'

'It's nae your hoose, Betty. Dinna lee.'

'Weel, I s' hae nae sic things gang by my kitchie door. There, Robert! what 'll ye mak' o' that? There's nae offence, there, I houp, gin it suldna be a'thegither my ain hoose. Tak Shargar oot o' that, or I s' awa' benn the hoose, as I tell ye.'

Meantime Shargar was standing on the stones, looking like a terrified white rabbit, and shaking from head to foot with cold and fright combined.

'I'll tak him oot o' this, but it's up the stair, Betty. An' gin ye gang benn the hoose aboot it, I sweir to ye, as sure 's death, I'll gang doon to Muckledrum upo' Setterday i' the efternune.'

'Gang awa' wi' yer havers. Only gin the mistress speirs onything aboot it, what am I to say?'

'Bide till she speirs. Auld Spunkie says, "Ready-made answers are aye to seek." And I say, Betty, hae ye a cauld pitawta

(potato)?'

'I'll luik and see. Wadna ye like it het up?'

'Ow ay, gin ye binna lang aboot it.'

Suddenly a bell rang, shrill and peremptory, right above Shargar's head, causing in him a responsive increase of trembling.

'Haud oot o' my gait. There's the mistress's bell,' said Betty.

'Jist bide till we're roon' the neuk and on to the stair,' said Robert, now leading the way.

Betty watched them safe round the corner before she made for the parlour, little thinking to what she had become an unwilling accomplice, for she never imagined that more than an evening's visit was intended by Shargar, which in itself seemed to her strange and improper enough even for such an eccentric boy as Robert to encourage.

Shargar followed in mortal terror, for, like Christian in The Pilgrim's Progress, he had no armour to his back. Once round the corner, two strides of three steps each took them to the top of the first stair, Shargar knocking his head in the darkness against the never-opened door. Again three strides brought them to the top of the second flight; and turning once more, still to the right, Robert led Shargar up the few steps into the higher of the two garrets.

Here there was just glimmer enough from the sky to discover the hollow of a close bedstead, built in under the sloping roof, which served it for a tester, while the two ends and most of the

front were boarded up to the roof. This bedstead fortunately was not so bare as the one in the other room, although it had not been used for many years, for an old mattress covered the boards with which it was bottomed.

'Gang in there, Shargar. Ye'll be warmer there than upo' the door-step ony gait. Pit aff yer shune.'

Shargar obeyed, full of delight at finding himself in such good quarters. Robert went to a forsaken press in the room, and brought out an ancient cloak of tartan, of the same form as what is now called an Inverness cape, a blue dress-coat, with plain gilt buttons, which shone even now in the all but darkness, and several other garments, amongst them a kilt, and heaped them over Shargar as he lay on the mattress. He then handed him the twopenny and the penny loaves, which were all his stock had reached to the purchase of, and left him, saying,—

'I maun awa' to my tay, Shargar. I'll fess ye a cauld tawtie het again, gin Betty has ony. Lie still, and whatever ye do, dinna come oot o' that.'

The last injunction was entirely unnecessary.

'Eh, Bob, I'm jist in haven!' said the poor creature, for his skin began to feel the precious possibility of reviving warmth in the distance.

Now that he had gained a new burrow, the human animal soon recovered from his fears as well. It seemed to him, in the novelty of the place, that he had made so many doublings to reach it, that there could be no danger of even the mistress of the house

finding him out, for she could hardly be supposed to look after such a remote corner of her dominions. And then he was boxed in with the bed, and covered with no end of warm garments, while the friendly darkness closed him and his shelter all round. Except the faintest blue gleam from one of the panes in the roof, there was soon no hint of light anywhere; and this was only sufficient to make the darkness visible, and thus add artistic effect to the operation of it upon Shargar's imagination—a faculty certainly uneducated in Shargar, but far, very far from being therefore non-existent. It was, indeed, actively operative, although, like that of many a fine lady and gentleman, only in relation to such primary questions as: 'What shall we eat? And what shall we drink? And wherewithal shall we be clothed?' But as he lay and devoured the new 'white breid,' his satisfaction—the bare delight of his animal existence—reached a pitch such as even this imagination, stinted with poverty, and frost-bitten with maternal oppression, had never conceived possible. The power of enjoying the present without anticipation of the future or regard of the past, is the especial privilege of the animal nature, and of the human nature in proportion as it has not been developed beyond the animal. Herein lies the happiness of cab horses and of tramps: to them the gift of forgetfulness is of worth inestimable. Shargar's heaven was for the present gained.

CHAPTER V. THE SYMPOSIUM

Robert had scarcely turned out of the square on his way to find Shargar, when a horseman entered it. His horse and he were both apparently black on one side and gray on the other, from the snow-drift settling to windward. The animal looked tired, but the rider sat as easy as if he were riding to cover. The reins hung loose, and the horse went in a straight line for The Boar's Head, stopping under the archway only when his master drew bridle at the door of the inn.

At that moment Miss Letty was standing at the back of Miss Napier's chair, leaning her arms upon it as she talked to her. This was her way of resting as often as occasion arose for a chat with her elder sister. Miss Letty's hair was gathered in a great knot at the top of her head, and little ringlets hung like tendrils down the sides of her face, the benevolence of which was less immediately striking than that of her sister's, because of the constant play of humour upon it, especially about the mouth. If a spirit of satire could be supposed converted into something Christian by an infusion of the tenderest loving-kindness and humanity, remaining still recognizable notwithstanding that all its bitterness was gone, such was the expression of Miss Letty's mouth, It was always half puckered as if in resistance to a comic smile, which showed itself at the windows of the keen gray eyes, however the mouth might be able to keep it within doors. She

was neatly dressed in black silk, with a lace collar. Her hands were small and white.

The moment the traveller stopped at the door, Miss Napier started.

'Letty,' she said, 'wha's that? I could amaist sweir to Black Geordie's fit.'

'A' four o' them, I think,' returned Miss Letty, as the horse, notwithstanding, or perhaps in consequence of his fatigue, began to paw and move about on the stones impatiently.

The rider had not yet spoken.

'He'll be efter some o' 's deevil-ma'-care sculduddery. But jist rin to the door, Letty, or Lizzy 'll be there afore ye, and maybe she wadna be ower ceevil. What can he be efter noo?'

'What wad the grew (grayhound) be efter but maukin (hare)?' returned Miss Letty.

'Hoot! nonsense! He kens naething aboot her. Gang to the door, lassie.'

Miss Letty obeyed.

'Wha's there?' she asked, somewhat sharply, as she opened it, 'that neither chaps (knocks) nor ca's?—Preserve 's a'! is't you, my lord?'

'Hoo ken ye me, Miss Letty withoot seein' my face?'

'A'body at The Boar's Heid kens Black Geordie as weel 's yer lordship's ain sel'. But whaur comes yer lordship frae in sic a nicht as this?'

'From Russia. Never dismounted between Moscow and

Aberdeen. The ice is bearing to-night.'

And the baron laughed inside the upturned collar of his cloak, for he knew that strangely-exaggerated stories were current about his feats in the saddle.

'That's a lang ride, my lord, and a sliddery. And what's yer lordship's wull?'

'Muckle ye care aboot my lordship to stand jawin' there in a night like this! Is nobody going to take my horse?'

'I beg yer lordship's pardon. Caumill!—Yer lordship never said ye wanted yer lordship's horse ta'en. I thocht ye micht be gaein' on to The Bothie.—Tak' Black Geordie here, Caumill.—Come in to the parlour, my lord.'

'How d'ye do, Miss Naper?' said Lord Rothie, as he entered the room. 'Here's this jade of a sister of yours asking me why I don't go home to The Bothie, when I choose to stop and water here.'

'What'll ye tak', my lord?—Letty, fess the brandy.'

'Oh! damn your brandy! Bring me a gill of good Glendronach.'

'Rin, Letty. His lordship's cauld.—I canna rise to offer ye the airm-cheir, my lord.'

'I can get one for myself, thank heaven!'

'Lang may yer lordship return sic thanks.'

'For I'm only new begun, ye think, Miss Naper. Well, I don't often trouble heaven with my affairs. By Jove! I ought to be heard when I do.'

'Nae doobt ye will, my lord, whan ye seek onything that's fit

to be gien ye.'

'True. Heaven's gifts are seldom much worth the asking.'

'Haud yer tongue, my lord, and dinna bring doon a judgment upo' my hoose, for it wad be missed oot o' Rothieden.'

'You're right there, Miss Naper. And here comes the whisky to stop my mouth.'

The Baron of Rothie sat for a few minutes with his feet on the fender before Miss Letty's blazing fire, without speaking, while he sipped the whisky neat from a wine-glass. He was a man about the middle height, rather full-figured, muscular and active, with a small head, and an eye whose brightness had not yet been dimmed by the sensuality which might be read in the condition rather than frame of his countenance. But while he spoke so pleasantly to the Miss Napiers, and his forehead spread broad and smooth over the twinkle of his hazel eye, there was a sharp curve on each side of his upper lip, half-way between the corner and the middle, which reminded one of the same curves in the lip of his ancestral boar's head, where it was lifted up by the protruding tusks. These curves disappeared, of course, when he smiled, and his smile, being a lord's, was generally pronounced irresistible. He was good-natured, and nowise inclined to stand upon his rank, so long as he had his own way.

'Any customers by the mail to-night, Miss Naper?' he asked, in a careless tone.

'Naebody partic'lar, my lord.'

'I thought ye never let anybody in that wasn't particularly

particular. No foot-passengers—eh?'

'Hoot, my lord! that's twa year ago. Gin I had jaloosed him to be a fren' o' yer lordship's, forby bein' a lord himsel', ye ken as weel 's I du that I wadna hae sent him ower the gait to Luckie Happit's, whaur he wadna even be ower sure o' gettin' clean sheets. But gin lords an' lords' sons will walk afit like ither fowk, wha's to ken them frae ither fowk?'

'Well, Miss Naper, he was no lord at all. He was nothing but a factor-body doon frae Glenbucket.'

'There was sma' hairm dune than, my lord. I'm glaid to hear 't. But what'll yer lordship hae to yer supper?'

'I would like a dish o' your chits and nears (sweetbreads and kidneys).'

'Noo, think o' that!' returned the landlady, laughing. 'You great fowk wad hae the verra coorse o' natur' turned upside doon to shuit yersels. Wha ever heard o' caure (calves) at this time o' the year?'

'Well, anything you like. Who was it came by the mail, did you say?'

'I said naebody partic'lar, my lord.'

'Well, I'll just go and have a look at Black Geordie.'

'Verra weel, my lord.—Letty, rin an' luik efter him; and as sune 's he's roon' the neuk, tell Lizzie no to say a word aboot the leddy. As sure 's deith he's efter her. Whaur cud he hae heard tell o' her?'

Lord Rothie came, a moment after, sauntering into the bar-

parlour, where Lizzie, the third Miss Napier, a red-haired, round-eyed, white-toothed woman of forty, was making entries in a book.

'She's a bonnie lassie that, that came in the coach to-night, they say, Miss Lizzie.'

'As ugly 's sin, my lord,' answered Lizzie.

'I hae seen some sin 'at was nane sae ugly, Miss Lizzie.'

'She wad hae clean scunnert (disgusted) ye, my lord. It's a mercy ye didna see her.'

'If she be as ugly as all that, I would just like to see her.'

Miss Lizzie saw she had gone too far.

'Ow, deed! gin yer lordship wants to see her, ye may see her at yer wull. I s' gang and tell her.'

And she rose as if to go.

'No, no. Nothing of the sort, Miss Lizzie. Only I heard that she was bonnie, and I wanted to see her. You know I like to look at a pretty girl.'

'That's ower weel kent, my lord.'

'Well, there's no harm in that, Miss Lizzie.'

'There's no harm in that, my lord, though yer lordship says 't.'

The facts were that his lordship had been to the county-town, some forty miles off, and Black Geordie had been sent to Hillknow to meet him; for in any weather that would let him sit, he preferred horseback to every other mode of travelling, though he seldom would be followed by a groom. He had posted to Hillknow, and had dined with a friend at the inn. The coach

stopping to change horses, he had caught a glimpse of a pretty face, as he thought, from its window, and had hoped to overtake the coach before it reached Rothieden. But stopping to drink another bottle, he had failed; and it was on the merest chance of seeing that pretty face that he stopped at The Boar's Head. In all probability, had the Marquis seen the lady, he would not have thought her at all such a beauty as she appeared in the eyes of Dooble Sanny; nor, I venture to think, had he thought as the shoemaker did, would he yet have dared to address her in other than the words of such respect as he could still feel in the presence of that which was more noble than himself.

Whether or not on his visit to the stable he found anything amiss with Black Geordie, I cannot tell, but he now begged Miss Lizzie to have a bedroom prepared for him.

It happened to be the evening of Friday, one devoted by some of the townspeople to a symposium. To this, knowing that the talk will throw a glimmer on several matters, I will now introduce my reader, as a spectator through the reversed telescope of my history.

A few of the more influential of the inhabitants had grown, rather than formed themselves, into a kind of club, which met weekly at The Boar's Head. Although they had no exclusive right to the room in which they sat, they generally managed to retain exclusive possession of it; for if any supposed objectionable person entered, they always got rid of him, sometimes without his being aware of how they had contrived to make him so

uncomfortable. They began to gather about seven o'clock, when it was expected that boiling water would be in readiness for the compound generally called toddy, sometimes punch. As soon as six were assembled, one was always voted into the chair.

On the present occasion, Mr. Innes, the school-master, was unanimously elected to that honour. He was a hard-featured, sententious, snuffy individual, of some learning, and great respectability.

I omit the political talk with which their intercommunications began; for however interesting at the time is the scaffolding by which existing institutions arise, the poles and beams when gathered again in the builder's yard are scarcely a subject for the artist.

The first to lead the way towards matters of nearer personality was William MacGregor, the linen manufacturer, a man who possessed a score of hand-looms or so—half of which, from the advance of cotton and the decline of linen-wear, now stood idle—but who had already a sufficient deposit in the hands of Mr. Thomson the banker—agent, that is, for the county-bank—to secure him against any necessity for taking to cotton shirts himself, which were an abomination and offence unpardonable in his eyes.

'Can ye tell me, Mr. Cocker,' he said, 'what mak's Sandy, Lord Rothie, or Wrathy, or what suld he be ca'd?—tak' to The Bothie at a time like this, whan there's neither huntin', nor fishin', nor shutin', nor onything o' the kin' aboot han' to be playacks till him,

the bonnie bairn—'cep' it be otters an' sic like?'

William was a shrunken old man, with white whiskers and a black wig, a keen black eye, always in search of the ludicrous in other people, and a mouth ever on the move, as if masticating something comical.

'You know just as well as I do,' answered Mr. Cocker, the Marquis of Boarshead's factor for the surrounding estate. 'He never was in the way of giving a reason for anything, least of all for his own movements.'

'Somebody was sayin' to me,' resumed MacGregor, who, in all probability, invented the story at the moment, 'that the prince took him kissin' ane o' his servan' lasses, and kickit him oot o' Carlton Hoose into the street, and he canna win' ower the disgrace o' 't.'

''Deed for the kissin',' said Mr. Thomson, a portly, comfortable-looking man, 'that's neither here nor there, though it micht hae been a duchess or twa; but for the kickin', my word! but Lord Sandy was mair likly to kick oot the prince. Do ye min' hoo he did whan the Markis taxed him wi'—?'

'Haud a quaiet sough,' interposed Mr. Cruickshank, the solicitor; 'there's a drap i' the hoose.'

This was a phrase well understood by the company, indicating the presence of some one unknown, or unfit to be trusted.

As he spoke he looked towards the farther end of the room, which lay in obscurity; for it was a large room, lighted only by the four candles on the table at which the company sat.

'Whaur, Mr. Cruickshank?' asked the dominie in a whisper.

'There,' answered Sampson Peddie, the bookseller, who seized the opportunity of saying something, and pointed furtively where the solicitor had only looked.

A dim figure was descried at a table in the farthest corner of the room, and they proceeded to carry out the plan they generally adopted to get rid of a stranger.

'Ye made use o' a curious auld Scots phrase this moment, Mr. Curshank: can ye explain hoo it comes to beir the meanin' that it's weel kent to beir?' said the manufacturer.

'Not I, Mr. MacGregor,' answered the solicitor. 'I'm no philologist or antiquarian. Ask the chairman.'

'Gentlemen,' responded Mr. Innes, taking a huge pinch of snuff after the word, and then, passing the box to Mr. Cocker, a sip from his glass before he went on: 'the phrase, gentlemen, "a drap i' the hoose," no doobt refers to an undesirable presence, for ye're weel awaur that it's a most unpleasin' discovery, in winter especially, to find a drop o' water hangin' from yer ceiling; a something, in short, whaur it has no business to be, and is not accordingly looked for, or prepared against.'

'It seems to me, Mr. Innes,' said MacGregor, 'that ye hae hit the nail, but no upo' the heid. What mak' ye o' the phrase, no confined to the Scots tongue, I believe, o' an eaves-drapper? The whilk, no doobt, represents a body that hings aboot yer winnock, like a drap hangin' ower abune it frae the eaves—therefore called an eaves drapper. But the sort of whilk we noo speak, are a waur

sort a'thegither; for they come to the inside o' yer hoose, o' yer verra chaumer, an' hing oot their lang lugs to hear what ye carena to be hard save by a dooce frien' or twa ower a het tum'ler.'

At the same moment the door opened, and a man entered, who was received with unusual welcome.

'Bless my sowl!' said the president, rising; 'it's Mr. Lammie! —Come awa', Mr. Lammie. Sit doon; sit doon. Whaur hae ye been this mony a day, like a pelican o' the wilderness?'

Mr. Lammie was a large, mild man, with florid cheeks, no whiskers, and a prominent black eye. He was characterized by a certain simple alacrity, a gentle, but outspeaking readiness, which made him a favourite.

'I dinna richtly mak' oot wha ye are,' he answered. 'Ye hae unco little licht here! Hoo are ye a', gentlemen? I s' discover ye by degrees, and pay my respecks accordin'.'

And he drew a chair to the table.

''Deed I wuss ye wad,' returned MacGregor, in a voice pretentiously hushed, but none the less audible. 'There's a drap in yon en' o' the hoose, Mr. Lammie.'

'Hoot! never min' the man,' said Lammie, looking round in the direction indicated. 'I s' warran' he cares as little aboot hiz as we care aboot him. There's nae treason noo a-days. I carena wha hears what I say.'

'For my pairt,' said Mr. Peddie, 'I canna help wonnerin' gin it cud be oor auld frien' Mr. Faukener.'

'Speyk o' the de'il—' said Mr. Lammie.

'Hoot! na,' returned Peddie, interrupting. 'He wasna a'thegither the de'il.'

'Haud the tongue o' ye,' retorted Lammie. 'Dinna ye ken a proverb whan ye hear 't? De'il hae ye! ye're as sharpset as a missionar'. I was only gaun to say that I'm doobtin' Andrew's deid.'

'Ay! ay!' commenced a chorus of questioning.

'Mhm!'

'Aaay!'

'What gars ye think that?'

'And sae he's deid!'

'He was a great favourite, Anerew!'

'Whaur dee'd he?'

'Aye some upsettin' though!'

'Ay. He was aye to be somebody wi' his tale.'

'A gude-hertit crater, but ye cudna lippen till him.'

'Speyk nae ill o' the deid. Maybe they'll hear ye, and turn roon' i' their coffins, and that'll whumle you i' your beds,' said MacGregor, with a twinkle in his eye.

'Ring the bell for anither tum'ler, Sampson,' said the chairman.

'What'll be dune wi' that factory place, noo? It'll be i' the market?'

'It's been i' the market for mony a year. But it's no his ava. It belangs to the auld leddy, his mither,' said the weaver.

'Why don't you buy it, Mr. MacGregor, and set up a cotton

mill? There's not much doing with the linen now,' said Mr. Cocker.

'Me!' returned MacGregor, with indignation. 'The Lord forgie ye for mintin' (hinting) at sic a thing, Mr. Cocker! Me tak' to coaton! I wad as sune spin the hair frae Sawtan's hurdies. Short fushionless dirt, that canna grow straucht oot o' the halesome yird, like the bonnie lint-bells, but maun stick itsel' upo' a buss! —set it up! Coorse vulgar stuff, 'at naebody wad weir but loup-coonter lads that wad fain luik like gentlemen by means o' the collars and ruffles—an' a' comin' frae the auld loom! They may weel affoord se'enteen hunner linen to set it aff wi' 'at has naething but coaton inside the breeks o' them.'

'But Dr. Wagstaff says it's healthier,' interposed Peddie.

'I'll wag a staff till him. De'il a bit o' 't 's healthier! an' that he kens. It's nae sae healthy, an' sae it mak's him mair wark wi' 's poothers an' his drauchts, an' ither stinkin' stuff. Healthier! What neist?'

'Somebody tellt me,' said the bookseller, inwardly conscious of offence, "at hoo Lord Sandy himsel' weirs cotton.'

'Ow 'deed, maybe. And he sets mony a worthy example furbye. Hoo mony, can ye tell me, Mr. Peddie, has he pulled doon frae honest, if no frae high estate, and sent oot to seek their livin' as he taucht them? Hoo mony—?'

'Hoot, hoot! Mr. MacGregor, his lordship hasn't a cotton shirt in his possession, I'll be bound,' said Mr. Cocker. 'And, besides, you have not to wash his dirty linen—or cotton either.'

‘That’s as muckle as to say, accordin’ to Cocker, that I’m no to speik a word against him. But I’ll say what I like. He’s no my maister,’ said MacGregor, who could drink very little without suffering in his temper and manners; and who, besides, had a certain shrewd suspicion as to the person who still sat in the dark end of the room, possibly because the entrance of Mr. Lammie had interrupted the exorcism.

The chairman interposed with soothing words; and the whole company, Cocker included, did its best to pacify the manufacturer; for they all knew what would be the penalty if they failed.

A good deal of talk followed, and a good deal of whisky was drunk. They were waited upon by Meg, who, without their being aware of it, cast a keen parting glance at them every time she left the room. At length the conversation had turned again to Andrew Falconer’s death.

‘Whaur said ye he dee’d, Mr. Lammie?’

‘I never said he was deid. I said I was feared ‘at he was deid.’

‘An’ what gars ye say that? It micht be o’ consequence to hae ‘t correck,’ said the solicitor.

‘I had a letter frae my auld frien’ and his, Dr. Anderson. Ye min’ upo’ him, Mr. Innes, dunna ye? He’s heid o’ the medical boord at Calcutta noo. He says naething but that he doobts he’s gane. He gaed up the country, and he hasna hard o’ him for sae lang. We hae keepit up a correspondence for mony a year noo, Dr. Anderson an’ me. He was a relation o’ Anerew’s, ye ken—a

second cousin, or something. He'll be hame or lang, I'm thinkin', wi' a fine pension.'

'He winna weir a cotton sark, I'll be boon',' said MacGregor.

'What's the auld leddy gaein' to du wi' that lang-leggit oye (grandson) o' hers, Anerew's son?' asked Sampson.

'Ow! he'll be gaein' to the college, I'm thinkin'. He's a fine lad, and a clever, they tell me,' said Mr. Thomson.

'Indeed, he's all that, and more too,' said the school-master.

'There's naething 'ull du but the college noo!' said MacGregor, whom nobody heeded, for fear of again rousing his anger.

'Hoo 'ill she manage that, honest woman? She maun hae but little to spare frae the cleedin' o' 'm.'

'She's a gude manager, Mistress Faukner. And, ye see, she has the bleachgreen yet.'

'She doesna weir cotton sarks,' growled MacGregor. 'Mony's the wob o' mine she's bleached and boucht tu!'

Nobody heeding him yet, he began to feel insulted, and broke in upon the conversation with intent.

'Ye haena telt 's yet, Cocker,' he said, 'what that maister o' yours is duin' here at this time o' the year. I wad ken that, gin ye please.'

'How should I know, Mr. MacGregor?' returned the factor, taking no notice of the offensive manner in which the question was put.

'He's no a hair better nor ane o' thae Algerine pirates 'at Lord Exmooth's het the hips o'—and that's my opingon.'

'He's nae amo' your feet, MacGregor,' said the banker. 'Ye micht jist lat him lie.'

'Gin I had him doon, faith gin I wadna lat him lie! I'll jist tell ye ae thing, gentlemen, that cam' to my knowledge no a hunner year ago. An' it's a' as true 's gospel, though I hae aye held my tongue aboot it till this verra nicht. Ay! ye'll a' hearken noo; but it's no lauchin', though there was sculduddery eneuch, nae doobt, afore it cam' that len'th. And mony a het drap did the puir lassie greet, I can tell ye. Faith! it was no lauchin' to her. She was a servan' o' oors, an' a ticht bonnie lass she was. They ca'd her the weyver's bonny Mary—that's the name she gaed by. Weel, ye see—'

MacGregor was interrupted by a sound from the further end of the room. The stranger, whom most of them had by this time forgotten, had risen, and was approaching the table where they sat.

'Guid guide us!' interrupted several under their breaths, as all rose, 'it's Lord Sandy himsel'!'

'I thank you, gentleman,' he said, with a mixture of irony and contempt, 'for the interest you take in my private history. I should have thought it had been as little to the taste as it is to the honour of some of you to listen to such a farrago of lies.'

'Lees! my lord,' said MacGregor, starting to his feet. Mr. Cocker looked dismayed, and Mr. Lammie sheepish—all of them dazed and dumbfoundered, except the old weaver, who, as his lordship turned to leave the room, added:

'Lang lugs (ears) suld be made o' leather, my lord, for fear they

grow het wi' what they hear.'

Lord Rothie turned in a rage. He too had been drinking.

'Kick that toad into the street, or, by heaven! it's the last drop any of you drink in this house!' he cried.

'The taed may tell the poddock (frog) what the rottan (rat) did i' the taed's hole, my lord,' said MacGregor, whom independence, honesty, bile, and drink combined to render fearless.

Lord Sandy left the room without another word. His factor took his hat and followed him. The rest dropped into their seats in silence. Mr. Lammie was the first to speak.

'There's a pliskie!' he said.

'I cud jist say the word efter auld Simeon,' said MacGregor.

'I never thocht to be sae favoured! Eh! but I hae langed, and noo I hae spoken!' with which words he sat down, contented.

When Mr. Cocker overtook his master, as MacGregor had not unfitly styled him, he only got a damning for his pains, and went home considerably crestfallen.

Lord Rothie returned to the landlady in her parlour.

'What's the maitter wi' ye, my lord? What's vexed ye?' asked Miss Napier, with a twinkle in her eyes, for she thought, from the baron's mortification, he must have received some rebuff, and now that the bonnie leddy was safe at Captain Forsyth's, enjoyed the idea of it.

'Ye keep an ill-tongued hoose, Miss Naper,' answered his lordship.

Miss Napier guessed at the truth at once—that he had overheard some free remarks on his well-known licence of behaviour.

'Weel, my lord, I do my best. A body canna keep an inn and speir the carritchis (catechism) at the door o' 't. But I believe ye're i' the richt, my lord, for I heard an awfu' aff-gang o' sweirin' i' the yard, jist afore yer lordship cam' in. An' noo' 'at I think o' 't, it wasna that onlike yer lordship's ain word.'

Lord Sandy broke into a loud laugh. He could enjoy a joke against himself when it came from a woman, and was founded on such a trifle as a personal vice.

'I think I'll go to bed,' he said when his laugh was over. 'I believe it's the only safe place from your tongue, Miss Naper.'

'Letty,' cried Miss Napier, 'fess a can'le, and show his lordship to the reid room.'

Till Miss Letty appeared, the baron sat and stretched himself. He then rose and followed her into the archway, and up an outside stair to a door which opened immediately upon a handsome old-fashioned room, where a blazing fire lighted up the red hangings. Miss Letty set down the candle, and bidding his lordship good night, turned and left the room, shutting the door, and locking it behind her—a proceeding of which his lordship took no notice, for, however especially suitable it might be in his case, it was only, from whatever ancient source derived, the custom of the house in regard to this particular room and a corresponding chamber on the opposite side of the archway.

Meantime the consternation amongst the members of the club was not so great as not to be talked over, or to prevent the call for more whisky and hot water. All but MacGregor, however, regretted what had occurred. He was so elevated with his victory and a sense of courage and prowess, that he became more and more facetious and overbearing.

'It's all very well for you, Mr. MacGregor,' said the dominie, with dignity: 'you have nothing to lose.'

'Troth! he canna brak the bank—eh, Mr. Tamson?'

'He may give me a hint to make you withdraw your money, though, Mr. MacGregor.'

'De'il care gin I do!' returned the weaver. 'I can mak' better o' 't ony day.'

'But there's yer hoose an' kailyard,' suggested Peddie.

'They're ma ain!—a' ma ain! He canna lay 's finger on onything o' mine but my servan' lass,' cried the weaver, slapping his thigh-bone—for there was little else to slap.

Meg, at the moment, was taking her exit-glance. She went straight to Miss Napier.

'Willie MacGregor's had eneuch, mem, an' a drappy ower.'

'Sen' Caumill doon to Mrs. MacGregor to say wi' my compliments that she wad do weel to sen' for him,' was the response.

Meantime he grew more than troublesome. Ever on the outlook, when sober, after the foibles of others, he laid himself open to endless ridicule when in drink, which, to tell the truth,

was a rare occurrence. He was in the midst of a prophetic denunciation of the vices of the nobility, and especially of Lord Rothie, when Meg, entering the room, went quietly behind his chair and whispered:

'Maister MacGregor, there's a lassie come for ye.'

'I'm nae in,' he answered, magnificently.

'But it's the mistress 'at's sent for ye. Somebody's wantin' ye.'

'Somebody maun want me, than.—As I was sayin', Mr. Cheerman and gentlemen—'

'Mistress MacGregor 'll be efter ye hersel', gin ye dinna gang,' said Meg.

'Let her come. Duv ye think I'm fleyt at her? De'il a step 'll I gang till I please. Tell her that, Meg.'

Meg left the room, with a broad grin on her good-humoured face.

'What's the bitch lauchin' at?' exclaimed MacGregor, starting to his feet.

The whole company rose likewise, using their endeavour to persuade him to go home.

'Duv ye think I'm drunk, sirs? I'll lat ye ken I'm no drunk. I hae a wull o' mine ain yet. Am I to gang hame wi' a lassie to haud me oot o' the gutters? Gin ye daur to alloo that I'm drunk, ye ken hoo ye'll fare, for de'il a fit 'll I gang oot o' this till I hae anither tum'ler.'

'I'm thinkin' there's mair o' 's jist want ane mair,' said Peddie.

A confirmatory murmur arose as each looked into the bottom

of his tumbler, and the bell was instantly rung. But it only brought Meg back with the message that it was time for them all to go home. Every eye turned upon MacGregor reproachfully.

'Ye needna luik at me that gait, sirs. I'm no fou,' said he.

''Deed no. Naebody taks ye to be,' answered the chairman. 'Meggie, there's naebody's had ower muckle yet, and twa or three o' 's hasna had freely eneuch. Jist gang an' fess a mutchkin mair. An' there'll be a shillin' to yersel', lass.'

Meg retired, but straightway returned.

'Miss Naper says there's no a drap mair drink to be had i' this hoose the nicht.'

'Here, Meggie,' said the chairman, 'there's yer shillin'; and ye jist gang to Miss Lettie, and gie her my compliments, and say that Mr. Lammie's here, and we haena seen him for a lang time. And'—the rest was spoken in a whisper—'I'll sweir to ye, Meggie, the weyver body sanna hae ae drap o' 't.'

Meg withdrew once more, and returned.

'Miss Letty's compliments, sir, and Miss Naper has the keys, and she's gane till her bed, and we maunna disturb her. And it's time 'at a' honest fowk was in their beds tu. And gin Mr. Lammie wants a bed i' this hoose, he maun gang till 't. An' here's his can'le. Gude nicht to ye a', gentlemen.'

So saying, Meg set the lighted candle on the sideboard, and finally vanished. The good-tempered, who formed the greater part of the company, smiled to each other, and emptied the last drops of their toddy first into their glasses, and thence into

their mouths. The ill-tempered, numbering but one more than MacGregor, growled and swore a little, the weaver declaring that he would not go home. But the rest walked out and left him, and at last, appalled by the silence, he rose with his wig awry, and trotted—he always trotted when he was tipsy—home to his wife.

CHAPTER VI. MRS. FALCONER

Meantime Robert was seated in the parlour at the little dark mahogany table, in which the lamp, shaded towards his grandmother's side, shone brilliantly reflected. Her face being thus hidden both by the light and the shadow, he could not observe the keen look of stern benevolence with which, knowing that he could not see her, she regarded him as he ate his thick oat-cake of Betty's skilled manufacture, well loaded with the sweetest butter, and drank the tea which she had poured out and sugared for him with liberal hand. It was a comfortable little room, though its inlaid mahogany chairs and ancient sofa, covered with horsehair, had a certain look of hardness, no doubt. A shepherdess and lamb, worked in silks whose brilliance had now faded half-way to neutrality, hung in a black frame, with brass rosettes at the corners, over the chimney-piece—the sole approach to the luxury of art in the homely little place. Besides the muslin stretched across the lower part of the window, it was undefended by curtains. There was no cat in the room, nor was there one in the kitchen even; for Mrs. Falconer had such a respect for humanity that she grudged every morsel consumed by the lower creation. She sat in one of the arm-chairs belonging to the hairy set, leaning back in contemplation of her grandson, as she took her tea.

She was a handsome old lady—little, but had once been taller,

for she was more than seventy now. She wore a plain cap of muslin, lying close to her face, and bordered a little way from the edge with a broad black ribbon, which went round her face, and then, turning at right angles, went round the back of her neck. Her gray hair peeped a little way from under this cap. A clear but short-sighted eye of a light hazel shone under a smooth thoughtful forehead; a straight and well-elevated, but rather short nose, which left the firm upper lip long and capable of expressing a world of dignified offence, rose over a well-formed mouth, revealing more moral than temperamental sweetness; while the chin was rather deficient than otherwise, and took little share in indicating the remarkable character possessed by the old lady.

After gazing at Robert for some time, she took a piece of oat-cake from a plate by her side, the only luxury in which she indulged, for it was made with cream instead of water—it was very little she ate of anything—and held it out to Robert in a hand white, soft, and smooth, but with square finger tips, and squat though pearly nails. 'Ha'e, Robert,' she said; and Robert received it with a 'Thank you, grannie'; but when he thought she did not see him, slipped it under the table and into his pocket. She saw him well enough, however, and although she would not condescend to ask him why he put it away instead of eating it, the endeavour to discover what could have been his reason for so doing cost her two hours of sleep that night. She would always be at the bottom of a thing if reflection could reach it, but she generally declined taking the most ordinary measures to expedite

the process.

When Robert had finished his tea, instead of rising to get his books and betake himself to his lessons, in regard to which his grandmother had seldom any cause to complain, although she would have considered herself guilty of high treason against the boy's future if she had allowed herself once to acknowledge as much, he drew his chair towards the fire, and said:

'Grandmamma!'

'He's gaein' to tell me something,' said Mrs. Falconer to herself. 'Will 't be aboot the puir barfut crater they ca' Shargar, or will 't be aboot the piece he pat intil 's pooch?'

'Weel, laddie?' she said aloud, willing to encourage him.

'Is 't true that my gran'father was the blin' piper o' Portcloddie?'

'Ay, laddie; true eneuch. Hoots, na! nae yer grandfather, but yer father's grandfather, laddie—my husband's father.'

'Hoo cam that aboot?'

'Weel, ye see, he was oot i' the Forty-five; and efter the battle o' Culloden, he had to rin for 't. He wasna wi' his ain clan at the battle, for his father had broucht him to the Lawlands whan he was a lad; but he played the pipes till a reg'ment raised by the Laird o' Portcloddie. And for ooks (weeks) he had to hide amo' the rocks. And they tuik a' his property frae him. It wasna muckle —a wheen hooses, and a kailyard or twa, wi' a bit fairmy on the tap o' a cauld hill near the sea-shore; but it was eneuch and to spare; and whan they tuik it frae him, he had naething left i' the

warl' but his sons. Yer grandfather was born the verra day o' the battle, and the verra day 'at the news cam, the mother deed. But yer great grandfather wasna lang or he merried anither wife. He was sic a man as ony woman micht hae been prood to merry. She was the dother (daughter) o' an episcopalian minister, and she keepit a school in Portcloddie. I saw him first mysel' whan I was aboot twenty—that was jist the year afore I was merried. He was a gey (considerably) auld man than, but as straucht as an ellwand, and jist pooerfu' beyon' belief. His shackle-bane (wrist) was as thick as baith mine; and years and years efter that, whan he tuik his son, my husband, and his grandson, my Anerew—'

'What ails ye, grannie? What for dinna ye gang on wi' the story?'

After a somewhat lengthened pause, Mrs. Falconer resumed as if she had not stopped at all.

'Ane in ilka han', jist for the fun o' 't, he kneipit their heids thegither, as gin they hed been twa carldoddies (stalks of ribgrass). But maybe it was the lauchin' o' the twa lads, for they thocht it unco fun. They were maist killed wi' lauchin'. But the last time he did it, the puir auld man hostit (coughed) sair efterhin, and had to gang and lie doon. He didna live lang efter that. But it wasna that 'at killed him, ye ken.'

'But hoo cam he to play the pipes?'

'He likit the pipes. And yer grandfather, he tuik to the fiddle.'

'But what for did they ca' him the blin' piper o' Portcloddie?'

'Because he turned blin' lang afore his en' cam, and there was

naething ither he cud do. And he wad aye mak an honest baubee whan he cud; for siller was fell scarce at that time o' day amo' the Falconers. Sae he gaed throu the toon at five o'clock ilka mornin' playin' his pipes, to lat them 'at war up ken they war up in time, and them 'at warna, that it was time to rise. And syne he played them again aboot aucht o'clock at nicht, to lat them ken 'at it was time for dacent fowk to gang to their beds. Ye see, there wasna sae mony clocks and watches by half than as there is noo.'

'Was he a guid piper, grannie?'

'What for speir ye that?'

'Because I tauld that sunk, Lumley—'

'Ca' naebody names, Robert. But what richt had ye to be speikin' to a man like that?'

'He spak to me first.'

'Whaur saw ye him?'

'At The Boar's Heid.'

'And what richt had ye to gang stan'in' aboot? Ye oucht to ha' gane in at ance.'

'There was a half-dizzen o' fowk stan'in' aboot, and I bude (behoved) to speik whan I was spoken till.'

'But ye budena stop an' mak' ae fule mair.'

'Isna that ca'in' names, grannie?'

''Deed, laddie, I doobt ye hae me there. But what said the fallow Lumley to ye?'

'He cast up to me that my grandfather was naething but a blin' piper.'

'And what said ye?'

'I daured him to say 'at he didna pipe weel.'

'Weel dune, laddie! And ye micht say 't wi' a gude conscience, for he wadna hae been piper till 's regiment at the battle o' Culloden gin he hadna pipit weel. Yon's his kilt hingin' up i' the press i' the garret. Ye'll hae to grow, Robert, my man, afore ye fill that.'

'And whase was that blue coat wi' the bonny gowd buttons upo' 't?' asked Robert, who thought he had discovered a new approach to an impregnable hold, which he would gladly storm if he could.

'Lat the coat sit. What has that to do wi' the kilt? A blue coat and a tartan kilt gang na weel thegither.'

'Excep' in an auld press whaur naebody sees them. Ye wadna care, grannie, wad ye, gin I was to cut aff the bonnie buttons?'

'Dinna lay a finger upo' them. Ye wad be gaein' playin' at pitch and toss or ither sic ploys wi' them. Na, na, lat them sit.'

'I wad only niffer them for bools (exchange them for marbles).'

'I daur ye to touch the coat or onything 'ither that's i' that press.'

'Weel, weel, grannie. I s' gang and get my lessons for the morn.'

'It's time, laddie. Ye hae been jabberin' ower muckle. Tell Betty to come and tak' awa' the tay-things.'

Robert went to the kitchen, got a couple of hot potatoes and a candle, and carried them up-stairs to Shargar, who was fast asleep. But the moment the light shone upon his face, he started

up, with his eyes, if not his senses, wide awake.

'It wasna me, mither! I tell ye it wasna me!'

And he covered his head with both arms, as if to defend it from a shower of blows.

'Haud yer tongue, Shargar. It's me.'

But before Shargar could come to his senses, the light of the candle falling upon the blue coat made the buttons flash confused suspicions into his mind.

'Mither, mither,' he said, 'ye hae gane ower far this time. There's ower mony o' them, and they're no the safe colour. We'll be baith hangt, as sure's there's a deevil in hell.'

As he said thus, he went on trying to pick the buttons from the coat, taking them for sovereigns, though how he could have seen a sovereign at that time in Scotland I can only conjecture. But Robert caught him by the shoulders, and shook him awake with no gentle hands, upon which he began to rub his eyes, and mutter sleepily:

'Is that you, Bob? I hae been dreamin', I doobt.'

'Gin ye dinna learn to dream quaieter, ye'll get you and me tu into mair trouble nor I care to hae aboot ye, ye rascal. Haud the tongue o' ye, and eat this tawtie, gin ye want onything mair. And here's a bit o' reamy cakes tu ye. Ye winna get that in ilka hoose i' the toon. It's my grannie's especial.'

Robert felt relieved after this, for he had eaten all the cakes Miss Napier had given him, and had had a pain in his conscience ever since.

'Hoo got ye a haud o' 't?' asked Shargar, evidently supposing he had stolen it.

'She gies me a bit noo and than.'

'And ye didna eat it yersel'? Eh, Bob!'

Shargar was somewhat overpowered at this fresh proof of Robert's friendship. But Robert was still more ashamed of what he had not done.

He took the blue coat carefully from the bed, and hung it in its place again, satisfied now, from the way his grannie had spoken, or, rather, declined to speak, about it, that it had belonged to his father.

'Am I to rise?' asked Shargar, not understanding the action.

'Na, na, lie still. Ye'll be warm eneuch wantin' thae sovereigns. I'll lat ye oot i' the mornin' afore grannie's up. And ye maun mak' the best o't efter that till it's dark again. We'll sattle a' aboot it at the schuil the morn. Only we maun be circumspec', ye ken.'

'Ye cudna lay yer han's upo' a drap o' whusky, cud ye, Bob?'

Robert stared in horror. A boy like that asking for whisky! and in his grandmother's house, too!

'Shargar,' he said solemnly, 'there's no a drap o' whusky i' this hoose. It's awfu' to hear ye mention sic a thing. My grannie wad smell the verra name o' 't a mile awa'. I doobt that's her fit upo' the stair a'ready.'

Robert crept to the door, and Shargar sat staring with horror, his eyes looking from the gloom of the bed like those of a half-strangled dog. But it was a false alarm, as Robert presently

returned to announce.

'Gin ever ye sae muckle as mention whusky again, no to say drink ae drap o' 't, you and me pairt company, and that I tell you, Shargar,' said he, emphatically.

'I'll never luik at it; I'll never mint at dreamin' o' 't,' answered Shargar, coweringly. 'Gin she pits 't intil my moo', I'll spit it oot. But gin ye strive wi' me, Bob, I'll cut my throat—I will; an' that'll be seen and heard tell o'.'

All this time, save during the alarm of Mrs. Falconer's approach, when he sat with a mouthful of hot potato, unable to move his jaws for terror, and the remnant arrested half-way in its progress from his mouth after the bite—all this time Shargar had been devouring the provisions Robert had brought him, as if he had not seen food that day. As soon as they were finished, he begged for a drink of water, which Robert managed to procure for him. He then left him for the night, for his longer absence might have brought his grandmother after him, who had perhaps only too good reasons for being doubtful, if not suspicious, about boys in general, though certainly not about Robert in particular. He carried with him his books from the other garret-room where he kept them, and sat down at the table by his grandmother, preparing his Latin and geography by her lamp, while she sat knitting a white stocking with fingers as rapid as thought, never looking at her work, but staring into the fire, and seeing visions there which Robert would have given everything he could call his own to see, and then would have given his life to blot out of

the world if he had seen them. Quietly the evening passed, by the peaceful lamp and the cheerful fire, with the Latin on the one side of the table, and the stocking on the other, as if ripe and purified old age and hopeful unstained youth had been the only extremes of humanity known to the world. But the bitter wind was howling by fits in the chimney, and the offspring of a nobleman and a gipsy lay asleep in the garret, covered with the cloak of an old Highland rebel.

At nine o'clock, Mrs. Falconer rang the bell for Betty, and they had worship. Robert read a chapter, and his grandmother prayed an extempore prayer, in which they that looked at the wine when it was red in the cup, and they that worshipped the woman clothed in scarlet and seated upon the seven hills, came in for a strange mixture, in which the vengeance yielded only to the pity.

'Lord, lead them to see the error of their ways,' she cried. 'Let the rod of thy wrath awake the worm of their conscience that they may know verily that there is a God that ruleth in the earth. Dinna lat them gang to hell, O Lord, we beseech thee.'

As soon as prayers were over, Robert had a tumbler of milk and some more oat-cake, and was sent to bed; after which it was impossible for him to hold any further communication with Shargar. For his grandmother, little as one might suspect it who entered the parlour in the daytime, always slept in that same room, in a bed closed in with doors like those of a large press in the wall, while Robert slept in a little closet, looking into a

garden at the back of the house, the door of which opened from the parlour close to the head of his grandmother's bed. It was just large enough to hold a good-sized bed with curtains, a chest of drawers, a bureau, a large eight-day clock, and one chair, leaving in the centre about five feet square for him to move about in. There was more room as well as more comfort in the bed. He was never allowed a candle, for light enough came through from the parlour, his grandmother thought; so he was soon extended between the whitest of cold sheets, with his knees up to his chin, and his thoughts following his lost father over all spaces of the earth with which his geography-book had made him acquainted.

He was in the habit of leaving his closet and creeping through his grandmother's room before she was awake—or at least before she had given any signs to the small household that she was restored to consciousness, and that the life of the house must proceed. He therefore found no difficulty in liberating Shargar from his prison, except what arose from the boy's own unwillingness to forsake his comfortable quarters for the fierce encounter of the January blast which awaited him. But Robert did not turn him out before the last moment of safety had arrived; for, by the aid of signs known to himself, he watched the progress of his grandmother's dressing—an operation which did not consume much of the morning, scrupulous as she was with regard to neatness and cleanliness—until Betty was called in to give her careful assistance to the final disposition of the mutch, when Shargar's exit could be delayed no longer. Then he mounted

to the foot of the second stair, and called in a keen whisper,

'Noo, Shargar, cut for the life o' ye.'

And down came the poor fellow, with long gliding steps, ragged and reluctant, and, without a word or a look, launched himself out into the cold, and sped away he knew not whither. As he left the door, the only suspicion of light was the dull and doubtful shimmer of the snow that covered the street, keen particles of which were blown in his face by the wind, which, having been up all night, had grown very cold, and seemed delighted to find one unprotected human being whom it might badger at its own bitter will. Outcast Shargar! Where he spent the interval between Mrs. Falconer's door and that of the school, I do not know. There was a report amongst his school-fellows that he had been found by Scroggie, the fish-cadger, lying at full length upon the back of his old horse, which, either from compassion or indifference, had not cared to rise up under the burden. They said likewise that, when accused by Scroggie of housebreaking, though nothing had to be broken to get in, only a string with a peculiar knot, on the invention of which the cadger prided himself, to be undone, all that Shargar had to say in his self-defence was, that he had a terrible sair wame, and that the horse was warmer nor the stanes i' the yard; and he had dune him nae ill, nae even drawn a hair frae his tail—which would have been a difficult feat, seeing the horse's tail was as bare as his hoof.

CHAPTER VII. ROBERT TO THE RESCUE!

That Shargar was a parish scholar—which means that the parish paid his fees, although, indeed, they were hardly worth paying—made very little difference to his position amongst his school-fellows. Nor did the fact of his being ragged and dirty affect his social reception to his discomfort. But the accumulated facts of the oddity of his personal appearance, his supposed imbecility, and the bad character borne by his mother, placed him in a very unenviable relation to the tyrannical and vulgar-minded amongst them. Concerning his person, he was long, and, as his name implied, lean, with pale-red hair, reddish eyes, no visible eyebrows or eyelashes, and very pale face—in fact, he was half-way to an Albino. His arms and legs seemed of equal length, both exceedingly long. The handsomeness of his mother appeared only in his nose and mouth, which were regular and good, though expressionless; and the birth of his father only in his small delicate hands and feet, of which any girl who cared only for smallness, and heeded neither character nor strength, might have been proud. His feet, however, were supposed to be enormous, from the difficulty with which he dragged after him the huge shoes in which in winter they were generally encased.

The imbecility, like the large feet, was only imputed. He certainly was not brilliant, but neither did he make a fool of

himself in any of the few branches of learning of which the parish-scholar came in for a share. That which gained him the imputation was the fact that his nature was without a particle of the aggressive, and all its defensive of as purely negative a character as was possible. Had he been a dog, he would never have thought of doing anything for his own protection beyond turning up his four legs in silent appeal to the mercy of the heavens. He was an absolute sepulchre in the swallowing of oppression and ill-usage. It vanished in him. There was no echo of complaint, no murmur of resentment from the hollows of that soul. The blows that fell upon him resounded not, and no one but God remembered them.

His mother made her living as she herself best knew, with occasional well-begrudged assistance from the parish. Her chief resource was no doubt begging from house to house for the handful of oatmeal which was the recognized, and, in the court of custom-taught conscience, the legalized dole upon which every beggar had a claim; and if she picked up at the same time a chicken, or a boy's rabbit, or any other stray luxury, she was only following the general rule of society, that your first duty is to take care of yourself. She was generally regarded as a gipsy, but I doubt if she had any gipsy blood in her veins. She was simply a tramper, with occasional fits of localization. Her worst fault was the way she treated her son, whom she starved apparently that she might continue able to beat him.

The particular occasion which led to the recognition of the

growing relation between Robert and Shargar was the following. Upon a certain Saturday—some sidereal power inimical to boys must have been in the ascendant—a Saturday of brilliant but intermittent sunshine, the white clouds seen from the school windows indicating by their rapid transit across those fields of vision that fresh breezes friendly to kites, or draigons, as they were called at Rothieden, were frolicking in the upper regions—nearly a dozen boys were kept in for not being able to pay down from memory the usual instalment of Shorter Catechism always due at the close of the week. Amongst these boys were Robert and Shargar. Sky-revealing windows and locked door were too painful; and in proportion as the feeling of having nothing to do increased, the more uneasy did the active element in the boys become, and the more ready to break out into some abnormal manifestation. Everything—sun, wind, clouds—was busy out of doors, and calling to them to come and join the fun; and activity at the same moment excited and restrained naturally turns to mischief. Most of them had already learned the obnoxious task—one quarter of an hour was enough for that—and now what should they do next? The eyes of three or four of the eldest of them fell simultaneously upon Shargar.

Robert was sitting plunged in one of his day-dreams, for he, too, had learned his catechism, when he was roused from his reverie by a question from a pale-faced little boy, who looked up to him as a great authority.

'What for 's 't ca'd the Shorter Carritchis, Bob?'

"Cause it's no fully sae lang's the Bible,' answered Robert, without giving the question the consideration due to it, and was proceeding to turn the matter over in his mind, when the mental process was arrested by a shout of laughter. The other boys had tied Shargar's feet to the desk at which he sat—likewise his hands, at full stretch; then, having attached about a dozen strings to as many elf-locks of his pale-red hair, which was never cut or trimmed, had tied them to various pegs in the wall behind him, so that the poor fellow could not stir. They were now crushing up pieces of waste-paper, not a few leaves of stray school-books being regarded in that light, into bullets, dipping them in ink and aiming them at Shargar's face.

For some time Shargar did not utter a word; and Robert, although somewhat indignant at the treatment he was receiving, felt as yet no impulse to interfere, for success was doubtful. But, indeed, he was not very easily roused to action of any kind; for he was as yet mostly in the larva-condition of character, when everything is transacted inside. But the fun grew more furious, and spot after spot of ink gloomed upon Shargar's white face. Still Robert took no notice, for they did not seem to be hurting him much. But when he saw the tears stealing down his patient cheeks, making channels through the ink which now nearly covered them, he could bear it no longer. He took out his knife, and under pretence of joining in the sport, drew near to Shargar, and with rapid hand cut the cords—all but those that bound his feet, which were less easy to reach without exposing

himself defenceless.

The boys of course turned upon Robert. But ere they came to more than abusive words a diversion took place.

Mrs. Innes, the school-master's wife—a stout, kind-hearted woman, the fine condition of whose temperament was clearly the result of her physical prosperity—appeared at the door which led to the dwelling-house above, bearing in her hands a huge tureen of potato-soup, for her motherly heart could not longer endure the thought of dinnerless boys. Her husband being engaged at a parish meeting, she had a chance of interfering with success.

But ere Nancy, the servant, could follow with the spoons and plates, Wattie Morrison had taken the tureen, and out of spite at Robert, had emptied its contents on the head of Shargar, who was still tied by the feet, with the words: 'Shargar, I anoint thee king over us, and here is thy crown,' giving the tureen, as he said so, a push on to his head, where it remained.

Shargar did not move, and for one moment could not speak, but the next he gave a shriek that made Robert think he was far worse scalded than turned out to be the case. He darted to him in rage, took the tureen from his head, and, his blood being fairly up now, flung it with all his force at Morrison, and felled him to the earth. At the same moment the master entered by the street door and his wife by the house door, which was directly opposite. In the middle of the room the prisoners surrounded the fallen tyrant—Robert, with the red face of wrath, and Shargar, with a complexion the mingled result of tears, ink, and soup, which

latter clothed him from head to foot besides, standing on the outskirts of the group. I need not follow the story farther. Both Robert and Morrison got a lickin'; and if Mr. Innes had been like some school-masters of those times, Shargar would not have escaped his share of the evil things going.

From that day Robert assumed the acknowledged position of Shargar's defender. And if there was pride and a sense of propriety mingled with his advocacy of Shargar's rights, nay, even if the relation was not altogether free from some amount of show-off on Robert's part, I cannot yet help thinking that it had its share in that development of the character of Falconer which has chiefly attracted me to the office of his biographer. There may have been in it the exercise of some patronage; probably it was not pure from the pride of beneficence; but at least it was a loving patronage and a vigorous beneficence; and, under the reaction of these, the good which in Robert's nature was as yet only in a state of solution, began to crystallize into character.

But the effect of the new relation was far more remarkable on Shargar. As incapable of self-defence as ever, he was yet in a moment roused to fury by any attack upon the person or the dignity of Robert: so that, indeed, it became a new and favourite mode of teasing Shargar to heap abuse, real or pretended, upon his friend. From the day when Robert thus espoused his part, Shargar was Robert's dog. That very evening, when she went to take a parting peep at the external before locking the door for the night, Betty found him sitting upon the door-step, only, however,

to send him off, as she described it, 'wi' a flech[1] in 's lug (a flea in his ear).' For the character of the mother was always associated with the boy, and avenged upon him. I must, however, allow that those delicate, dirty fingers of his could not with safety be warranted from occasional picking and stealing.

At this period of my story, Robert himself was rather a grotesque-looking animal, very tall and lanky, with especially long arms, which excess of length they retained after he was full-grown. In this respect Shargar and he were alike; but the long legs of Shargar were unmatched in Robert, for at this time his body was peculiarly long. He had large black eyes, deep sunk even then, and a Roman nose, the size of which in a boy of his years looked portentous. For the rest, he was dark-complexioned, with dark hair, destined to grow darker still, with hands and feet well modelled, but which would have made four feet and four hands such as Shargar's.

When his mind was not oppressed with the consideration of any important metaphysical question, he learned his lessons well; when such was present, the Latin grammar, with all its attendant servilities, was driven from the presence of the lordly need. That once satisfied in spite of pandies and imprisonments, he returned with fresh zest, and, indeed, with some ephemeral ardour, to the rules of syntax or prosody, though the latter, in

[1] In Scotch the ch and gh are almost always guttural. The gh according to Mr. Alexander Ellis, the sole authority in the past pronunciation of the country, was guttural in England in the time of Shakspere.

the mode in which it was then and there taught, was almost as useless as the task set himself by a worthy lay-preacher in the neighbourhood—of learning the first nine chapters of the first Book of the Chronicles, in atonement for having, in an evil hour of freedom of spirit, ventured to suggest that such lists of names, even although forming a portion of Holy Writ, could scarcely be reckoned of equally divine authority with St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

CHAPTER VIII. THE ANGEL UNAWARES

Although Betty seemed to hold little communication with the outer world, she yet contrived somehow or other to bring home what gossip was going to the ears of her mistress, who had very few visitors; for, while her neighbours held Mrs. Falconer in great and evident respect, she was not the sort of person to sit down and have a news with. There was a certain sedate self-contained dignity about her which the common mind felt to be chilling and repellant; and from any gossip of a personal nature—what Betty brought her always excepted—she would turn away, generally with the words, 'Hoots! I canna bide clashes.'

On the evening following that of Shargar's introduction to Mrs. Falconer's house, Betty came home from the butcher's—for it was Saturday night, and she had gone to fetch the beef for their Sunday's broth—with the news that the people next door, that is, round the corner in the next street, had a visitor.

The house in question had been built by Robert's father, and was, compared with Mrs. Falconer's one-storey house, large and handsome. Robert had been born, and had spent a few years of his life in it, but could recall nothing of the facts of those early days. Some time before the period at which my history commences it had passed into other hands, and it was now quite strange to him. It had been bought by a retired naval officer, who

lived in it with his wife—the only Englishwoman in the place, until the arrival, at The Boar's Head, of the lady so much admired by Dooble Sanny.

Robert was up-stairs when Betty emptied her news-bag, and so heard nothing of this bit of gossip. He had just assured Shargar that as soon as his grandmother was asleep he would look about for what he could find, and carry it up to him in the garret. As yet he had confined the expenditure out of Shargar's shilling to twopence.

The household always retired early—earlier on Saturday night in preparation for the Sabbath—and by ten o'clock grannie and Betty were in bed. Robert, indeed, was in bed too; but he had lain down in his clothes, waiting for such time as might afford reasonable hope of his grandmother being asleep, when he might both ease Shargar's hunger and get to sleep himself. Several times he got up, resolved to make his attempt; but as often his courage failed and he lay down again, sure that grannie could not be asleep yet. When the clock beside him struck eleven, he could bear it no longer, and finally rose to do his endeavour.

Opening the door of the closet slowly and softly, he crept upon his hands and knees into the middle of the parlour, feeling very much like a thief, as, indeed, in a measure he was, though from a blameless motive. But just as he had accomplished half the distance to the door, he was arrested and fixed with terror; for a deep sigh came from grannie's bed, followed by the voice of words. He thought at first that she had heard him, but he soon

found that he was mistaken. Still, the fear of discovery held him there on all fours, like a chained animal. A dull red gleam, faint and dull, from the embers of the fire, was the sole light in the room. Everything so common to his eyes in the daylight seemed now strange and eerie in the dying coals, and at what was to the boy the unearthly hour of the night.

He felt that he ought not to listen to grannie, but terror made him unable to move.

'Och hone! och hone!' said grannie from the bed. 'I've a sair, sair hert. I've a sair hert i' my breist, O Lord! thoo knowest. My ain Anerew! To think o' my bairnie that I cairriet i' my ain body, that sookit my breists, and leuch i' my face—to think o' 'im bein' a reprobate! O Lord! cudna he be eleckit yet? Is there nae turnin' o' thy decrees? Na, na; that wadna do at a'. But while there's life there's houp. But wha kens whether he be alive or no? Naebody can tell. Glaidly wad I luik upon 's deid face gin I cud believe that his sowl wasna amang the lost. But eh! the torments o' that place! and the reik that gangs up for ever an' ever, smorin' (smothering) the stars! And my Anerew doon i' the hert o' 't cryin'! And me no able to win till him! O Lord! I canna say thy will be done. But dinna lay 't to my chairge; for gin ye was a mither yersel' ye wadna pit him there. O Lord! I'm verra ill-fashioned. I beg yer pardon. I'm near oot o' my min'. Forgie me, O Lord! for I hardly ken what I'm sayin'. He was my ain babe, my ain Anerew, and ye gae him to me yersel'. And noo he's for the finger o' scorn to pint at; an ootcast an' a wan'erer frae his ain country, an' daurna

come within sicht o' 't for them 'at wad tak' the law o' 'm. An' it's a' drink—drink an' ill company! He wad hae dune weel eneuch gin they wad only hae latten him be. What for maun men be aye drink-drinkin' at something or ither? I never want it. Eh! gin I war as young as whan he was born, I wad be up an' awa' this verra nicht to luik for him. But it's no use me tryin' 't. O God! ance mair I pray thee to turn him frae the error o' 's ways afore he goes hence an' isna more. And O dinna lat Robert gang efter him, as he's like eneuch to do. Gie me grace to haud him ticht, that he may be to the praise o' thy glory for ever an' ever. Amen.'

Whether it was that the weary woman here fell asleep, or that she was too exhausted for further speech, Robert heard no more, though he remained there frozen with horror for some minutes after his grandmother had ceased. This, then, was the reason why she would never speak about his father! She kept all her thoughts about him for the silence of the night, and loneliness with the God who never sleeps, but watches the wicked all through the dark. And his father was one of the wicked! And God was against him! And when he died he would go to hell! But he was not dead yet: Robert was sure of that. And when he grew a man, he would go and seek him, and beg him on his knees to repent and come back to God, who would forgive him then, and take him to heaven when he died. And there he would be good, and good people would love him.

Something like this passed through the boy's mind ere he moved to creep from the room, for his was one of those natures

which are active in the generation of hope. He had almost forgotten what he came there for; and had it not been that he had promised Shargar, he would have crept back to his bed and left him to bear his hunger as best he could. But now, first his right hand, then his left knee, like any other quadruped, he crawled to the door, rose only to his knees to open it, took almost a minute to the operation, then dropped and crawled again, till he had passed out, turned, and drawn the door to, leaving it slightly ajar. Then it struck him awfully that the same terrible passage must be gone through again. But he rose to his feet, for he had no shoes on, and there was little danger of making any noise, although it was pitch dark—he knew the house so well. With gathering courage, he felt his way to the kitchen, and there groped about; but he could find nothing beyond a few quarters of oat-cake, which, with a mug of water, he proceeded to carry up to Shargar in the garret.

When he reached the kitchen door, he was struck with amazement and for a moment with fresh fear. A light was shining into the transe from the stair which went up at right angles from the end of it. He knew it could not be grannie, and he heard Betty snoring in her own den, which opened from the kitchen. He thought it must be Shargar who had grown impatient; but how he had got hold of a light he could not think. As soon as he turned the corner, however, the doubt was changed into mystery. At the top of the broad low stair stood a woman-form with a candle in her hand, gazing about her as if wondering which way to go. The light fell full upon her face, the beauty of which was such that,

with her dress, which was white—being, in fact, a nightgown—and her hair, which was hanging loose about her shoulders and down to her waist, it led Robert at once to the conclusion (his reasoning faculties already shaken by the events of the night) that she was an angel come down to comfort his grannie; and he kneeled involuntarily at the foot of the stair, and gazed up at her, with the cakes in one hand, and the mug of water in the other, like a meat-and-drink offering. Whether he had closed his eyes or bowed his head, he could not say; but he became suddenly aware that the angel had vanished—he knew not when, how, or whither. This for a time confirmed his assurance that it was an angel. And although he was undeceived before long, the impression made upon him that night was never effaced. But, indeed, whatever Falconer heard or saw was something more to him than it would have been to anybody else.

Elated, though awed, by the vision, he felt his way up the stair in the new darkness, as if walking in a holy dream, trod as if upon sacred ground as he crossed the landing where the angel had stood—went up and up, and found Shargar wide awake with expectant hunger. He, too, had caught a glimmer of the light. But Robert did not tell him what he had seen. That was too sacred a subject to enter upon with Shargar, and he was intent enough upon his supper not to be inquisitive.

Robert left him to finish it at his leisure, and returned to cross his grandmother's room once more, half expecting to find the angel standing by her bedside. But all was dark and still. Creeping

back as he had come, he heard her quiet, though deep, breathing, and his mind was at ease about her for the night. What if the angel he had surprised had only come to appear to grannie in her sleep? Why not? There were such stories in the Bible, and grannie was certainly as good as some of the people in the Bible that saw angels—Sarah, for instance. And if the angels came to see grannie, why should they not have some care over his father as well? It might be—who could tell?

It is perhaps necessary to explain Robert's vision. The angel was the owner of the boxes he had seen at The Boar's Head. Looking around her room before going to bed, she had seen a trap in the floor near the wall, and raising it, had discovered a few steps of a stair leading down to a door. Curiosity naturally led her to examine it. The key was in the lock. It opened outwards, and there she found herself, to her surprise, in the heart of another dwelling, of lowlier aspect. She never saw Robert; for while he approached with shoeless feet, she had been glancing through the open door of the gable-room, and when he knelt, the light which she held in her hand had, I presume, hidden him from her. He, on his part, had not observed that the moveless door stood open at last.

I have already said that the house adjoining had been built by Robert's father. The lady's room was that which he had occupied with his wife, and in it Robert had been born. The door, with its trap-stair, was a natural invention for uniting the levels of the two houses, and a desirable one in not a few of the forms which the

weather assumed in that region. When the larger house passed into other hands, it had never entered the minds of the simple people who occupied the contiguous dwellings, to build up the doorway between.

CHAPTER IX. A DISCOVERY

The friendship of Robert had gained Shargar the favourable notice of others of the school-public. These were chiefly of those who came from the country, ready to follow an example set them by a town boy. When his desertion was known, moved both by their compassion for him, and their respect for Robert, they began to give him some portion of the dinner they brought with them; and never in his life had Shargar fared so well as for the first week after he had been cast upon the world. But in proportion as their interest faded with the novelty, so their appetites reasserted former claims of use and wont, and Shargar began once more to feel the pangs of hunger. For all that Robert could manage to procure for him without attracting the attention he was so anxious to avoid, was little more than sufficient to keep his hunger alive, Shargar being gifted with a great appetite, and Robert having no allowance of pocket-money from his grandmother. The threepence he had been able to spend on him were what remained of sixpence Mr. Innes had given him for an exercise which he wrote in blank verse instead of in prose—an achievement of which the school-master was proud, both from his reverence for Milton, and from his inability to compose a metrical line himself. And how and when he should ever possess another penny was even unimaginable. Shargar's shilling was likewise spent. So Robert could but go on pocketing instead of

eating all that he dared, watching anxiously for opportunity of evading the eyes of his grandmother. On her dimness of sight, however, he depended too confidently after all; for either she was not so blind as he thought she was, or she made up for the defect of her vision by the keenness of her observation. She saw enough to cause her considerable annoyance, though it suggested nothing inconsistent with rectitude on the part of the boy, further than that there was something underhand going on. One supposition after another arose in the old lady's brain, and one after another was dismissed as improbable. First, she tried to persuade herself that he wanted to take the provisions to school with him, and eat them there—a proceeding of which she certainly did not approve, but for the reproof of which she was unwilling to betray the loopholes of her eyes. Next she concluded, for half a day, that he must have a pair of rabbits hidden away in some nook or other—possibly in the little strip of garden belonging to the house. And so conjecture followed conjecture for a whole week, during which, strange to say, not even Betty knew that Shargar slept in the house. For so careful and watchful were the two boys, that although she could not help suspecting something from the expression and behaviour of Robert, what that something might be she could not imagine; nor had she and her mistress as yet exchanged confidences on the subject. Her observation coincided with that of her mistress as to the disappearance of odds and ends of eatables—potatoes, cold porridge, bits of oat-cake; and even, on one occasion, when Shargar happened to be especially

ravenous, a yellow, or cured and half-dried, haddock, which the lad devoured raw, vanished from her domain. He went to school in the morning smelling so strong in consequence, that they told him he must have been passing the night in Scroggie's cart, and not on his horse's back this time.

The boys kept their secret well.

One evening, towards the end of the week, Robert, after seeing Shargar disposed of for the night, proceeded to carry out a project which had grown in his brain within the last two days in consequence of an occurrence with which his relation to Shargar had had something to do. It was this:

The housing of Shargar in the garret had led Robert to make a close acquaintance with the place. He was familiar with all the outs and ins of the little room which he considered his own, for that was a civilized, being a plastered, ceiled, and comparatively well-lighted little room, but not with the other, which was three times its size, very badly lighted, and showing the naked couples from roof-tree to floor. Besides, it contained no end of dark corners, with which his childish imagination had associated undefined horrors, assuming now one shape, now another. Also there were several closets in it, constructed in the angles of the place, and several chests—two of which he had ventured to peep into. But although he had found them filled, not with bones, as he had expected, but one with papers, and one with garments, he had yet dared to carry his researches no further. One evening, however, when Betty was out, and he had

got hold of her candle, and gone up to keep Shargar company for a few minutes, a sudden impulse seized him to have a peep into all the closets. One of them he knew a little about, as containing, amongst other things, his father's coat with the gilt buttons, and his great-grandfather's kilt, as well as other garments useful to Shargar: now he would see what was in the rest. He did not find anything very interesting, however, till he arrived at the last. Out of it he drew a long queer-shaped box into the light of Betty's dip.

'Luik here, Shargar!' he said under his breath, for they never dared to speak aloud in these precincts—'luik here! What can there be in this box? Is't a bairnie's coffin, duv ye think? Luik at it.'

In this case Shargar, having roamed the country a good deal more than Robert, and having been present at some merry-makings with his mother, of which there were comparatively few in that country-side, was better informed than his friend.

'Eh! Bob, duvna ye ken what that is? I thocht ye kent a' thing. That's a fiddle.'

'That's buff an' styte (stuff and nonsense), Shargar. Do ye think I dinna ken a fiddle whan I see ane, wi' its guts ootside o' 'ts wame, an' the thoomacks to screw them up wi' an' gar't skirl?'

'Buff an' styte yersel'!' cried Shargar, in indignation, from the bed. 'Gie's a haud o' 't.'

Robert handed him the case. Shargar undid the hooks in a moment, and revealed the creature lying in its shell like a boiled bivalve.

'I tellt ye sae!' he exclaimed triumphantly. 'Maybe ye'll lippen to me (trust me) neist time.'

'An' I tellt you,' retorted Robert, with an equivocation altogether unworthy of his growing honesty. 'I was cocksure that cudna be a fiddle. There's the fiddle i' the hert o' 't! Losh! I min' noo. It maun be my grandfather's fiddle 'at I hae heard tell o'.'

'No to ken a fiddle-case!' reflected Shargar, with as much of contempt as it was possible for him to show.

'I tell ye what, Shargar,' returned Robert, indignantly; 'ye may ken the box o' a fiddle better nor I do, but de'il hae me gin I dinna ken the fiddle itsel' raither better nor ye do in a fortnicht frae this time. I s' tak' it to Dooble Sanny; he can play the fiddle fine. An' I'll play 't too, or the de'il s' be in't.'

'Eh, man, that 'll be gran'!' cried Shargar, incapable of jealousy. 'We can gang to a' the markets thegither and gaither baubees (halfpence).'

To this anticipation Robert returned no reply, for, hearing Betty come in, he judged it time to restore the violin to its case, and Betty's candle to the kitchen, lest she should invade the upper regions in search of it. But that very night he managed to have an interview with Dooble Sanny, the shoemaker, and it was arranged between them that Robert should bring his violin on the evening at which my story has now arrived.

Whatever motive he had for seeking to commence the study of music, it holds even in more important matters that, if the thing pursued be good, there is a hope of the pursuit purifying

the motive. And Robert no sooner heard the fiddle utter a few mournful sounds in the hands of the soutar, who was no contemptible performer, than he longed to establish such a relation between himself and the strange instrument, that, dumb and deaf as it had been to him hitherto, it would respond to his touch also, and tell him the secrets of its queerly-twisted skull, full of sweet sounds instead of brains. From that moment he would be a musician for music's own sake, and forgot utterly what had appeared to him, though I doubt if it was, the sole motive of his desire to learn—namely, the necessity of retaining his superiority over Shargar.

What added considerably to the excitement of his feelings on the occasion, was the expression of reverence, almost of awe, with which the shoemaker took the instrument from its case, and the tenderness with which he handled it. The fact was that he had not had a violin in his hands for nearly a year, having been compelled to pawn his own in order to alleviate the sickness brought on his wife by his own ill-treatment of her, once that he came home drunk from a wedding. It was strange to think that such dirty hands should be able to bring such sounds out of the instrument the moment he got it safely cuddled under his cheek. So dirty were they, that it was said Dooble Sanny never required to carry any rosin with him for fiddler's need, his own fingers having always enough upon them for one bow at least. Yet the points of those fingers never lost the delicacy of their touch. Some people thought this was in virtue of their being washed

only once a week—a custom Alexander justified on the ground that, in a trade like his, it was of no use to wash oftener, for he would be just as dirty again before night.

The moment he began to play, the face of the soutar grew ecstatic. He stopped at the very first note, notwithstanding, let fall his arms, the one with the bow, the other with the violin, at his sides, and said, with a deep-drawn respiration and lengthened utterance:

'Eh!'

Then after a pause, during which he stood motionless:

'The crater maun be a Cry Moany! Hear till her!' he added, drawing another long note.

Then, after another pause:

'She's a Straddle Vawrious at least! Hear till her. I never had sic a combination o' timmer and catgut atween my cleuks (claws) afore.'

As to its being a Stradivarius, or even a Cremona at all, the testimony of Dooble Sanny was not worth much on the point. But the shoemaker's admiration roused in the boy's mind a reverence for the individual instrument which he never lost.

From that day the two were friends.

Suddenly the soutar started off at full speed in a strathspey, which was soon lost in the wail of a Highland psalm-tune, giving place in its turn to 'Sic a wife as Willie had!' And on he went without pause, till Robert dared not stop any longer. The fiddle had bewitched the fiddler.

'Come as aften 's ye like, Robert, gin ye fess this leddy wi' ye,' said the soutar.

And he stroked the back of the violin tenderly with his open palm.

'But wad ye hae ony objection to lat it lie aside ye, and lat me come whan I can?'

'Objection, laddie? I wad as sune objeck to lattin' my ain wife lie aside me.'

'Ay,' said Robert, seized with some anxiety about the violin as he remembered the fate of the wife, 'but ye ken Elspet comes aff a' the waur sometimes.'

Softened by the proximity of the wonderful violin, and stung afresh by the boy's words as his conscience had often stung him before, for he loved his wife dearly save when the demon of drink possessed him, the tears rose in Elshender's eyes. He held out the violin to Robert, saying, with unsteady voice:

'Hae, tak her awa'. I dinna deserve to hae sic a thing i' my hoose. But hear me, Robert, and lat hearin' be believin'. I never was sae drunk but I cud tune my fiddle. Mair by token, ance they fand me lyin' o' my back i' the Corrie, an' the watter, they say, was ower a' but the mou' o' me; but I was haudin' my fiddle up abune my heid, and de'il a spark o' watter was upo' her.'

'It's a pity yer wife wasna yer fiddle, than, Sanny,' said Robert, with more presumption than wit.

''Deed ye're i' the richt, there, Robert. Hae, tak' yer fiddle.'

''Deed no,' returned Robert. 'I maun jist lippen (trust) to ye,

Sanders. I canna bide langer the nicht; but maybe ye'll tell me hoo to haud her the neist time 'at I come—will ye?'

'That I wull, Robert, come whan ye like. An' gin ye come o' ane 'at cud play this fiddle as this fiddle deserves to be playt, ye'll do me credit.'

'Ye min' what that sumph Lumley said to me the ither nicht, Sanders, aboot my grandfather?'

'Ay, weel eneuch. A dish o' drucken havers!'

'It was true eneuch aboot my great-grandfather, though.'

'No! Was't railly?'

'Ay. He was the best piper in 's regiment at Culloden. Gin they had a' fouchten as he pipit, there wad hae been anither tale to tell. And he was toon-piper forby, jist like you, Sanders, efter they took frae him a' 'at he had.'

'Na! heard ye ever the like o' that! Weel, wha wad hae thocht it? Faith! we maun hae you fiddle as weel as yer lucky-daiddy pipit.—But here's the King o' Bashan comin' efter his butes, an' them no half dune yet!' exclaimed Dooble Sanny, settling in haste to his awl and his lingel (Fr. ligneul). 'He'll be roarin' mair like a bull o' the country than the king o' 't.'

As Robert departed, Peter Ogg came in, and as he passed the window, he heard the shoemaker averring:

'I haena risen frae my stule sin' ane o'clock; but there's a sicht to be dune to them, Mr. Ogg.'

Indeed, Alexander ab Alexandro, as Mr. Innes facetiously styled him, was in more ways than one worthy of the name of

Dooble. There seemed to be two natures in the man, which all his music had not yet been able to blend.

CHAPTER X. ANOTHER DISCOVERY IN THE GARRET

Little did Robert dream of the reception that awaited him at home. Almost as soon as he had left the house, the following events began to take place.

The mistress's bell rang, and Betty 'gaed benn the hoose to see what she cud be wantin',' whereupon a conversation ensued.

'Wha was that at the door, Betty?' asked Mrs. Falconer; for Robert had not shut the door so carefully as he ought, seeing that the deafness of his grandmother was of much the same faculty as her blindness.

Had Robert not had a hold of Betty by the forelock of her years, he would have been unable to steal any liberty at all. Still Betty had a conscience, and although she would not offend Robert if she could help it, yet she would not lie.

"Deed, mem, I canna jist distinckly say 'at I heard the door,' she answered.

'Whaur's Robert?' was her next question.

'He's generally up the stair aboot this hoor, mem—that is, whan he's no i' the parlour at 's lessons.'

'What gangs he sae muckle up the stair for, Betty, do ye ken? It's something by ordinar' wi' 'm.'

"Deed I dinna ken, mem. I never tuik it into my heid to gang considerin' aboot it. He'll hae some ploy o' 's ain, nae doobt.

Laddies will be laddies, ye ken, mem.'

'I doobt, Betty, ye'll be aidin' an' abettin'. An' it disna become yer years, Betty.'

'My years are no to fin' faut wi', mem. They're weel eneuch.'

'That's naething to the pint, Betty. What's the laddie aboot?'

'Do ye mean whan he gangs up the stair, mem?'

'Ay. Ye ken weel eneuch what I mean.'

'Weel, mem, I tell ye I dinna ken. An' ye never heard me tell ye a lee sin' ever I was i' yer service, mem.'

'Na, nae doonricht. Ye gang aboot it an' aboot it, an' at last ye come sae near leein' that gin ye spak anither word, ye wad be at it; and it jist fleys (frights) me frae speirin' ae ither question at ye. An' that's hoo ye win oot o' 't. But noo 'at it's aboot my ain oye (grandson), I'm no gaein' to tyne (lose) him to save a woman o' your years, wha oucht to ken better; an sae I'll speir at ye, though ye suld be driven to lee like Sawtan himsel'.—What's he aboot whan he gangs up the stair? Noo!'

'Weel, as sure's deith, I dinna ken. Ye drive me to sweirin', mem, an' no to leein'.'

'I carena. Hae ye no idea aboot it, than, Betty?'

'Weel, mem, I think sometimes he canna be weel, and maun hae a tod (fox) in 's stamack, or something o' that nater. For what he eats is awfu'. An' I think whiles he jist gangs up the stair to eat at 's ain wull.'

'That jumps wi' my ain observations, Betty. Do ye think he micht hae a rabbit, or maybe a pair o' them, in some boxie i' the

garret, noo?'

'And what for no, gin he had, mem?'

'What for no? Nesty stinkin' things! But that's no the pint. I aye hae to haud ye to the pint, Betty. The pint is, whether he has rabbits or no?'

'Or guinea-pigs,' suggested Betty.

'Weel.'

'Or maybe a pup or twa. Or I kent a laddie ance 'at keepit a haill faimily o' kittlins. Or maybe he micht hae a bit lammie. There was an uncle o' min' ain—'

'Haud yer tongue, Betty! Ye hae ower muckle to say for a' the sense there's intil 't.'

'Weel, mem, ye speirt questions at me.'

'Weel, I hae had eneuch o' yer answers, Betty. Gang and tell Robert to come here direckly.'

Betty went, knowing perfectly that Robert had gone out, and returned with the information. Her mistress searched her face with a keen eye.

'That maun hae been himsel' efter a' whan ye thocht ye hard the door gang,' said Betty.

'It's a strange thing that I suld hear him benn here wi' the door steekit, an' your door open at the verra door-cheek o' the ither, an' you no hear him, Betty. And me sae deif as weel!'

"Deed, mem,' retorted Betty, losing her temper a little, 'I can be as deif 's ither fowk mysel' whiles.'

When Betty grew angry, Mrs. Falconer invariably grew calm,

or, at least, put her temper out of sight. She was silent now, and continued silent till Betty moved to return to her kitchen, when she said, in a tone of one who had just arrived at an important resolution:

'Betty, we'll jist awa' up the stair an' luik.'

'Weel, mem, I hae nae objections.'

'Nae objections! What for suld you or ony ither body hae ony objections to me gaein' whaur I like i' my ain hoose? Umph!' exclaimed Mrs. Falconer, turning and facing her maid.

'In coorse, mem. I only meant I had nae objections to gang wi' ye.'

'And what for suld you or ony ither woman that I paid twa pun' five i' the half-year till, daur to hae objections to gaein' whaur I wantit ye to gang i' my ain hoose?'

'Hoot, mem! it was but a slip o' the tongue—naething mair.'

'Slip me nae sic slips, or ye'll come by a fa' at last, I doobt, Betty,' concluded Mrs. Falconer, in a mollified tone, as she turned and led the way from the room.

They got a candle in the kitchen and proceeded up-stairs, Mrs. Falconer still leading, and Betty following. They did not even look into the ga'le-room, not doubting that the dignity of the best bed-room was in no danger of being violated even by Robert, but took their way upwards to the room in which he kept his school-books—almost the only articles of property which the boy possessed. Here they found nothing suspicious. All was even in the best possible order—not a very wonderful fact, seeing a

few books and a slate were the only things there besides the papers on the shelves.

What the feelings of Shargar must have been when he heard the steps and voices, and saw the light approaching his place of refuge, we will not change our point of view to inquire. He certainly was as little to be envied at that moment as at any moment during the whole of his existence.

The first sense Mrs. Falconer made use of in the search after possible animals lay in her nose. She kept snuffing constantly, but, beyond the usual musty smell of neglected apartments, had as yet discovered nothing. The moment she entered the upper garret, however—

'There's an ill-faured smell here, Betty,' she said, believing that they had at last found the trail of the mystery; 'but it's no like the smell o' rabbits. Jist luik i' the nuik there ahin' the door.'

'There's naething here,' responded Betty.

'Roon the en' o' that kist there. I s' luik into the press.'

As Betty rose from her search behind the chest and turned towards her mistress, her eyes crossed the cavernous opening of the bed. There, to her horror, she beheld a face like that of a galvanised corpse staring at her from the darkness. Shargar was in a sitting posture, paralysed with terror, waiting, like a fascinated bird, till Mrs. Falconer and Betty should make the final spring upon him, and do whatever was equivalent to devouring him upon the spot. He had sat up to listen to the noise of their ascending footsteps, and fear had so overmastered him,

that he either could not, or forgot that he could lie down and cover his head with some of the many garments scattered around him.

'I didna say whusky, did I?' he kept repeating to himself, in utter imbecility of fear.

'The Lord preserve 's!' exclaimed Betty, the moment she could speak; for during the first few seconds, having caught the infection of Shargar's expression, she stood equally paralysed. 'The Lord preserve 's!' she repeated.

'Ance is eneuch,' said Mrs. Falconer, sharply, turning round to see what the cause of Betty's ejaculation might be.

I have said that she was dim-sighted. The candle they had was little better than a penny dip. The bed was darker than the rest of the room. Shargar's face had none of the more distinctive characteristics of manhood upon it.

'Gude preserve 's!' exclaimed Mrs. Falconer in her turn: 'it's a wumman.'

Poor deluded Shargar, thinking himself safer under any form than that which he actually bore, attempted no protest against the mistake. But, indeed, he was incapable of speech. The two women flew upon him to drag him out of bed. Then first recovering his powers of motion, he sprung up in an agony of terror, and darted out between them, overturning Betty in his course.

'Ye rouch limmer!' cried Betty, from the floor. 'Ye lang-leggit jaud!' she added, as she rose—and at the same moment Shargar banged the street-door behind him in his terror—'I wat ye dinna

carry yer coats ower syde (too long)!'

For Shargar, having discovered that the way to get the most warmth from Robert's great-grandfather's kilt was to wear it in the manner for which it had been fabricated, was in the habit of fastening it round his waist before he got into bed; and the eye of Betty, as she fell, had caught the swing of this portion of his attire.

But poor Mrs. Falconer, with sunken head, walked out of the garret in the silence of despair. She went slowly down the steep stair, supporting herself against the wall, her round-toed shoes creaking solemnly as she went, took refuge in the ga'le-room, and burst into a violent fit of weeping. For such depravity she was not prepared. What a terrible curse hung over her family! Surely they were all reprobate from the womb, not one elected for salvation from the guilt of Adam's fall, and therefore abandoned to Satan as his natural prey, to be led captive of him at his will. She threw herself on her knees at the side of the bed, and prayed heart-brokenly. Betty heard her as she limped past the door on her way back to her kitchen.

Meantime Shargar had rushed across the next street on his bare feet into the Crookit Wynd, terrifying poor old Kirstan Peerie, the divisions betwixt the compartments of whose memory had broken down, into the exclamation to her next neighbour, Tam Rhin, with whom she was trying to gossip:

'Eh, Tammas! that'll be ane o' the slauchtert at Culloden.'

He never stopped till he reached his mother's deserted abode

—strange instinct! There he ran to earth like a hunted fox. Rushing at the door, forgetful of everything but refuge, he found it unlocked, and closing it behind him, stood panting like the hart that has found the water-brooks. The owner had looked in one day to see whether the place was worth repairing, for it was a mere outhouse, and had forgotten to turn the key when he left it. Poor Shargar! Was it more or less of a refuge that the mother that bore him was not there either to curse or welcome his return? Less—if we may judge from a remark he once made in my hearing many long years after:

'For, ye see,' he said, 'a mither's a mither, be she the verra de'il.'

Searching about in the dark, he found the one article unsold by the landlord, a stool, with but two of its natural three legs. On this he balanced himself and waited—simply for what Robert would do; for his faith in Robert was unbounded, and he had no other hope on earth. But Shargar was not miserable. In that wretched hovel, his bare feet clasping the clay floor in constant search of a wavering equilibrium, with pitch darkness around him, and incapable of the simplest philosophical or religious reflection, he yet found life good. For it had interest. Nay, more, it had hope. I doubt, however, whether there is any interest at all without hope.

While he sat there, Robert, thinking him snug in the garret, was walking quietly home from the shoemaker's; and his first impulse on entering was to run up and recount the particulars of his interview with Alexander. Arrived in the dark garret,

he called Shargar, as usual, in a whisper—received no reply—thought he was asleep—called louder (for he had had a penny from his grandmother that day for bringing home two pails of water for Betty, and had just spent it upon a loaf for him)—but no Shargar replied. Thereupon he went to the bed to lay hold of him and shake him. But his searching hands found no Shargar. Becoming alarmed, he ran down-stairs to beg a light from Betty.

When he reached the kitchen, he found Betty's nose as much in the air as its construction would permit. For a hook-nosed animal, she certainly was the most harmless and ovine creature in the world, but this was a case in which feminine modesty was both concerned and aggrieved. She showed her resentment no further, however, than by simply returning no answer in syllable, or sound, or motion, to Robert's request. She was washing up the tea-things, and went on with her work as if she had been in absolute solitude, saving that her countenance could hardly have kept up that expression of injured dignity had such been the case. Robert plainly saw, to his great concern, that his secret had been discovered in his absence, and that Shargar had been expelled with contumely. But, with an instinct of facing the worst at once which accompanied him through life, he went straight to his grandmother's parlour.

'Well, grandmamma,' he said, trying to speak as cheerfully as he could.

Grannie's prayers had softened her a little, else she would have been as silent as Betty; for it was from her mistress that Betty had

learned this mode of torturing a criminal. So she was just able to return his greeting in the words, 'Weel, Robert,' pronounced in a finality of tone that indicated she had done her utmost, and had nothing to add.

'Here's a browst (brewage)!' thought Robert to himself; and, still on the principle of flying at the first of mischief he saw—the best mode of meeting it, no doubt—addressed his grandmother at once. The effort necessary gave a tone of defiance to his words.

'What for willna ye speik to me, grannie?' he said. 'I'm no a haithen, nor yet a papist.'

'Ye're waur nor baith in ane, Robert.'

'Hoots! ye winna say baith, grannie,' returned Robert, who, even at the age of fourteen, when once compelled to assert himself, assumed a modest superiority.

'Nane o' sic impidence!' retorted Mrs. Falconer. 'I wonner whaur ye learn that. But it's nae wonner. Evil communications corrupt gude mainners. Ye're a lost prodigal, Robert, like yer father afore ye. I hae jist been sittin' here thinkin' wi' mysel' whether it wadna be better for baith o' 's to lat ye gang an' reap the fruit o' yer doin's at ance; for the hard ways is the best road for transgressors. I'm no bund to keep ye.'

'Weel, weel, I s' awa' to Shargar. Him and me 'ill haud on thegither better nor you an' me, grannie. He's a puir cratur, but he can stick till a body.'

'What are ye haverin' aboot Shargar for, ye heepocreet loon? Ye'll no gang to Shargar, I s' warran'! Ye'll be efter that vile

limmer that's turnt my honest hoose intil a sty this last fortnicht.'

'Grannie, I dinna ken what ye mean.'

'She kens, than. I sent her aff like ane o' Samson's foxes, wi' a firebrand at her tail. It's a pity it wasna tied atween the twa o' ye.'

'Preserve 's, grannie! Is't possible ye hae ta'en Shargar for ane o' wumman-kin'?'

'I ken naething aboot Shargar, I tell ye. I ken that Betty an' me tuik an ill-faured dame i' the bed i' the garret.'

'Cud it be his mither?' thought Robert in bewilderment; but he recovered himself in a moment, and answered,

'Shargar may be a quean efter a', for onything 'at I ken to the contrairy; but I aye tuik him for a loon. Faith, sic a quean as he'd mak!'

And careless to resist the ludicrousness of the idea, he burst into a loud fit of laughter, which did more to reassure his grannie than any amount of protestation could have done, however she pretended to take offence at his ill-timed merriment.

Seeing his grandmother staggered, Robert gathered courage to assume the offensive.

'But, granny! hoo ever Betty, no to say you, cud hae driven oot a puir half-stervit cratur like Shargar, even supposin' he oucht to hae been in coaties, and no in troosers—and the mither o' him run awa' an' left him—it's mair nor I can unnerstan.' I misdoobt me sair but he's gane and droont himsel'.'

Robert knew well enough that Shargar would not drown himself without at least bidding him good-bye; but he knew too

that his grandmother could be wrought upon. Her conscience was more tender than her feelings; and this peculiarity occasioned part of the mutual non-understanding rather than misunderstanding between her grandson and herself. The first relation she bore to most that came near her was one of severity and rebuke; but underneath her cold outside lay a warm heart, to which conscience acted the part of a somewhat capricious stoker, now quenching its heat with the cold water of duty, now stirring it up with the poker of reproach, and ever treating it as an inferior and a slave. But her conscience was, on the whole, a better friend to her race than her heart; and, indeed, the conscience is always a better friend than a heart whose motions are undirected by it. From Falconer's account of her, however, I cannot help thinking that she not unfrequently took refuge in severity of tone and manner from the threatened ebullition of a feeling which she could not otherwise control, and which she was ashamed to manifest. Possibly conscience had spoken more and more gently as its behests were more and more readily obeyed, until the heart began to gather courage, and at last, as in many old people, took the upper hand, which was outwardly inconvenient to one of Mrs. Falconer's temperament. Hence, in doing the kindest thing in the world, she would speak in a tone of command, even of rebuke, as if she were compelling the performance of the most unpleasant duty in the person who received the kindness. But the human heart is hard to analyze, and, indeed, will not submit quietly to the operation, however gently performed. Nor is the result at all

easy to put into words. It is best shown in actions.

Again, it may appear rather strange that Robert should be able to talk in such an easy manner to his grandmother, seeing he had been guilty of concealment, if not of deception. But she had never been so actively severe towards Robert as she had been towards her own children. To him she was wonderfully gentle for her nature, and sought to exercise the saving harshness which she still believed necessary, solely in keeping from him every enjoyment of life which the narrowest theories as to the rule and will of God could set down as worldly. Frivolity, of which there was little in this sober boy, was in her eyes a vice; loud laughter almost a crime; cards, and novelles, as she called them, were such in her estimation, as to be beyond my powers of characterization. Her commonest injunction was, 'Noo be douce,'—that is sober—uttered to the soberest boy she could ever have known. But Robert was a large-hearted boy, else this life would never have had to be written; and so, through all this, his deepest nature came into unconscious contact with that of his noble old grandmother. There was nothing small about either of them. Hence Robert was not afraid of her. He had got more of her nature in him than of her son's. She and his own mother had more share in him than his father, though from him he inherited good qualities likewise.

He had concealed his doings with Shargar simply because he believed they could not be done if his grandmother knew of his plans. Herein he did her less than justice. But so unpleasant

was concealment to his nature, and so much did the dread of discovery press upon him, that the moment he saw the thing had come out into the daylight of her knowledge, such a reaction of relief took place as, operating along with his deep natural humour and the comical circumstance of the case, gave him an ease and freedom of communication which he had never before enjoyed with her. Likewise there was a certain courage in the boy which, if his own natural disposition had not been so quiet that he felt the negations of her rule the less, might have resulted in underhand doings of a very different kind, possibly, from those of benevolence.

He must have been a strange being to look at, I always think, at this point of his development, with his huge nose, his black eyes, his lanky figure, and his sober countenance, on which a smile was rarely visible, but from which burst occasional guffaws of laughter.

At the words 'droont himsel',' Mrs. Falconer started.

'Rin, laddie, rin,' she said, 'an' fess him back direckly! Betty! Betty! gang wi' Robert and help him to luik for Shargar. Ye auld, blin', doited body, 'at says ye can see, and canna tell a lad frae a lass!'

'Na, na, grannie. I'm no gaein' oot wi' a dame like her trailin' at my fut. She wad be a sair hinnerance to me. Gin Shargar be to be gotten—that is, gin he be in life—I s' get him wantin' Betty. And gin ye dinna ken him for the crater ye fand i' the garret, he maun be sair changed sin' I left him there.'

'Weel, weel, Robert, gang yer wa's. But gin ye be deceivin' me, may the Lord—forgie ye, Robert, for sair ye'll need it.'

'Nae fear o' that, grannie,' returned Robert, from the street door, and vanished.

Mrs. Falconer stalked—No, I will not use that word of the gait of a woman like my friend's grandmother. 'Stately stept she butt the hoose' to Betty. She felt strangely soft at the heart, Robert not being yet proved a reprobate; but she was not therefore prepared to drop one atom of the dignity of her relation to her servant.

'Betty,' she said, 'ye hae made a mistak.'

'What's that, mem?' returned Betty.

'It wasna a lass ava; it was that crater Shargar.'

'Ye said it was a lass yersel' first, mem.'

'Ye ken weel eneuch that I'm short sichtit, an' hae been frae the day o' my birth.'

'I'm no auld eneuch to min' upo' that, mem,' returned Betty revengefully, but in an undertone, as if she did not intend her mistress to hear. And although she heard well enough, her mistress adopted the subterfuge. 'But I'll sweir the crater I saw was in cwytes (petticoats).'

'Sweir not at all, Betty. Ye hae made a mistak ony gait.'

'Wha says that, mem?'

'Robert.'

'Aweel, gin he be tellin' the trowth—'

'Daur ye mint (insinuate) to me that a son o' mine wad tell onything but the trowth?'

'Na, na, mem. But gin that wasna a quean, ye canna deny but she luikit unco like ane, and no a blate (bashful) ane eyther.'

'Gin he was a loon, he wadna luik like a blate lass, ony gait, Betty. And there ye're wrang.'

'Weel, weel, mem, hae 't yer ain gait,' muttered Betty.

'I wull hae 't my ain gait,' retorted her mistress, 'because it's the richt gait, Betty. An' noo ye maun jist gang up the stair, an' get the place cleant oot an' put in order.'

'I wull do that, mem.'

'Ay wull ye. An' luik weel aboot, Betty, you that can see sae weel, in case there suld be ony cattle aboot; for he's nane o' the cleanest, yon dame!'

'I wull do that, mem.'

'An' gang direckly, afore he comes back.'

'Wha comes back?'

'Robert, of course.'

'What for that?'

''Cause he's comin' wi' 'im.'

'What he 's comin' wi' 'im?'

'Ca' 't she, gin ye like. It's Shargar.'

'Wha says that?' exclaimed Betty, sniffing and starting at once.

'I say that. An' ye gang an' du what I tell ye, this minute.'

Betty obeyed instantly; for the tone in which the last words were spoken was one she was not accustomed to dispute. She only muttered as she went, 'It 'll a' come upo' me as usual.'

Betty's job was long ended before Robert returned. Never

dreaming that Shargar could have gone back to the old haunt, he had looked for him everywhere before that occurred to him as a last chance. Nor would he have found him even then, for he would not have thought of his being inside the deserted house, had not Shargar heard his footsteps in the street.

He started up from his stool saying, 'That's Bob!' but was not sure enough to go to the door: he might be mistaken; it might be the landlord! He heard the feet stop and did not move; but when he heard them begin to go away again, he rushed to the door, and bawled on the chance at the top of his voice, 'Bob! Bob!'

'Eh! ye crater!' said Robert, 'ir ye there efter a'?

'Eh! Bob,' exclaimed Shargar, and burst into tears. 'I thocht ye wad come efter me.'

'Of coorse,' answered Robert, coolly. 'Come awa' hame.'

'Whaur til?' asked Shargar in dismay.

'Hame to yer ain bed at my grannie's.'

'Na, na,' said Shargar, hurriedly, retreating within the door of the hovel. 'Na, na, Bob, lad, I s' no du that. She's an awfu' wuman, that grannie o' yours. I canna think hoo ye can bide wi' her. I'm weel oot o' her grups, I can tell ye.'

It required a good deal of persuasion, but at last Robert prevailed upon Shargar to return. For was not Robert his tower of strength? And if Robert was not frightened at his grannie, or at Betty, why should he be? At length they entered Mrs. Falconer's parlour, Robert dragging in Shargar after him, having failed altogether in encouraging him to enter after a more dignified

fashion.

It must be remembered that although Shargar was still kilted, he was not the less trowsered, such as the trowsers were. It makes my heart ache to think of those trowsers—not believing trowsers essential to blessedness either, but knowing the superiority of the old Roman costume of the kilt.

No sooner had Mrs. Falconer cast her eyes upon him than she could not but be convinced of the truth of Robert's averment.

'Here he is, grannie; and gin ye bena saitisfeed yet—'

'Haud yer tongue, laddie. Ye hae gi'en me nae cause to doobt yer word.'

Indeed, during Robert's absence, his grandmother had had leisure to perceive of what an absurd folly she had been guilty. She had also had time to make up her mind as to her duty with regard to Shargar; and the more she thought about it, the more she admired the conduct of her grandson, and the better she saw that it would be right to follow his example. No doubt she was the more inclined to this benevolence that she had as it were received her grandson back from the jaws of death.

When the two lads entered, from her arm-chair Mrs. Falconer examined Shargar from head to foot with the eye of a queen on her throne, and a countenance immovable in stern gentleness, till Shargar would gladly have sunk into the shelter of the voluminous kilt from the gaze of those quiet hazel eyes.

At length she spoke:

'Robert, tak him awa'.'

'Whaur'll I tak him till, grannie?'

'Tak him up to the garret. Betty 'ill ha' ta'en a tub o' het water up there 'gen this time, and ye maun see that he washes himsel' frae heid to fut, or he s' no bide an 'oor i' my hoose. Gang awa' an' see till 't this minute.'

But she detained them yet awhile with various directions in regard of cleansing, for the carrying out of which Robert was only too glad to give his word. She dismissed them at last, and Shargar by and by found himself in bed, clean, and, for the first time in his life, between a pair of linen sheets—not altogether to his satisfaction, for mere order and comfort were substituted for adventure and success.

But greater trials awaited him. In the morning he was visited by Brodie, the tailor, and Elshender, the shoemaker, both of whom he held in awe as his superiors in the social scale, and by them handled and measured from head to feet, the latter included; after which he had to lie in bed for three days, till his clothes came home; for Betty had carefully committed every article of his former dress to the kitchen fire, not without a sense of pollution to the bottom of her kettle. Nor would he have got them for double the time, had not Robert haunted the tailor, as well as the soutar, like an evil conscience, till they had finished them. Thus grievous was Shargar's introduction to the comforts of respectability. Nor did he like it much better when he was dressed, and able to go about; for not only was he uncomfortable in his new clothes, which, after the very easy fit of the old ones,

felt like a suit of plate-armour, but he was liable to be sent for at any moment by the awful sovereignty in whose dominions he found himself, and which, of course, proceeded to instruct him not merely in his own religious duties, but in the religious theories of his ancestors, if, indeed, Shargar's ancestors ever had any. And now the Shorter Catechism seemed likely to be changed into the Longer Catechism; for he had it Sundays as well as Saturdays, besides Alleine's Alarm to the Unconverted, Baxter's Saint's Rest, Erskine's Gospel Sonnets, and other books of a like kind. Nor was it any relief to Shargar that the gloom was broken by the incomparable Pilgrim's Progress and the Holy War, for he cared for none of these things. Indeed, so dreary did he find it all, that his love to Robert was never put to such a severe test. But for that, he would have run for it. Twenty times a day was he so tempted.

At school, though it was better, yet it was bad. For he was ten times as much laughed at for his new clothes, though they were of the plainest, as he had been for his old rags. Still he bore all the pangs of unwelcome advancement without a grumble, for the sake of his friend alone, whose dog he remained as much as ever. But his past life of cold and neglect, and hunger and blows, and homelessness and rags, began to glimmer as in the distance of a vaporous sunset, and the loveless freedom he had then enjoyed gave it a bloom as of summer-roses.

I wonder whether there may not have been in some unknown corner of the old lady's mind this lingering remnant of paganism,

that, in reclaiming the outcast from the error of his ways, she was making an offering acceptable to that God whom her mere prayers could not move to look with favour upon her prodigal son Andrew. Nor from her own acknowledged religious belief as a background would it have stuck so fiery off either. Indeed, it might have been a partial corrective of some yet more dreadful articles of her creed,—which she held, be it remembered, because she could not help it.

CHAPTER XI. PRIVATE INTERVIEWS

The winter passed slowly away. Robert and Shargar went to school together, and learned their lessons together at Mrs. Falconer's table. Shargar soon learned to behave with tolerable propriety; was obedient, as far as eye-service went; looked as queer as ever; did what he pleased, which was nowise very wicked, the moment he was out of the old lady's sight; was well fed and well cared for; and when he was asked how he was, gave the invariable answer: 'Middlin'.' He was not very happy.

There was little communication in words between the two boys, for the one had not much to say, and the pondering fits of the other grew rather than relaxed in frequency and intensity. Yet amongst chance acquaintances in the town Robert had the character of a wag, of which he was totally unaware himself. Indeed, although he had more than the ordinary share of humour, I suspect it was not so much his fun as his earnest that got him the character; for he would say such altogether unheard-of and strange things, that the only way they were capable of accounting for him was as a humorist.

'Eh!' he said once to Elshender, during a pause common to a thunder-storm and a lesson on the violin 'eh! wadna ye like to be up in that clood wi' a spaud, turnin' ower the divots and catchin' the flashes lyin' aneath them like lang reid fiery worms?'

'Ay, man, but gin ye luik up to the cloods that gait, ye'll never

be muckle o' a fiddler.'

This was merely an outbreak of that insolence of advice so often shown to the young from no vantage-ground but that of age and faithlessness, reminding one of the 'jigging fool' who interfered between Brutus and Cassius on the sole ground that he had seen more years than they. As if ever a fiddler that did not look up to the clouds would be anything but a catgut-scraper! Even Elshender's fiddle was the one angel that held back the heavy curtain of his gross nature, and let the sky shine through. He ought to have been set fiddling every Sunday morning, and from his fiddling dragged straight to church. It was the only thing man could have done for his conversion, for then his heart was open. But I fear the prayers would have closed it before the sermon came. He should rather have been compelled to take his fiddle to church with him, and have a gentle scrape at it in the pauses of the service; only there are no such pauses in the service, alas! And Dooble Sanny, though not too religious to get drunk occasionally, was a great deal too religious to play his fiddle on the Sabbath: he would not willingly anger the powers above; but it was sometimes a sore temptation, especially after he got possession of old Mr. Falconer's wonderful instrument.

'Hoots, man!' he would say to Robert; 'dinna han'le her as gin she war an egg-box. Tak haud o' her as gin she war a leevin' crater. Ye maun jist straik her canny, an' wile the music oot o' her; for she's like ither women: gin ye be rouch wi' her, ye winna get a word oot o' her. An' dinna han'le her that gait. She canna

bide to be contred an' pu'd this gait and that gait.—Come to me, my bonny leddy. Ye'll tell me yer story, winna ye, my dauty (pet)?'

And with every gesture as if he were humouring a shy and invalid girl, he would, as he said, wile the music out of her in sobs and wailing, till the instrument, gathering courage in his embrace, grew gently merry in its confidence, and broke at last into airy laughter. He always spoke, and apparently thought, of his violin as a woman, just as a sailor does of his craft. But there was nothing about him, except his love for music and its instruments, to suggest other than a most uncivilized nature. That which was fine in him was constantly checked and held down by the gross; the merely animal overpowered the spiritual; and it was only upon occasion that his heavenly companion, the violin, could raise him a few feet above the mire and the clay. She never succeeded in setting his feet on a rock; while, on the contrary, he often dragged her with him into the mire of questionable company and circumstances. Worthy Mr. Falconer would have been horrified to see his umquhile modest companion in such society as that into which she was now introduced at times. But nevertheless the soutar was a good and patient teacher; and although it took Robert rather more than a fortnight to redeem his pledge to Shargar, he did make progress. It could not, however, be rapid, seeing that an hour at a time, two evenings in the week, was all that he could give to the violin. Even with this moderation, the risk of his absence exciting his grandmother's suspicion and

inquiry was far from small.

And now, were those really faded old memories of his grandfather and his merry kindness, all so different from the solemn benevolence of his grandmother, which seemed to revive in his bosom with the revivification of the violin? The instrument had surely laid up a story in its hollow breast, had been dreaming over it all the time it lay hidden away in the closet, and was now telling out its dreams about the old times in the ear of the listening boy. To him also it began to assume something of that mystery and life which had such a softening, and, for the moment at least, elevating influence on his master.

At length the love of the violin had grown upon him so, that he could not but cast about how he might enjoy more of its company. It would not do, for many reasons, to go oftener to the shoemaker's, especially now that the days were getting longer. Nor was that what he wanted. He wanted opportunity for practice. He wanted to be alone with the creature, to see if she would not say something more to him than she had ever said yet. Wafts and odours of melodies began to steal upon him ere he was aware in the half lights between sleeping and waking: if he could only entice them to creep out of the violin, and once 'bless his humble ears' with the bodily hearing of them! Perhaps he might —who could tell? But how? But where?

There was a building in Rothieden not old, yet so deserted that its very history seemed to have come to a standstill, and the dust that filled it to have fallen from the plumes of passing

centuries. It was the property of Mrs. Falconer, left her by her husband. Trade had gradually ebbed away from the town till the thread-factory stood unoccupied, with all its machinery rusting and mouldering, just as the work-people had risen and left it one hot, midsummer day, when they were told that their services were no longer required. Some of the thread even remained upon the spools, and in the hollows of some of the sockets the oil had as yet dried only into a paste; although to Robert the desertion of the place appeared immemorial. It stood at a furlong's distance from the house, on the outskirt of the town. There was a large, neglected garden behind it, with some good fruit-trees, and plenty of the bushes which boys love for the sake of their berries. After grannie's jam-pots were properly filled, the remnant of these, a gleaning far greater than the gathering, was at the disposal of Robert, and, philosopher although in some measure he was already, he appreciated the privilege. Haunting this garden in the previous summer, he had for the first time made acquaintance with the interior of the deserted factory. The door to the road was always kept locked, and the key of it lay in one of grannie's drawers; but he had then discovered a back entrance less securely fastened, and with a strange mingling of fear and curiosity had from time to time extended his rambles over what seemed to him the huge desolation of the place. Half of it was well built of stone and lime, but of the other half the upper part was built of wood, which now showed signs of considerable decay. One room opened into another through the length of the

place, revealing a vista of machines, standing with an air of the last folding of the wings of silence over them, and the sense of a deeper and deeper sinking into the soundless abyss. But their activity was not so far vanished but that by degrees Robert came to fancy that he had some time or other seen a woman seated at each of those silent powers, whose single hand set the whole frame in motion, with its numberless spindles and spools rapidly revolving—a vague mystery of endless threads in orderly complication, out of which came some desired, to him unknown, result, so that the whole place was full of a bewildering tumult of work, every little reel contributing its share, as the water-drops clashing together make the roar of a tempest. Now all was still as the church on a week-day, still as the school on a Saturday afternoon. Nay, the silence seemed to have settled down like the dust, and grown old and thick, so dead and old that the ghost of the ancient noise had arisen to haunt the place.

Thither would Robert carry his violin, and there would he woo her.

'I'm thinkin' I maun tak her wi' me the nicht, Sanders,' he said, holding the fiddle lovingly to his bosom, after he had finished his next lesson.

The shoemaker looked blank.

'Ye're no gaein' to desert me, are ye?'

'Na, weel I wat!' returned Robert. 'But I want to try her at hame. I maun get used till her a bittie, ye ken, afore I can du onything wi' her.'

'I wiss ye had na brought her here ava. What I am to du wantin' her!'

'What for dinna ye get yer ain back?'

'I haena the siller, man. And, forbye, I doobt I wadna be that sair content wi' her noo gin I had her. I used to think her gran'. But I'm clean oot o' conceit o' her. That bonnie leddy's ta'en 't clean oot o' me.'

'But ye canna hae her aye, ye ken, Sanders. She's no mine. She's my grannie's, ye ken.'

'What's the use o' her to her? She pits nae vailue upon her. Eh, man, gin she wad gie her to me, I wad haud her i' the best o' shune a' the lave o' her days.'

'That wadna be muckle, Sanders, for she hasna had a new pair sin' ever I mind.'

'But I wad haud Betty in shune as weel.'

'Betty pays for her ain shune, I reckon.'

'Weel, I wad haud you in shune, and yer bairns, and yer bairns' bairns,' cried the soutar, with enthusiasm.

'Hoot, toot, man! Lang or that ye'll be fiddlin' i' the new Jeroozlem.'

'Eh, man!' said Alexander, looking up—he had just cracked the roset-ends off his hands, for he had the upper leather of a boot in the grasp of the clams, and his right hand hung arrested on its blind way to the awl—'duv ye think there'll be fiddles there? I thocht they war a' hairps, a thing 'at I never saw, but it canna be up till a fiddle.'

'I dinna ken,' answered Robert; 'but ye suld mak a pint o' seein' for yersel'.'

'Gin I thoucht there wad be fiddles there, faith I wad hae a try. It wadna be muckle o' a Jeroozlem to me wantin' my fiddle. But gin there be fiddles, I daursay they'll be gran' anes. I daursay they wad gi' me a new ane—I mean ane as auld as Noah's 'at he played i' the ark whan the de'il cam' in by to hearken. I wad fain hae a try. Ye ken a' aboot it wi' that grannie o' yours: hoo's a body to begin?'

'By giein' up the drink, man.'

'Ay—ay—ay—I reckon ye're richt. Weel, I'll think aboot it whan ance I'm throu wi' this job. That'll be neist ook, or thereabouts, or aiblins twa days efter. I'll hae some leiser than.'

Before he had finished speaking he had caught up his awl and begun to work vigorously, boring his holes as if the nerves of feeling were continued to the point of the tool, inserting the bristles that served him for needles with a delicacy worthy of soft-skinned fingers, drawing through the rosined threads with a whisk, and untwining them with a crack from the leather that guarded his hands.

'Gude nicht to ye,' said Robert, with the fiddle-case under his arm.

The shoemaker looked up, with his hands bound in his threads.

'Ye're no gaein' to tak her frae me the nicht?'

'Ay am I, but I'll fess her back again. I'm no gaein' to Jericho

wi' her.'

'Gang to Hecklebirnie wi' her, and that's three mile ayont hell.'

'Na; we maun win farther nor that. There canna be muckle fiddlin' there.'

'Weel, tak her to the new Jeroozlem. I s' gang doon to Lucky Leary's, and fill mysel' roarin' fou, an' it'll be a' your wyte (blame).'

'I doobt ye'll get the straiks (blows) though. Or maybe ye think Bell 'ill tak them for ye.'

Dooble Sanny caught up a huge boot, the sole of which was filled with broad-headed nails as thick as they could be driven, and, in a rage, threw it at Robert as he darted out. Through its clang against the door-cheek, the shoemaker heard a cry from the instrument. He cast everything from him and sprang after Robert. But Robert was down the wynd like a long-legged grayhound, and Elshender could only follow like a fierce mastiff. It was love and grief, though, and apprehension and remorse, not vengeance, that winged his heels. He soon saw that pursuit was vain.

'Robert! Robert!' he cried; 'I canna win up wi' ye. Stop, for God's sake! Is she hurtit?'

Robert stopped at once.

'Ye hae made a bonny leddy o' her—a lameter (cripple) I doobt, like yer wife,' he answered, with indignation.

'Dinna be aye flingin' a man's fau'ts in 's face. It jist maks him 'at he canna bide himsel' or you eyther. Lat's see the bonny

crater.'

Robert complied, for he too was anxious. They were now standing in the space in front of Shargar's old abode, and there was no one to be seen. Elshender took the box, opened it carefully, and peeped in with a face of great apprehension.

'I thocht that was a'!' he said with some satisfaction. 'I kent the string whan I heard it. But we'll sune get a new thairm till her,' he added, in a tone of sorrowful commiseration and condolence, as he took the violin from the case, tenderly as if it had been a hurt child.

One touch of the bow, drawing out a goul of grief, satisfied him that she was uninjured. Next a hurried inspection showed him that there was enough of the catgut twisted round the peg to make up for the part that was broken off. In a moment he had fastened it to the tail-piece, tightened and tuned it. Forthwith he took the bow from the case-lid, and in jubilant guise he expatiated upon the wrong he had done his bonny leddy, till the doors and windows around were crowded with heads peering through the dark to see whence the sounds came, and a little child toddled across from one of the lowliest houses with a ha'penny for the fiddler. Gladly would Robert have restored it with interest, but, alas! there was no interest in his bank, for not a ha'penny had he in the world. The incident recalled Sandy to Rothieden and its cares. He restored the violin to its case, and while Robert was fearing he would take it under his arm and walk away with it, handed it back with a humble sigh and a 'Praise

be thankit;' then, without another word, turned and went to his lonely stool and home 'untreasured of its mistress.' Robert went home too, and stole like a thief to his room.

The next day was a Saturday, which, indeed, was the real old Sabbath, or at least the half of it, to the schoolboys of Rothieden. Even Robert's grannie was Jew enough, or rather Christian enough, to respect this remnant of the fourth commandment—divine antidote to the rest of the godless money-making and soul-saving week—and he had the half-day to himself. So as soon as he had had his dinner, he managed to give Shargar the slip, left him to the inroads of a desolate despondency, and stole away to the old factory-garden. The key of that he had managed to purloin from the kitchen where it hung; nor was there much danger of its absence being discovered, seeing that in winter no one thought of the garden. The smuggling of the violin out of the house was the 'dearest danger'—the more so that he would not run the risk of carrying her out unprotected, and it was altogether a bulky venture with the case. But by spying and speeding he managed it, and soon found himself safe within the high walls of the garden.

It was early spring. There had been a heavy fall of sleet in the morning, and now the wind blew gustfully about the place. The neglected trees shook showers upon him as he passed under them, trampling down the rank growth of the grass-walks. The long twigs of the wall-trees, which had never been nailed up, or had been torn down by the snow and the blasts of winter, went trailing away in the moan of the fitful wind, and swung

back as it sunk to a sigh. The currant and gooseberry bushes, bare and leafless, and 'shivering all for cold,' neither reminded him of the feasts of the past summer, nor gave him any hope for the next. He strode careless through it all to gain the door at the bottom. It yielded to a push, and the long grass streamed in over the threshold as he entered. He mounted by a broad stair in the main part of the house, passing the silent clock in one of its corners, now expiating in motionlessness the false accusations it had brought against the work-people, and turned into the chaos of machinery.

I fear that my readers will expect, from the minuteness with which I recount these particulars, that, after all, I am going to describe a rendezvous with a lady, or a ghost at least. I will not plead in excuse that I, too, have been infected with Sandy's mode of regarding her, but I plead that in the mind of Robert the proceeding was involved in something of that awe and mystery with which a youth approaches the woman he loves. He had not yet arrived at the period when the feminine assumes its paramount influence, combining in itself all that music, colour, form, odour, can suggest, with something infinitely higher and more divine; but he had begun to be haunted with some vague aspirations towards the infinite, of which his attempts on the violin were the outcome. And now that he was to be alone, for the first time, with this wonderful realizer of dreams and awakener of visions, to do with her as he would, to hint by gentle touches at the thoughts that were fluttering in his soul, and listen for her

voice that by the echoes in which she strove to respond he might know that she understood him, it was no wonder if he felt an ethereal foretaste of the expectation that haunts the approach of souls.

But I am not even going to describe his first tÃªte-Ã -tÃªte with his violin. Perhaps he returned from it somewhat disappointed. Probably he found her coy, unready to acknowledge his demands on her attention. But not the less willingly did he return with her to the solitude of the ruinous factory. On every safe occasion, becoming more and more frequent as the days grew longer, he repaired thither, and every time returned more capable of drawing the coherence of melody from that matrix of sweet sounds.

At length the people about began to say that the factory was haunted; that the ghost of old Mr. Falconer, unable to repose while neglect was ruining the precious results of his industry, visited the place night after night, and solaced his disappointment by renewing on his favourite violin strains not yet forgotten by him in his grave, and remembered well by those who had been in his service, not a few of whom lived in the neighbourhood of the forsaken building.

One gusty afternoon, like the first, but late in the spring, Robert repaired as usual to this his secret haunt. He had played for some time, and now, from a sudden pause of impulse, had ceased, and begun to look around him. The only light came from two long pale cracks in the rain-clouds of the west. The

wind was blowing through the broken windows, which stretched away on either hand. A dreary, windy gloom, therefore, pervaded the desolate place; and in the dusk, and their settled order, the machines looked multitudinous. An eerie sense of discomfort came over him as he gazed, and he lifted his violin to dispel the strange unpleasant feeling that grew upon him. But at the first long stroke across the strings, an awful sound arose in the further room; a sound that made him all but drop the bow, and cling to his violin. It went on. It was the old, all but forgotten whirr of bobbins, mingled with the gentle groans of the revolving horizontal wheel, but magnified in the silence of the place, and the echoing imagination of the boy, into something preternaturally awful. Yielding for a moment to the growth of goose-skin, and the insurrection of hair, he recovered himself by a violent effort, and walked to the door that connected the two compartments. Was it more or less fearful that the jenny was not going of itself? that the figure of an old woman sat solemnly turning and turning the hand-wheel? Not without calling in the jury of his senses, however, would he yield to the special plea of his imagination, but went nearer, half expecting to find that the mutch, with its big flapping borders, glimmering white in the gloom across many a machine, surrounded the face of a skull. But he was soon satisfied that it was only a blind woman everybody knew—so old that she had become childish. She had heard the reports of the factory being haunted, and groping about with her half-withered brain full of them, had found the garden and the

back door open, and had climbed to the first-floor by a farther stair, well known to her when she used to work that very machine. She had seated herself instinctively, according to ancient wont, and had set it in motion once more.

Yielding to an impulse of experiment, Robert began to play again. Thereupon her disordered ideas broke out in words. And Robert soon began to feel that it could hardly be more ghastly to look upon a ghost than to be taken for one.

'Ay, ay, sir,' said the old woman, in a tone of commiseration, 'it maun be sair to bide. I dinna wonner 'at ye canna lie still. But what gars ye gang daunerin' aboot this place? It's no yours ony langer. Ye ken whan fowk's deid, they tyne the grip (loose hold). Ye suld gang hame to yer wife. She micht say a word to quaiet yer auld banes, for she's a douce an' a wice woman—the mistress.'

Then followed a pause. There was a horror about the old woman's voice, already half dissolved by death, in the desolate place, that almost took from Robert the power of motion. But his violin sent forth an accidental twang, and that set her going again.

'Ye was aye a douce honest gentleman yersel', an' I dinna wonner ye canna bide it. But I wad hae thoucht glory micht hae hauden ye in. But yer ain son! Eh ay! And a braw lad and a bonnie! It's a sod thing he bude to gang the wrang gait; and it's no wonner, as I say, that ye lea' the worms to come an' luik efter him. I doobt—I doobt it winna be to you he'll gang at the lang last. There winna be room for him aside ye in Awbrahawm's boasom. And syne to behave sae ill to that winsome wife o' his! I dinna

wonner 'at ye maun be up! Eh na! But, sir, sin ye are up, I wish ye wad speyk to John Thamson no to tak aff the day 'at I was awa' last ook, for 'deed I was verra unweel, and bude to keep my bed.'

Robert was beginning to feel uneasy as to how he should get rid of her, when she rose, and saying, 'Ay, ay, I ken it's sax o'clock,' went out as she had come in. Robert followed, and saw her safe out of the garden, but did not return to the factory.

So his father had behaved ill to his mother too!

'But what for hearken to the havers o' a dottled auld wife?' he said to himself, pondering as he walked home.

Old Janet told a strange story of how she had seen the ghost, and had had a long talk with him, and of what he said, and of how he groaned and played the fiddle between. And finding that the report had reached his grandmother's ears, Robert thought it prudent, much to his discontent, to intermit his visits to the factory. Mrs. Falconer, of course, received the rumour with indignant scorn, and peremptorily refused to allow any examination of the premises.

But how have the violin by him and not hear her speak? One evening the longing after her voice grow upon him till he could resist it no longer. He shut the door of his garret-room, and, with Shargar by him, took her out and began to play softly, gently—oh so softly, so gently! Shargar was enraptured. Robert went on playing.

Suddenly the door opened, and his grannie stood awfully revealed before them. Betty had heard the violin, and had flown

to the parlour in the belief that, unable to get any one to heed him at the factory, the ghost had taken Janet's advice, and come home. But his wife smiled a smile of contempt, went with Betty to the kitchen—over which Robert's room lay—heard the sounds, put off her creaking shoes, stole up-stairs on her soft white lambswool stockings, and caught the pair. The violin was seized, put in its case, and carried off; and Mrs. Falconer rejoiced to think she had broken a gin set by Satan for the unwary feet of her poor Robert. Little she knew the wonder of that violin—how it had kept the soul of her husband alive! Little she knew how dangerous it is to shut an open door, with ever so narrow a peep into the eternal, in the face of a son of Adam! And little she knew how determinedly and restlessly a nature like Robert's would search for another, to open one possibly which she might consider ten times more dangerous than that which she had closed.

When Alexander heard of the affair, he was at first overwhelmed with the misfortune; but gathering a little heart at last, he set to 'working,' as he said himself, 'like a verra deevil'; and as he was the best shoemaker in the town, and for the time abstained utterly from whisky, and all sorts of drink but well-water, he soon managed to save the money necessary, and redeem the old fiddle. But whether it was from fancy, or habit, or what, even Robert's inexperienced ear could not accommodate itself, save under protest, to the instrument which once his teacher had considered all but perfect; and it needed the master's finest touch to make its tone other than painful to the sense of

the neophyte.

No one can estimate too highly the value of such a resource to a man like the shoemaker, or a boy like Robert. Whatever it be that keeps the finer faculties of the mind awake, wonder alive, and the interest above mere eating and drinking, money-making and money-saving; whatever it be that gives gladness, or sorrow, or hope—this, be it violin, pencil, pen, or, highest of all, the love of woman, is simply a divine gift of holy influence for the salvation of that being to whom it comes, for the lifting of him out of the mire and up on the rock. For it keeps a way open for the entrance of deeper, holier, grander influences, emanating from the same riches of the Godhead. And though many have genius that have no grace, they will only be so much the worse, so much the nearer to the brute, if you take from them that which corresponds to Dooble Sanny's fiddle.

CHAPTER XII. ROBERT'S PLAN OF SALVATION

For some time after the loss of his friend, Robert went loitering and mooning about, quite neglecting the lessons to which he had not, it must be confessed, paid much attention for many weeks. Even when seated at his grannie's table, he could do no more than fix his eyes on his book: to learn was impossible; it was even disgusting to him. But his was a nature which, foiled in one direction, must, absolutely helpless against its own vitality, straightway send out its searching roots in another. Of all forces, that of growth is the one irresistible, for it is the creating power of God, the law of life and of being. Therefore no accumulation of refusals, and checks, and turnings, and forbiddings, from all the good old grannies in the world, could have prevented Robert from striking root downward, and bearing fruit upward, though, as in all higher natures, the fruit was a long way off yet. But his soul was only sad and hungry. He was not unhappy, for he had been guilty of nothing that weighed on his conscience. He had been doing many things of late, it is true, without asking leave of his grandmother, but wherever prayer is felt to be of no avail, there cannot be the sense of obligation save on compulsion. Even direct disobedience in such case will generally leave little soreness, except the thing forbidden should be in its own nature wrong, and then, indeed, 'Don Worm, the conscience,' may begin

to bite. But Robert felt nothing immoral in playing upon his grandfather's violin, nor even in taking liberties with a piece of lumber for which nobody cared but possibly the dead; therefore he was not unhappy, only much disappointed, very empty, and somewhat gloomy. There was nothing to look forward to now, no secret full of riches and endless in hope—in short, no violin.

To feel the full force of his loss, my reader must remember that around the childhood of Robert, which he was fast leaving behind him, there had gathered no tenderness—none at least by him recognizable as such. All the women he came in contact with were his grandmother and Betty. He had no recollection of having ever been kissed. From the darkness and negation of such an embryo-existence, his nature had been unconsciously striving to escape—struggling to get from below ground into the sunlit air—sighing after a freedom he could not have defined, the freedom that comes, not of independence, but of love—not of lawlessness, but of the perfection of law. Of this beauty of life, with its wonder and its deepness, this unknown glory, his fiddle had been the type. It had been the ark that held, if not the tables of the covenant, yet the golden pot of angel's food, and the rod that budded in death. And now that it was gone, the gloomier aspect of things began to lay hold upon him; his soul turned itself away from the sun, and entered into the shadow of the underworld. Like the white-horsed twins of lake Regillus, like Phoebe, the queen of skyey plain and earthly forest, every boy and girl, every man and woman, that lives at all, has to divide many a year

between Tartarus and Olympus.

For now arose within him, not without ultimate good, the evil phantasms of a theology which would explain all God's doings by low conceptions, low I mean for humanity even, of right, and law, and justice, then only taking refuge in the fact of the incapacity of the human understanding when its own inventions are impugned as undivine. In such a system, hell is invariably the deepest truth, and the love of God is not so deep as hell. Hence, as foundations must be laid in the deepest, the system is founded in hell, and the first article in the creed that Robert Falconer learned was, 'I believe in hell.' Practically, I mean, it was so; else how should it be that as often as a thought of religious duty arose in his mind, it appeared in the form of escaping hell, of fleeing from the wrath to come? For his very nature was hell, being not born in sin and brought forth in iniquity, but born sin and brought forth iniquity. And yet God made him. He must believe that. And he must believe, too, that God was just, awfully just, punishing with fearful pains those who did not go through a certain process of mind which it was utterly impossible they should go through without a help which he would give to some, and withhold from others, the reason of the difference not being such, to say the least of it, as to come within the reach of the persons concerned. And this God they said was love. It was logically absurd, of course, yet, thank God, they did say that God was love; and many of them succeeded in believing it, too, and in ordering their ways as if the first article of their creed had been 'I believe in God'; whence, in

truth, we are bound to say it was the first in power and reality, if not in order; for what are we to say a man believes, if not what he acts upon? Still the former article was the one they brought chiefly to bear upon their children. This mortar, probably they thought, threw the shell straighter than any of the other field-pieces of the church-militant. Hence it was even in justification of God himself that a party arose to say that a man could believe without the help of God at all, and after believing only began to receive God's help—a heresy all but as dreary and barren as the former. No one dreamed of saying—at least such a glad word of prophecy never reached Rothieden—that, while nobody can do without the help of the Father any more than a new-born babe could of itself live and grow to a man, yet that in the giving of that help the very fatherhood of the Father finds its one gladsome labour; that for that the Lord came; for that the world was made; for that we were born into it; for that God lives and loves like the most loving man or woman on earth, only infinitely more, and in other ways and kinds besides, which we cannot understand; and that therefore to be a man is the soul of eternal jubilation.

Robert consequently began to take fits of soul-saving, a most rational exercise, worldly wise and prudent—right too on the principles he had received, but not in the least Christian in its nature, or even God-fearing. His imagination began to busy itself in representing the dire consequences of not entering into the one refuge of faith. He made many frantic efforts to believe that he believed; took to keeping the Sabbath very carefully—

that is, by going to church three times, and to Sunday-school as well; by never walking a step save to or from church; by never saying a word upon any subject unconnected with religion, chiefly theoretical; by never reading any but religious books; by never whistling; by never thinking of his lost fiddle, and so on—all the time feeling that God was ready to pounce upon him if he failed once; till again and again the intensity of his efforts utterly defeated their object by destroying for the time the desire to prosecute them with the power to will them. But through the horrible vapours of these vain endeavours, which denied God altogether as the maker of the world, and the former of his soul and heart and brain, and sought to worship him as a capricious demon, there broke a little light, a little soothing, soft twilight, from the dim windows of such literature as came in his way. Besides The Pilgrim's Progress there were several books which shone moon-like on his darkness, and lifted something of the weight of that Egyptian gloom off his spirit. One of these, strange to say, was Defoe's Religious Courtship, and one, Young's Night Thoughts. But there was another which deserves particular notice, inasmuch as it did far more than merely interest or amuse him, raising a deep question in his mind, and one worthy to be asked. This book was the translation of Klopstock's Messiah, to which I have already referred. It was not one of his grandmother's books, but had probably belonged to his father: he had found it in his little garret-room. But as often as she saw him reading it, she seemed rather pleased, he thought. As

to the book itself, its florid expatiation could neither offend nor injure a boy like Robert, while its representation of our Lord was to him a wonderful relief from that given in the pulpit, and in all the religious books he knew. But the point for the sake of which I refer to it in particular is this: Amongst the rebel angels who are of the actors in the story, one of the principal is a cherub who repents of making his choice with Satan, mourns over his apostasy, haunts unseen the steps of our Saviour, wheels lamenting about the cross, and would gladly return to his lost duties in heaven, if only he might—a doubt which I believe is left unsolved in the volume, and naturally enough remained unsolved in Robert's mind:—Would poor Abaddon be forgiven and taken home again? For although naturally, that is, to judge by his own instincts, there could be no question of his forgiveness, according to what he had been taught there could be no question of his perdition. Having no one to talk to, he divided himself and went to buffets on the subject, siding, of course, with the better half of himself which supported the merciful view of the matter; for all his efforts at keeping the Sabbath, had in his own honest judgment failed so entirely, that he had no ground for believing himself one of the elect. Had he succeeded in persuading himself that he was, there is no saying to what lengths of indifference about others the chosen prig might have advanced by this time.

He made one attempt to open the subject with Shargar.

'Shargar, what think ye?' he said suddenly, one day. 'Gin a de'il war to repent, wad God forgie him?'

'There's no sayin' what fowk wad du till ance they're tried,' returned Shargar, cautiously.

Robert did not care to resume the question with one who so circumspectly refused to take a metaphysical or a priori view of the matter.

He made an attempt with his grandmother.

One Sunday, his thoughts, after trying for a time to revolve in due orbit around the mind of the Rev. Hugh Maccleary, as projected in a sermon which he had botched up out of a commentary, failed at last and flew off into what the said gentleman would have pronounced 'very dangerous speculation, seeing no man is to go beyond what is written in the Bible, which contains not only the truth, but the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, for this time and for all future time—both here and in the world to come.' Some such sentence, at least, was in his sermon that day, and the preacher no doubt supposed St. Matthew, not St. Matthew Henry, accountable for its origination. In the Limbo into which Robert's then spirit flew, it had been sorely exercised about the substitution of the sufferings of Christ for those which humanity must else have endured while ages rolled on—mere ripples on the ocean of eternity.

'Noo, be douce,' said Mrs. Falconer, solemnly, as Robert, a trifle lighter at heart from the result of his cogitations than usual, sat down to dinner: he had happened to smile across the table to Shargar. And he was douce, and smiled no more.

They ate their broth, or, more properly, supped it, with horn

spoons, in absolute silence; after which Mrs. Falconer put a large piece of meat on the plate of each, with the same formula:

'Hae. Ye s' get nae mair.'

The allowance was ample in the extreme, bearing a relation to her words similar to that which her practice bore to her theology. A piece of cheese, because it was the Sabbath, followed, and dinner was over.

When the table had been cleared by Betty, they drew their chairs to the fire, and Robert had to read to his grandmother, while Shargar sat listening. He had not read long, however, before he looked up from his Bible and began the following conversation:—

'Wasna it an ill trick o' Joseph, gran'mither, to put that cup, an' a siller ane tu, into the mou' o' Benjamin's seck?'

'What for that, laddie? He wanted to gar them come back again, ye ken.'

'But he needna hae gane aboot it in sic a playactor-like gait. He needna hae latten them awa' ohn tellt (without telling) them that he was their brither.'

'They had behaved verra ill till him.'

'He used to clype (tell tales) upo' them, though.'

'Laddie, tak ye care what ye say aboot Joseph, for he was a teep o' Christ.'

'Hoo was that, gran'mither?'

'They sellt him to the Ishmeleets for siller, as Judas did him.'

'Did he beir the sins o' them 'at sellt him?'

'Ye may say, in a mainner, 'at he did; for he was sair afflickit afore he wan up to be the King's richt han'; an' syne he keepit a hantle o' ill aff o' 's brithren.'

'Sae, gran'mither, ither fowk nor Christ micht suffer for the sins o' their neebors?'

'Ay, laddie, mony a ane has to do that. But no to mak atonement, ye ken. Naething but the sufferin' o' the spotless cud du that. The Lord wadna be saitisfeet wi' less nor that. It maun be the innocent to suffer for the guilty.'

'I unnerstan' that,' said Robert, who had heard it so often that he had not yet thought of trying to understand it. 'But gin we gang to the gude place, we'll be a' innocent, willna we, grannie?'

'Ay, that we will—washed spotless, and pure, and clean, and dressed i' the weddin' garment, and set doon at the table wi' him and wi' his Father. That's them 'at believes in him, ye ken.'

'Of coorse, grannie.—Weel, ye see, I hae been thinkin' o' a plan for maist han' toomin' (almost emptying) hell.'

'What's i' the bairn's heid noo? Troth, ye're no blate, meddlin' wi' sic subjecks, laddie!'

'I didna want to say onything to vex ye, grannie. I s' gang on wi' the chapter.'

'Ow, say awa'. Ye sanna say muckle 'at's wrang afore I cry haud,' said Mrs. Falconer, curious to know what had been moving in the boy's mind, but watching him like a cat, ready to spring upon the first visible hair of the old Adam.

And Robert, recalling the outbreak of terrible grief which he

had heard on that memorable night, really thought that his project would bring comfort to a mind burdened with such care, and went on with the exposition of his plan.

'A' them 'at sits doon to the supper o' the Lamb 'll sit there because Christ suffert the punishment due to their sins—winna they, grannie?'

'Doobtless, laddie.'

'But it'll be some sair upo' them to sit there aitin' an' drinkin' an' talkin' awa', an' enjoyin' themsel's, whan ilka noo an' than there'll come a sough o' wailin' up frae the ill place, an' a smell o' burnin' ill to bide.'

'What put that i' yer heid, laddie? There's no rizzon to think 'at hell's sae near haven as a' that. The Lord forbid it!'

'Weel, but, grannie, they'll ken 't a' the same, whether they smell 't or no. An' I canna help thinkin' that the farrer awa' I thoucht they war, the waur I wad like to think upo' them. 'Deed it wad be waur.'

'What are ye drivin' at, laddie? I canna unnerstan' ye,' said Mrs. Falconer, feeling very uncomfortable, and yet curious, almost anxious, to hear what would come next. 'I trust we winna hae to think muckle—'

But here, I presume, the thought of the added desolation of her Andrew if she, too, were to forget him, as well as his Father in heaven, checked the flow of her words. She paused, and Robert took up his parable and went on, first with yet another question.

'Duv ye think, grannie, that a body wad be allooed to speik a

word i' public, like, there—at the lang table, like, I mean?'

'What for no, gin it was dune wi' moedesty, and for a guid rizzon? But railly, laddie, I doobt ye're haverin' a'thegither. Ye hard naething like that, I'm sure, the day, frae Mr. Maccleary.'

'Na, na; he said naething aboot it. But maybe I'll gang and speir at him, though.'

'What aboot?'

'What I'm gaein' to tell ye, grannie.'

'Weel, tell awa', and hae dune wi' 't. I'm growin' tired o' 't.'

It was something else than tired she was growing.

'Weel, I'm gaein' to try a' that I can to win in there.'

'I houp ye will. Strive and pray. Resist the deevil. Walk in the licht. Lippen not to yersel', but trust in Christ and his salvation.'

'Ay, ay, grannie.—Weel—'

'Are ye no dune yet?'

'Na. I'm but jist beginnin'.'

'Beginnin', are ye? Humph!'

'Weel, gin I win in there, the verra first nicht I sit doon wi' the lave o' them, I'm gaein' to rise up an' say—that is, gin the Maister, at the heid o' the table, disna bid me sit doon—an' say: "Brithers an' sisters, the haill o' ye, hearken to me for ae minute; an', O Lord! gin I say wrang, jist tak the speech frae me, and I'll sit doon dumb an' rebukit. We're a' here by grace and no by merit, save his, as ye a' ken better nor I can tell ye, for ye hae been langer here nor me. But it's jist ruggin' an' rivin' at my hert to think o' them 'at's doon there. Maybe ye can hear them. I canna.

Noo, we hae nae merit, an' they hae nae merit, an' what for are we here and them there? But we're washed clean and innocent noo; and noo, whan there's no wyte lying upo' oursel's, it seems to me that we micht beir some o' the sins o' them 'at hae ower mony. I call upo' ilk ane o' ye 'at has a frien' or a neebor down yonner, to rise up an' taste nor bite nor sup mair till we gang up a'thegither to the fut o' the throne, and pray the Lord to lat's gang and du as the Maister did afore 's, and beir their griefs, and cairry their sorrows doon in hell there; gin it maybe that they may repent and get remission o' their sins, an' come up here wi' us at the lang last, and sit doon wi' 's at this table, a' throuw the merits o' oor Saviour Jesus Christ, at the heid o' the table there. Amen.'"

Half ashamed of his long speech, half overcome by the feelings fighting within him, and altogether bewildered, Robert burst out crying like a baby, and ran out of the room—up to his own place of meditation, where he threw himself on the floor. Shargar, who had made neither head nor tail of it all, as he said afterwards, sat staring at Mrs. Falconer. She rose, and going into Robert's little bedroom, closed the door, and what she did there is not far to seek.

When she came out, she rang the bell for tea, and sent Shargar to look for Robert. When he appeared, she was so gentle to him that it woke quite a new sensation in him. But after tea was over, she said:

'Noo, Robert, lat's hae nae mair o' this. Ye ken as weel 's I du that them 'at gangs there their doom is fixed, and noething can

alter 't. An' we're not to alloo oor ain fancies to cairry 's ayont the Scripter. We hae oor ain salvation to work oot wi' fear an' trimlin'. We hae naething to do wi' what's hidden. Luik ye till 't 'at ye win in yersel'. That's eneuch for you to min'.—Shargar, ye can gang to the kirk. Robert's to bide wi' me the nicht.'

Mrs. Falconer very rarely went to church, for she could not hear a word, and found it irksome.

When Robert and she were alone together,

'Laddie,' she said, 'be ye waure o' judgin' the Almichty. What luiks to you a' wrang may be a' richt. But it's true eneuch 'at we dinna ken a'thing; an' he's no deid yet—I dinna believe 'at he is—and he'll maybe win in yet.'

Here her voice failed her. And Robert had nothing to say now. He had said all his say before.

'Pray, Robert, pray for yer father, laddie,' she resumed; 'for we hae muckle rizzon to be anxious aboot 'im. Pray while there's life an' houp. Gie the Lord no rist. Pray till 'im day an' nicht, as I du, that he wad lead 'im to see the error o' his ways, an' turn to the Lord, wha's ready to pardon. Gin yer mother had lived, I wad hae had mair houp, I confess, for she was a braw leddy and a bonny, and that sweet-tongued! She cud hae wiled a maukin frae its lair wi' her bonnie Hielan' speech. I never likit to hear nane o' them speyk the Erse (Irish, that is, Gaelic), it was aye sae gloggie and baneless; and I cudna unnerstan' ae word o' 't. Nae mair cud yer father—hoot! yer gran'father, I mean—though his father cud speyk it weel. But to hear yer mother—mamma, as

ye used to ca' her aye, efter the new fashion—to hear her speyk English, that was sweet to the ear; for the braid Scotch she kent as little o' as I do o' the Erse. It was hert's care aboot him that shortent her days. And a' that'll be laid upo' him. He'll hae 't a' to beir an' accoont for. Och hone! Och hone! Eh! Robert, my man, be a guid lad, an' serve the Lord wi' a' yer hert, an' sowl, an' stren'th, an' min'; for gin ye gang wrang, yer ain father 'll hae to beir naebody kens hoo muckle o' the wyte o' 't, for he's dune naething to bring ye up i' the way ye suld gang, an' haud ye oot o' the ill gait. For the sake o' yer puir father, haud ye to the richt road. It may spare him a pang or twa i' the ill place. Eh, gin the Lord wad only tak me, and lat him gang!'

Involuntarily and unconsciously the mother's love was adopting the hope which she had denounced in her grandson. And Robert saw it, but he was never the man when I knew him to push a victory. He said nothing. Only a tear or two at the memory of the wayworn man, his recollection of whose visit I have already recorded, rolled down his cheeks. He was at such a distance from him!—such an impassable gulf yawned between them!—that was the grief! Not the gulf of death, nor the gulf that divides hell from heaven, but the gulf of abjuration by the good because of his evil ways. His grandmother, herself weeping fast and silently, with scarce altered countenance, took her neatly-folded handkerchief from her pocket, and wiped her grandson's fresh cheeks, then wiped her own withered face; and from that moment Robert knew that he loved her.

Then followed the Sabbath-evening prayer that she always offered with the boy, whichever he was, who kept her company. They knelt down together, side by side, in a certain corner of the room, the same, I doubt not, in which she knelt at her private devotions, before going to bed. There she uttered a long extempore prayer, rapid in speech, full of divinity and Scripture-phrases, but not the less earnest and simple, for it flowed from a heart of faith. Then Robert had to pray after her, loud in her ear, that she might hear him thoroughly, so that he often felt as if he were praying to her, and not to God at all.

She had begun to teach him to pray so early that the custom reached beyond the confines of his memory. At first he had had to repeat the words after her; but soon she made him construct his own utterances, now and then giving him a suggestion in the form of a petition when he seemed likely to break down, or putting a phrase into what she considered more suitable language. But all such assistance she had given up long ago.

On the present occasion, after she had ended her petitions with those for Jews and pagans, and especially for the 'Pop' o' Rom',' in whom with a rare liberality she took the kindest interest, always praying God to give him a good wife, though she knew perfectly well the marriage-creed of the priesthood, for her faith in the hearer of prayer scorned every theory but that in which she had herself been born and bred, she turned to Robert with the usual 'Noo, Robert!' and Robert began. But after he had gone on for some time with the ordinary phrases, he turned all at once into a

new track, and instead of praying in general terms for 'those that would not walk in the right way,' said,

'O Lord! save my father,' and there paused.

'If it be thy will,' suggested his grandmother.

But Robert continued silent. His grandmother repeated the subjunctive clause.

'I'm tryin', grandmother,' said Robert, 'but I canna say 't. I daurna say an if aboot it. It wad be like giein' in till 's damnation. We maun hae him saved, grannie!'

'Laddie! laddie! haud yer tongue!' said Mrs. Falconer, in a tone of distressed awe. 'O Lord, forgie 'im. He's young and disna ken better yet. He canna unnerstan' thy ways, nor, for that maitter, can I preten' to unnerstan' them mysel'. But thoo art a' licht, and in thee is no darkness at all. And thy licht comes into oor blin' een, and mak's them blinner yet. But, O Lord, gin it wad please thee to hear oor prayer…eh! hoo we wad praise thee! And my Andrew wad praise thee mair nor ninety and nine o' them 'at need nae repentance.'

A long pause followed. And then the only words that would come were: 'For Christ's sake. Amen.'

When she said that God was light, instead of concluding therefrom that he could not do the deeds of darkness, she was driven, from a faith in the teaching of Jonathan Edwards as implicit as that of 'any lay papist of Loretto,' to doubt whether the deeds of darkness were not after all deeds of light, or at least to conclude that their character depended not on their own nature,

but on who did them.

They rose from their knees, and Mrs. Falconer sat down by her fire, with her feet on her little wooden stool, and began, as was her wont in that household twilight, ere the lamp was lighted, to review her past life, and follow her lost son through all conditions and circumstances to her imaginable. And when the world to come arose before her, clad in all the glories which her fancy, chilled by education and years, could supply, it was but to vanish in the gloom of the remembrance of him with whom she dared not hope to share its blessedness. This at least was how Falconer afterwards interpreted the sudden changes from gladness to gloom which he saw at such times on her countenance.

But while such a small portion of the universe of thought was enlightened by the glowworm lamp of the theories she had been taught, she was not limited for light to that feeble source. While she walked on her way, the moon, unseen herself behind the clouds, was illuminating the whole landscape so gently and evenly, that the glowworm being the only visible point of radiance, to it she attributed all the light. But she felt bound to go on believing as she had been taught; for sometimes the most original mind has the strongest sense of law upon it, and will, in default of a better, obey a beggarly one—only till the higher law that swallows it up manifests itself. Obedience was as essential an element of her creed as of that of any purest-minded monk; neither being sufficiently impressed with this: that, while

obedience is the law of the kingdom, it is of considerable importance that that which is obeyed should be in very truth the will of God. It is one thing, and a good thing, to do for God's sake that which is not his will: it is another thing, and altogether a better thing—how much better, no words can tell—to do for God's sake that which is his will. Mrs. Falconer's submission and obedience led her to accept as the will of God, lest she should be guilty of opposition to him, that which it was anything but giving him honour to accept as such. Therefore her love to God was too like the love of the slave or the dog; too little like the love of the child, with whose obedience the Father cannot be satisfied until he cares for his reason as the highest form of his will. True, the child who most faithfully desires to know the inward will or reason of the Father, will be the most ready to obey without it; only for this obedience it is essential that the apparent command at least be such as he can suppose attributable to the Father. Of his own self he is bound to judge what is right, as the Lord said. Had Abraham doubted whether it was in any case right to slay his son, he would have been justified in doubting whether God really required it of him, and would have been bound to delay action until the arrival of more light. True, the will of God can never be other than good; but I doubt if any man can ever be sure that a thing is the will of God, save by seeing into its nature and character, and beholding its goodness. Whatever God does must be right, but are we sure that we know what he does? That which men say he does may be very wrong indeed.

This burden she in her turn laid upon Robert—not unkindly, but as needful for his training towards well-being. Her way with him was shaped after that which she recognized as God's way with her. 'Speir nae questons, but gang an' du as ye're tellt.' And it was anything but a bad lesson for the boy. It was one of the best he could have had—that of authority. It is a grand thing to obey without asking questions, so long as there is nothing evil in what is commanded. Only grannie concealed her reasons without reason; and God makes no secrets. Hence she seemed more stern and less sympathetic than she really was.

She sat with her feet on the little wooden stool, and Robert sat beside her staring into the fire, till they heard the outer door open, and Shargar and Betty come in from church.

CHAPTER XIII. ROBERT'S MOTHER

Early on the following morning, while Mrs. Falconer, Robert, and Shargar were at breakfast, Mr. Lammie came. He had delayed communicating the intelligence he had received till he should be more certain of its truth. Older than Andrew, he had been a great friend of his father, and likewise of some of Mrs. Falconer's own family. Therefore he was received with a kindly welcome. But there was a cloud on his brow which in a moment revealed that his errand was not a pleasant one.

'I haena seen ye for a lang time, Mr. Lammie. Gae butt the hoose, lads. Or I'm thinkin' it maun be schule-time. Sit ye doon, Mr. Lammie, and lat's hear yer news.'

'I cam frae Aberdeen last nicht, Mistress Faukner,' he began.

'Ye haena been hame sin' syne?' she rejoined.

'Na. I sleepit at The Boar's Heid.'

'What for did ye that? What gart ye be at that expense, whan ye kent I had a bed i' the ga'le-room?'

'Weel, ye see, they're auld frien's o' mine, and I like to gang to them whan I'm i' the gait o' 't.'

'Weel, they're a fine faimily, the Miss Napers. And, I wat, sin' they maun sell drink, they du 't wi' discretion. That's weel kent.'

Possibly Mr. Lammie, remembering what then occurred, may have thought the discretion a little in excess of the drink, but he had other matters to occupy him now. For a few moments both

were silent.

'There's been some ill news, they tell me, Mrs. Faukner,' he said at length, when the silence had grown painful.

'Humph!' returned the old lady, her face becoming stony with the effort to suppress all emotion. 'Nae aboot Anerew?'

''Deed is 't, mem. An' ill news, I'm sorry to say.'

'Is he ta'en?'

'Ay is he—by a jyler that winna tyne the grup.'

'He's no deid, John Lammie? Dinna say 't.'

'I maun say 't, Mrs. Faukner. I had it frae Dr. Anderson, yer ain cousin. He hintit at it afore, but his last letter leaves nae room to doobt upo' the subjeck. I'm unco sorry to be the beirer o' sic ill news, Mrs. Faukner, but I had nae chice.'

'Ohone! Ohone! the day o' grace is by at last! My puir Anerew!' exclaimed Mrs. Falconer, and sat dumb thereafter.

Mr. Lammie tried to comfort her with some of the usual comfortless commonplaces. She neither wept nor replied, but sat with stony face staring into her lap, till, seeing that she was as one that heareth not, he rose and left her alone with her grief. A few minutes after he was gone, she rang the bell, and told Betty in her usual voice to send Robert to her.

'He's gane to the schule, mem.'

'Rin efter him, an' tell him to come hame.'

When Robert appeared, wondering what his grandmother could want with him, she said:

'Close the door, Robert. I canna lat ye gang to the schule the

day. We maun lea' him oot noo.'

'Lea' wha oot, grannie?'

'Him, him—Anerew. Yer father, laddie. I think my hert 'll brak.'

'Lea' him oot o' what, grannie? I dinna unnerstan' ye.'

'Lea' him oot o' oor prayers, laddie, and I canna bide it.'

'What for that?'

'He's deid.'

'Are ye sure?'

'Ay, ower sure—ower sure, laddie.'

'Weel, I dinna believe 't.'

'What for that?'

''Cause I winna believe 't. I'm no bund to believe 't, am I?'

'What's the gude o' that? What for no believe 't? Dr. Anderson's sent hame word o' 't to John Lammie. Och hone! och hone!'

'I tell ye I winna believe 't, grannie, 'cep' God himsel' tells me. As lang 's I dinna believe 'at he's deid, I can keep him i' my prayers. I'm no gaein' to lea' him oot, I tell ye, grannie.'

'Weel, laddie, I canna argue wi' ye. I hae nae hert til 't. I doobt I maun greit! Come awa'.'

She took him by the hand and rose, then let him go again, saying,

'Sneck the door, laddie.'

Robert bolted the door, and his grandmother again taking his hand, led him to the usual corner. There they knelt down

together, and the old woman's prayer was one great and bitter cry for submission to the divine will. She rose a little strengthened, if not comforted, saying,

'Ye maun pray yer lane, laddie. But oh be a guid lad, for ye're a' that I hae left; and gin ye gang wrang tu, ye'll bring doon my gray hairs wi' sorrow to the grave. They're gray eneuch, and they're near eneuch to the grave, but gin ye turn oot weel, I'll maybe haud up my heid a bit yet. But O Anerew! my son! my son! Would God I had died for thee!'

And the words of her brother in grief, the king of Israel, opened the floodgates of her heart, and she wept. Robert left her weeping, and closed the door quietly as if his dead father had been lying in the room.

He took his way up to his own garret, closed that door too, and sat down upon the floor, with his back against the empty bedstead.

There were no more castles to build now. It was all very well to say that he would not believe the news and would pray for his father, but he did believe them—enough at least to spoil the praying. His favourite employment, seated there, had hitherto been to imagine how he would grow a great man, and set out to seek his father, and find him, and stand by him, and be his son and servant. Oh! to have the man stroke his head and pat his cheek, and love him! One moment he imagined himself his indignant defender, the next he would be climbing on his knee, as if he were still a little child, and laying his head on his shoulder.

For he had had no fondling his life long, and his heart yearned for it. But all this was gone now. A dreary time lay before him, with nobody to please, nobody to serve; with nobody to praise him. Grannie never praised him. She must have thought praise something wicked. And his father was in misery, for ever and ever! Only somehow that thought was not quite thinkable. It was more the vanishing of hope from his own life than a sense of his father's fate that oppressed him.

He cast his eyes, as in a hungry despair, around the empty room—or, rather, I should have said, in that faintness which makes food at once essential and loathsome; for despair has no proper hunger in it. The room seemed as empty as his life. There was nothing for his eyes to rest upon but those bundles and bundles of dust-browned papers on the shelves before him. What were they all about? He understood that they were his father's: now that he was dead, it would be no sacrilege to look at them. Nobody cared about them. He would see at least what they were. It would be something to do in this dreariness.

Bills and receipts, and everything ephemeral—to feel the interest of which, a man must be a poet indeed—was all that met his view. Bundle after bundle he tried, with no better success. But as he drew near the middle of the second shelf, upon which they lay several rows deep, he saw something dark behind, hurriedly displaced the packets between, and drew forth a small workbox. His heart beat like that of the prince in the fairy-tale, when he comes to the door of the Sleeping Beauty. This at least must

have been hers. It was a common little thing, probably a childish possession, and kept to hold trifles worth more than they looked to be. He opened it with bated breath. The first thing he saw was a half-finished reel of cotton—a pirn, he called it. Beside it was a gold thimble. He lifted the tray. A lovely face in miniature, with dark hair and blue eyes, lay looking earnestly upward. At the lid of this coffin those eyes had looked for so many years! The picture was set all round with pearls in an oval ring. How Robert knew them to be pearls he could not tell, for he did not know that he had ever seen any pearls before, but he knew they were pearls, and that pearls had something to do with the New Jerusalem. But the sadness of it all at length overpowered him, and he burst out crying. For it was awfully sad that his mother's portrait should be in his own mother's box.

He took a bit of red tape off a bundle of the papers, put it through the eye of the setting, and hung the picture round his neck, inside his clothes, for grannie must not see it. She would take that away as she had taken his fiddle. He had a nameless something now for which he had been longing for years.

Looking again in the box, he found a little bit of paper, discoloured with antiquity, as it seemed to him, though it was not so old as himself. Unfolding it he found written upon it a well-known hymn, and at the bottom of the hymn, the words: 'O Lord! my heart is very sore.'—The treasure upon Robert's bosom was no longer the symbol of a mother's love, but of a woman's sadness, which he could not reach to comfort. In that

hour, the boy made a great stride towards manhood. Doubtless his mother's grief had been the same as grannie's—the fear that she would lose her husband for ever. The hourly fresh griefs from neglect and wrong did not occur to him; only the never never more. He looked no farther, took the portrait from his neck and replaced it with the paper, put the box back, and walled it up in solitude once more with the dusty bundles. Then he went down to his grandmother, sadder and more desolate than ever.

He found her seated in her usual place. Her New Testament, a large-print octavo, lay on the table beside her unopened; for where within those boards could she find comfort for a grief like hers? That it was the will of God might well comfort any suffering of her own, but would it comfort Andrew? and if there was no comfort for Andrew, how was Andrew's mother to be comforted?

Yet God had given his first-born to save his brethren: how could he be pleased that she should dry her tears and be comforted? True, some awful unknown force of a necessity with which God could not cope came in to explain it; but this did not make God more kind, for he knew it all every time he made a man; nor man less sorrowful, for God would have his very mother forget him, or, worse still, remember him and be happy.

'Read a chapter till me, laddie,' she said.

Robert opened and read till he came to the words: 'I pray not for the world.'

'He was o' the world,' said the old woman; 'and gin Christ

wadna pray for him, what for suld I?'

Already, so soon after her son's death, would her theology begin to harden her heart. The strife which results from believing that the higher love demands the suppression of the lower, is the most fearful of all discords, the absolute love slaying love—the house divided against itself; one moment all given up for the will of Him, the next the human tenderness rushing back in a flood. Mrs. Falconer burst into a very agony of weeping. From that day, for many years, the name of her lost Andrew never passed her lips in the hearing of her grandson, and certainly in that of no one else.

But in a few weeks she was more cheerful. It is one of the mysteries of humanity that mothers in her circumstances, and holding her creed, do regain not merely the faculty of going on with the business of life, but, in most cases, even cheerfulness. The infinite Truth, the Love of the universe, supports them beyond their consciousness, coming to them like sleep from the roots of their being, and having nothing to do with their opinions or beliefs. And hence spring those comforting subterfuges of hope to which they all fly. Not being able to trust the Father entirely, they yet say: 'Who can tell what took place at the last moment? Who can tell whether God did not please to grant them saving faith at the eleventh hour?'—that so they might pass from the very gates of hell, the only place for which their life had fitted them, into the bosom of love and purity! This God could do for all: this for the son beloved of his mother perhaps he might do!

O rebellious mother heart! dearer to God than that which beats laboriously solemn under Genevan gown or Lutheran surplice! if thou wouldst read by thine own large light, instead of the glimmer from the phosphorescent brains of theologians, thou mightst even be able to understand such a simple word as that of the Saviour, when, wishing his disciples to know that he had a nearer regard for them as his brethren in holier danger, than those who had not yet partaken of his light, and therefore praying for them not merely as human beings, but as the human beings they were, he said to his Father in their hearing: 'I pray not for the world, but for them,'—not for the world now, but for them—a meaningless utterance, if he never prayed for the world; a word of small meaning, if it was not his very wont and custom to pray for the world—for men as men. Lord Christ! not alone from the pains of hell, or of conscience—not alone from the outer darkness of self and all that is mean and poor and low, do we fly to thee; but from the anger that arises within us at the wretched words spoken in thy name, at the degradation of thee and of thy Father in the mouths of those that claim especially to have found thee, do we seek thy feet. Pray thou for them also, for they know not what they do.

CHAPTER XIV. MARY ST. JOHN

After this, day followed day in calm, dull progress. Robert did not care for the games through which his school-fellows forgot the little they had to forget, and had therefore few in any sense his companions. So he passed his time out of school in the society of his grandmother and Shargar, except that spent in the garret, and the few hours a week occupied by the lessons of the shoemaker. For he went on, though half-heartedly, with those lessons, given now upon Sandy's redeemed violin which he called his old wife, and made a little progress even, as we sometimes do when we least think it.

He took more and more to brooding in the garret; and as more questions presented themselves for solution, he became more anxious to arrive at the solution, and more uneasy as he failed in satisfying himself that he had arrived at it; so that his brain, which needed quiet for the true formation of its substance, as a cooling liquefaction or an evaporating solution for the just formation of its crystals, became in danger of settling into an abnormal arrangement of the cellular deposits.

I believe that even the new-born infant is, in some of his moods, already grappling with the deepest metaphysical problems, in forms infinitely too rudimental for the understanding of the grown philosopher—as far, in fact, removed from his ken on the one side, that of intelligential beginning,

the germinal subjective, as his abstrusest speculations are from the final solutions of absolute entity on the other. If this be the case, it is no wonder that at Robert's age the deepest questions of his coming manhood should be in active operation, although so surrounded with the yoke of common belief and the shell of accredited authority, that the embryo faith, which in minds like his always takes the form of doubt, could not be defined any more than its existence could be disproved. I have given a hint at the tendency of his mind already, in the fact that one of the most definite inquiries to which he had yet turned his thoughts was, whether God would have mercy upon a repentant devil. An ordinary puzzle had been—if his father were to marry again, and it should turn out after all that his mother was not dead, what was his father to do? But this was over now. A third was, why, when he came out of church, sunshine always made him miserable, and he felt better able to be good when it rained or snowed hard. I might mention the inquiry whether it was not possible somehow to elude the omniscience of God; but that is a common question with thoughtful children, and indicates little that is characteristic of the individual. That he puzzled himself about the perpetual motion may pass for little likewise; but one thing which is worth mentioning, for indeed it caused him considerable distress, was, that in reading the Paradise Lost he could not help sympathizing with Satan, and feeling—I do not say thinking—that the Almighty was pompous, scarcely reasonable, and somewhat revengeful.

He was recognized amongst his school-fellows as remarkable for his love of fair-play; so much so, that he was their constant referee. Add to this that, notwithstanding his sympathy with Satan, he almost invariably sided with his master, in regard of any angry reflection or seditious movement, and even when unjustly punished himself, the occasional result of a certain backwardness in self-defence, never showed any resentment—a most improbable statement, I admit, but nevertheless true—and I think the rest of his character may be left to the gradual dawn of its historical manifestation.

He had long ere this discovered who the angel was that had appeared to him at the top of the stair upon that memorable night; but he could hardly yet say that he had seen her; for, except one dim glimpse he had had of her at the window as he passed in the street, she had not appeared to him save in the vision of that night. During the whole winter she scarcely left the house, partly from the state of her health, affected by the sudden change to a northern climate, partly from the attention required by her aunt, to aid in nursing whom she had left the warmer south. Indeed, it was only to return the visits of a few of Mrs. Forsyth's chosen, that she had crossed the threshold at all; and those visits were paid at a time when all such half-grown inhabitants as Robert were gathered under the leathery wing of Mr. Innes.

But long before the winter was over, Rothieden had discovered that the stranger, the English lady, Mary St. John, outlandish, almost heathenish as her lovely name sounded in its

ears, had a power as altogether strange and new as her name. For she was not only an admirable performer on the pianoforte, but such a simple enthusiast in music, that the man must have had no music or little heart in him in whom her playing did not move all that there was of the deepest.

Occasionally there would be quite a small crowd gathered at night by the window of Mrs. Forsyth's drawing-room, which was on the ground-floor, listening to music such as had never before been heard in Rothieden. More than once, when Robert had not found Sandy Elshender at home on the lesson-night, and had gone to seek him, he had discovered him lying in wait, like a fowler, to catch the sweet sounds that flew from the opened cage of her instrument. He leaned against the wall with his ear laid over the edge, and as near the window as he dared to put it, his rough face, gnarled and blotched, and hirsute with the stubble of neglected beard—his whole ursine face transfigured by the passage of the sweet sounds through his chaotic brain, which they swept like the wind of God, when of old it moved on the face of the waters that clothed the void and formless world.

'Haud yer tongue!' he would say in a hoarse whisper, when Robert sought to attract his attention; 'haud yer tongue, man, and hearken. Gin yon bonny leddy 'at yer grannie keeps lockit up i' the aumry war to tak to the piano, that's jist hoo she wad play. Lord, man! pit yer sowl i' yer lugs, an' hearken.'

The soutar was all wrong in this; for if old Mr. Falconer's violin had taken woman-shape, it would have been that of a slight,

worn, swarthy creature, with wild black eyes, great and restless, a voice like a bird's, and thin fingers that clawed the music out of the wires like the quills of the old harpsichord; not that of Mary St. John, who was tall, and could not help being stately, was large and well-fashioned, as full of repose as Handel's music, with a contralto voice to make you weep, and eyes that would have seemed but for their maidenliness to be always ready to fold you in their lucid gray depths.

Robert stared at the soutar, doubting at first whether he had not been drinking. But the intoxication of music produces such a different expression from that of drink, that Robert saw at once that if he had indeed been drinking, at least the music had got above the drink. As long as the playing went on, Elshender was not to be moved from the window.

But to many of the people of Rothieden the music did not recommend the musician; for every sort of music, except the most unmusical of psalm-singing, was in their minds of a piece with 'dancin' an' play-actin', an' ither warldly vainities an' abominations.' And Robert, being as yet more capable of melody than harmony, grudged to lose a lesson on Sandy's 'auld wife o' a fiddle' for any amount of Miss St. John's playing.

CHAPTER XV. ERIC ERICSON

One gusty evening—it was of the last day in March—Robert well remembered both the date and the day—a bleak wind was driving up the long street of the town, and Robert was standing looking out of one of the windows in the gable-room. The evening was closing into night. He hardly knew how he came to be there, but when he thought about it he found it was play-Wednesday, and that he had been all the half-holiday trying one thing after another to interest himself withal, but in vain. He knew nothing about east winds; but not the less did this dreary wind of the dreary March world prove itself upon his soul. For such a wind has a shadow wind along with it, that blows in the minds of men. There was nothing genial, no growth in it. It killed, and killed most dogmatically. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. Even an east wind must bear some blessing on its ugly wings. And as Robert looked down from the gable, the wind was blowing up the street before it half-a-dozen footfaring students from Aberdeen, on their way home at the close of the session, probably to the farm-labours of the spring.

This was a glad sight, as that of the returning storks in Denmark. Robert knew where they would put up, sought his cap, and went out. His grandmother never objected to his going to see Miss Napier; it was in her house that the weary men would this night rest.

It was not without reason that Lord Rothie had teased his hostess about receiving foot-passengers, for to such it was her invariable custom to make some civil excuse, sending Meg or Peggy to show them over the way to the hostelry next in rank, a proceeding recognized by the inferior hostess as both just and friendly, for the good woman never thought of measuring The Star against The Boar's Head. More than one comical story had been the result of this law of The Boar's Head, unalterable almost as that of the Medes and Persians. I say almost, for to one class of the footfaring community the official ice about the hearts of the three women did thaw, yielding passage to a full river of hospitality and generosity; and that was the class to which these wayfarers belonged.

Well may Scotland rejoice in her universities, for whatever may be said against their system—I have no complaint to make—they are divine in their freedom: men who follow the plough in the spring and reap the harvest in the autumn, may, and often do, frequent their sacred precincts when the winter comes—so fierce, yet so welcome—so severe, yet so blessed—opening for them the doors to yet harder toil and yet poorer fare. I fear, however, that of such there will be fewer and fewer, seeing one class which supplied a portion of them has almost vanished from the country—that class which was its truest, simplest, and noblest strength—that class which at one time rendered it something far other than ridicule to say that Scotland was pre-eminently a God-fearing nation—I mean the class of cottars.

Of this class were some of the footfaring company. But there were others of more means than the men of this lowly origin, who either could not afford to travel by the expensive coaches, or could find none to accommodate them. Possibly some preferred to walk. However this may have been, the various groups which at the beginning and close of the session passed through Rothieden weary and footsore, were sure of a hearty welcome at The Boar's Head. And much the men needed it. Some of them would have walked between one and two hundred miles before completing their journey.

Robert made a circuit, and, fleet of foot, was in Miss Napier's parlour before the travellers made their appearance on the square. When they knocked at the door, Miss Letty herself went and opened it.

'Can ye tak 's in, mem?' was on the lips of their spokesman, but Miss Letty had the first word.

'Come in, come in, gentlemen. This is the first o' ye, and ye're the mair welcome. It's like seein' the first o' the swallows. An' sic a day as ye hae had for yer lang traivel!' she went on, leading the way to her sister's parlour, and followed by all the students, of whom the one that came hindmost was the most remarkable of the group—at the same time the most weary and downcast.

Miss Napier gave them a similar welcome, shaking hands with every one of them. She knew them all but the last. To him she involuntarily showed a more formal respect, partly from his appearance, and partly that she had never seen him before. The

whisky-bottle was brought out, and all partook, save still the last. Miss Lizzie went to order their supper.

'Noo, gentlemen,' said Miss Letty, 'wad ony o' ye like to gang an' change yer hose, and pit on a pair o' slippers?'

Several declined, saying they would wait until they had had their supper; the roads had been quite dry, &c., &c. One said he would, and another said his feet were blistered.

'Hoot awa'!'[2] exclaimed Miss Letty.—'Here, Peggy!' she cried, going to the door; 'tak a pail o' het watter up to the chackit room. Jist ye gang up, Mr. Cameron, and Peggy 'll see to yer feet. —Noo, sir, will ye gang to yer room an' mak yersel' comfortable? —jist as gin ye war at hame, for sae ye are.'

She addressed the stranger thus. He replied in a low indifferent tone,

'No, thank you; I must be off again directly.'

He was from Caithness, and talked no Scotch.

''Deed, sir, ye'll do naething o' the kin'. Here ye s' bide, tho' I suld lock the door.'

'Come, come, Ericson, none o' your nonsense!' said one of his fellows. 'Ye ken yer feet are sae blistered ye can hardly put ane by the ither.—It was a' we cud du, mem, to get him alang the last mile.'

'That s' be my business, than,' concluded Miss Letty.

She left the room, and returning in a few minutes, said, as a

[2] An exclamation of pitiful sympathy, inexplicable to the understanding. Thus the author covers his philological ignorance of the cross-breeding of the phrase.

matter of course, but with authority,

'Mr. Ericson, ye maun come wi' me.'

Then she hesitated a little. Was it maidenliness in the waning woman of five-and-forty? It was, I believe; for how can a woman always remember how old she is? If ever there was a young soul in God's world, it was Letty Napier. And the young man was tall and stately as a Scandinavian chief, with a look of command, tempered with patient endurance, in his eagle face, for he was more like an eagle than any other creature, and in his countenance signs of suffering. Miss Letty seeing this, was moved, and her heart swelled, and she grew conscious and shy, and turning to Robert, said,

'Come up the stair wi' 's, Robert; I may want ye.'

Robert jumped to his feet. His heart too had been yearning towards the stranger.

As if yielding to the inevitable, Ericson rose and followed Miss Letty. But when they had reached the room, and the door was shut behind them, and Miss Letty pointed to a chair beside which stood a little wooden tub full of hot water, saying, 'Sit ye doon there, Mr. Ericson,' he drew himself up, all but his graciously-bowed head, and said,

'Ma'am, I must tell you that I followed the rest in here from the very stupidity of weariness. I have not a shilling in my pocket.'

'God bless me!' said Miss Letty—and God did bless her, I am sure—'we maun see to the feet first. What wad ye du wi' a shillin' gin ye had it? Wad ye clap ane upo' ilka blister?'

Ericson burst out laughing, and sat down. But still he hesitated.

'Aff wi' yer shune, sir. Duv ye think I can wash yer feet throu ben' leather?' said Miss Letty, not disdaining to advance her fingers to a shoe-tie.

'But I'm ashamed. My stockings are all in holes.'

'Weel, ye s' get a clean pair to put on the morn, an' I'll darn them 'at ye hae on, gin they be worth darnin', afore ye gang—an' what are ye sae camstairie (unmanageable) for? A body wad think ye had a clo'en fit in ilk ane o' thae bits o' shune o' yours. I winna promise to please yer mither wi' my darnin' though.'

'I have no mother to find fault with it,' said Ericson.

'Weel, a sister's waur.'

'I have no sister, either.'

This was too much for Miss Letty. She could keep up the bravado of humour no longer. She fairly burst out crying. In a moment more the shoes and stockings were off, and the blisters in the hot water. Miss Letty's tears dropped into the tub, and the salt in them did not hurt the feet with which she busied herself, more than was necessary, to hide them.

But no sooner had she recovered herself than she resumed her former tone.

'A shillin'! said ye? An' a' thae greedy gleds (kites) o' professors to pay, that live upo' the verra blude and banes o' sair-vroucht students! Hoo cud ye hae a shillin' ower? Troth, it's nae wonner ye haena ane left. An' a' the merchan's there jist leevin' upo' ye! Lord hae a care o' 's! sic bonnie feet!—Wi' blisters I

mean. I never saw sic a sicht o' raw puddin's in my life. Ye're no fit to come doon the stair again.'

All the time she was tenderly washing and bathing the weary feet. When she had dressed them and tied them up, she took the tub of water and carried it away, but turned at the door.

'Ye'll jist mak up yer min' to bide a twa three days,' she said; 'for thae feet cudna bide to be carried, no to say to carry a weicht like you. There's naebody to luik for ye, ye ken. An' ye're no to come doon the nicht. I'll sen' up yer supper. And Robert there 'll bide and keep ye company.'

She vanished; and a moment after, Peggy appeared with a salamander—that is a huge poker, ending not in a point, but a red-hot ace of spades—which she thrust between the bars of the grate, into the heart of a nest of brushwood. Presently a cheerful fire illuminated the room.

Ericson was seated on one chair, with his feet on another, his head sunk on his bosom, and his eyes thinking. There was something about him almost as powerfully attractive to Robert as it had been to Miss Letty. So he sat gazing at him, and longing for a chance of doing something for him. He had reverence already, and some love, but he had never felt at all as he felt towards this man. Nor was it as the Chinese puzzlers called Scotch metaphysicians, might have represented it—a combination of love and reverence. It was the recognition of the eternal brotherhood between him and one nobler than himself—hence a lovely eager worship.

Seeing Ericson look about him as if he wanted something, Robert started to his feet.

'Is there onything ye want, Mr. Ericson?' he said, with service standing in his eyes.

'A small bundle I think I brought up with me,' replied the youth.

It was not there. Robert rushed down-stairs, and returned with it—a nightshirt and a hairbrush or so, tied up in a blue cotton handkerchief. This was all that Robert was able to do for Ericson that evening.

He went home and dreamed about him. He called at The Boar's Head the next morning before going to school, but Ericson was not yet up. When he called again as soon as morning school was over, he found that they had persuaded him to keep his bed, but Miss Letty took him up to his room. He looked better, was pleased to see Robert, and spoke to him kindly. Twice yet Robert called to inquire after him that day, and once more he saw him, for he took his tea up to him.

The next day Ericson was much better, received Robert with a smile, and went out with him for a stroll, for all his companions were gone, and of some students who had arrived since he did not know any. Robert took him to his grandmother, who received him with stately kindness. Then they went out again, and passed the windows of Captain Forsyth's house. Mary St. John was playing. They stood for a moment, almost involuntarily, to listen. She ceased.

'That's the music of the spheres,' said Ericson, in a low voice, as they moved on.

'Will you tell me what that means?' asked Robert. 'I've come upon 't ower an' ower in Milton.'

Thereupon Ericson explained to him what Pythagoras had taught about the stars moving in their great orbits with sounds of awful harmony, too grandly loud for the human organ to vibrate in response to their music—hence unheard of men. And Ericson spoke as if he believed it. But after he had spoken, his face grew sadder than ever; and, as if to change the subject, he said, abruptly,

'What a fine old lady your grandmother is, Robert!'

'Is she?' returned Robert.

'I don't mean to say she's like Miss Letty,' said Ericson. 'She's an angel!'

A long pause followed. Robert's thoughts went roaming in their usual haunts.

'Do you think, Mr. Ericson,' he said, at length, taking up the old question still floating unanswered in his mind, 'do you think if a devil was to repent God would forgive him?'

Ericson turned and looked at him. Their eyes met. The youth wondered at the boy. He had recognized in him a younger brother, one who had begun to ask questions, calling them out into the deaf and dumb abyss of the universe.

'If God was as good as I would like him to be, the devils themselves would repent,' he said, turning away.

Then he turned again, and looking down upon Robert like a sorrowful eagle from a crag over its harried nest, said,

'If I only knew that God was as good as—that woman, I should die content.'

Robert heard words of blasphemy from the mouth of an angel, but his respect for Ericson compelled a reply.

'What woman, Mr. Ericson?' he asked.

'I mean Miss Letty, of course.'

'But surely ye dinna think God's nae as guid as she is? Surely he's as good as he can be. He is good, ye ken.'

'Oh, yes. They say so. And then they tell you something about him that isn't good, and go on calling him good all the same. But calling anybody good doesn't make him good, you know.'

'Then ye dinna believe 'at God is good, Mr. Ericson?' said Robert, choking with a strange mingling of horror and hope.

'I didn't say that, my boy. But to know that God was good, and fair, and kind—heartily, I mean, not half-ways, and with ifs and buts—my boy, there would be nothing left to be miserable about.'

In a momentary flash of thought, Robert wondered whether this might not be his old friend, the repentant angel, sent to earth as a man, that he might have a share in the redemption, and work out his own salvation. And from this very moment the thoughts about God that had hitherto been moving in formless solution in his mind began slowly to crystallize.

The next day, Eric Ericson, not without a piece in ae pouch

and money in another, took his way home, if home it could be called where neither father, mother, brother, nor sister awaited his return. For a season Robert saw him no more.

As often as his name was mentioned, Miss Letty's eyes would grow hazy, and as often she would make some comical remark.

'Puir fallow!' she would say, 'he was ower lang-leggit for this warld.'

Or again:

'Ay, he was a braw chield. But he canna live. His feet's ower sma'.'

Or yet again:

'Saw ye ever sic a gowk, to mak sic a wark aboot sittin' doon an' haein' his feet washed, as gin that cost a body onything!'

CHAPTER XVI. MR. LAMMIE'S FARM

One of the first warm mornings in the beginning of summer, the boy woke early, and lay awake, as was his custom, thinking. The sun, in all the indescribable purity of its morning light, had kindled a spot of brilliance just about where his grannie's head must be lying asleep in its sad thoughts, on the opposite side of the partition.

He lay looking at the light. There came a gentle tapping at his window. A long streamer of honeysuckle, not yet in blossom, but alive with the life of the summer, was blown by the air of the morning against his window-pane, as if calling him to get up and look out. He did get up and look out.

But he started back in such haste that he fell against the side of his bed. Within a few yards of his window, bending over a bush, was the loveliest face he had ever seen—the only face, in fact, he had ever yet felt to be beautiful. For the window looked directly into the garden of the next house: its honeysuckle tapped at his window, its sweet-peas grew against his window-sill. It was the face of the angel of that night; but how different when illuminated by the morning sun from then, when lighted up by a chamber-candle! The first thought that came to him was the half-ludicrous, all-fantastic idea of the shoemaker about his grandfather's violin being a woman. A vaguest dream-vision of

her having escaped from his grandmother's aumrie (store-closet), and wandering free amidst the wind and among the flowers, crossed his mind before he had recovered sufficiently from his surprise to prevent Fancy from cutting any more of those too ridiculous capers in which she indulged at will in sleep, and as often besides as she can get away from the spectacles of old Grannie Judgment.

But the music of her revelation was not that of the violin; and Robert vaguely felt this, though he searched no further for a fitting instrument to represent her. If he had heard the organ indeed!—but he knew no instrument save the violin: the piano he had only heard through the window. For a few moments her face brooded over the bush, and her long, finely-modelled fingers travelled about it as if they were creating a flower upon it—probably they were assisting the birth or blowing of some beauty—and then she raised herself with a lingering look, and vanished from the field of the window.

But ever after this, when the evening grew dark, Robert would steal out of the house, leaving his book open by his grannie's lamp, that its patient expansion might seem to say, 'He will come back presently,' and dart round the corner with quick quiet step, to hear if Miss St. John was playing. If she was not, he would return to the Sabbath stillness of the parlour, where his grandmother sat meditating or reading, and Shargar sat brooding over the freedom of the old days ere Mrs. Falconer had begun to reclaim him. There he would seat himself once more at his

book—to rise again ere another hour had gone by, and hearken yet again at her window whether the stream might not be flowing now. If he found her at her instrument he would stand listening in earnest delight, until the fear of being missed drove him in: this secret too might be discovered, and this enchantress too sent, by the decree of his grandmother, into the limbo of vanities. Thus strangely did his evening life oscillate between the two peaceful negations of grannie's parlour and the vital gladness of the unknown lady's window. And skilfully did he manage his retreats and returns, curtailing his absences with such moderation that, for a long time, they awoke no suspicion in the mind of his grandmother.

I suspect myself that the old lady thought he had gone to his prayers in the garret. And I believe she thought that he was praying for his dead father; with which most papistical, and, therefore, most unchristian observance, she yet dared not interfere, because she expected Robert to defend himself triumphantly with the simple assertion that he did not believe his father was dead. Possibly the mother was not sorry that her poor son should be prayed for, in case he might be alive after all, though she could no longer do so herself—not merely dared not, but persuaded herself that she would not. Robert, however, was convinced enough, and hopeless enough, by this time, and had even less temptation to break the twentieth commandment by praying for the dead, than his grandmother had; for with all his imaginative outgoings after his father, his love to him was as yet,

compared to that father's mother's, 'as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine.'

Shargar would glance up at him with a queer look as he came in from these excursions, drop his head over his task again, look busy and miserable, and all would glide on as before.

When the first really summer weather came, Mr. Lammie one day paid Mrs. Falconer a second visit. He had not been able to get over the remembrance of the desolation in which he had left her. But he could do nothing for her, he thought, till it was warm weather. He was accompanied by his daughter, a woman approaching the further verge of youth, bulky and florid, and as full of tenderness as her large frame could hold. After much, and, for a long time, apparently useless persuasion, they at last believed they had prevailed upon her to pay them a visit for a fortnight. But she had only retreated within another of her defences.

'I canna leave thae twa laddies alane. They wad be up to a' mischeef.'

'There's Betty to luik efter them,' suggested Miss Lammie.

'Betty!' returned Mrs. Falconer, with scorn. 'Betty's naething but a bairn hersel'—muckler and waur faured (worse favoured).'

'But what for shouldna ye fess the lads wi' ye?' suggested Mr. Lammie.

'I hae no richt to burden you wi' them.'

'Weel, I hae aften wonnert what gart ye burden yersel' wi' that Shargar, as I understan' they ca' him,' said Mr. Lammie.

'Jist naething but a bit o' greed,' returned the old lady, with the nearest approach to a smile that had shown itself upon her face since Mr. Lammie's last visit.

'I dinna understan' that, Mistress Faukner,' said Miss Lammie.

'I'm sae sure o' haein' 't back again, ye ken,—wi' interest,' returned Mrs. Falconer.

'Hoo's that? His father winna con ye ony thanks for haudin' him in life.'

'He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord, ye ken, Miss Lammie.'

'Atweel, gin ye like to lippen to that bank, nae doobt ae way or anither it'll gang to yer accoont,' said Miss Lammie.

'It wad ill become us, ony gait,' said her father, 'nae to gie him shelter for your sake, Mrs. Faukner, no to mention ither names, sin' it's yer wull to mak the puir lad ane o' the family.—They say his ain mither's run awa' an' left him.'

''Deed she's dune that.'

'Can ye mak onything o' 'im?'

'He's douce eneuch. An' Robert says he does nae that ill at the schuil.'

'Weel, jist fess him wi' ye. We'll hae some place or ither to put him intil, gin it suld be only a shak'-doon upo' the flure.'

'Na, na. There's the schuilin'—what's to be dune wi' that?'

'They can gang i' the mornin', and get their denner wi' Betty here; and syne come hame to their fower-hoors (four o'clock tea) whan the schule's ower i' the efternune. 'Deed, mem, ye maun

jist come for the sake o' the auld frien'ship atween the faimilies.'

'Weel, gin it maun be sae, it maun be sae,' yielded Mrs. Falconer, with a sigh.

She had not left her own house for a single night for ten years. Nor is it likely she would have now given in, for immovableness was one of the most marked of her characteristics, had she not been so broken by mental suffering, that she did not care much about anything, least of all about herself.

Innumerable were the instructions in propriety of behaviour which she gave the boys in prospect of this visit. The probability being that they would behave just as well as at home, these instructions were considerably unnecessary, for Mrs. Falconer was a strict enforcer of all social rules. Scarcely less unnecessary were the directions she gave as to the conduct of Betty, who received them all in erect submission, with her hands under her apron. She ought to have been a young girl instead of an elderly woman, if there was any propriety in the way her mistress spoke to her. It proved at least her own belief in the description she had given of her to Miss Lammie.

'Noo, Betty, ye maun be dooce. An' dinna stan' at the door i' the gloamin'. An' dinna stan' claikin' an' jawin' wi' the ither lasses whan ye gang to the wall for watter. An' whan ye gang intil a chop, dinna hae them sayin' ahint yer back, as sune's yer oot again, "She's her ain mistress by way o'," or sic like. An' min' ye hae worship wi' yersel', whan I'm nae here to hae 't wi' ye. Ye can come benn to the parlour gin ye like. An' there's my muckle

Testament. And dinna gie the lads a' thing they want. Gie them plenty to ait, but no ower muckle. Fowk suld aye lea' aff wi' an eppiteet.'

Mr. Lammie brought his gig at last, and took grannie away to Bodyfauld. When the boys returned from school at the dinner-hour, it was to exult in a freedom which Robert had never imagined before. But even he could not know what a relief it was to Shargar to eat without the awfully calm eyes of Mrs. Falconer watching, as it seemed to him, the progress of every mouthful down that capacious throat of his. The old lady would have been shocked to learn how the imagination of the ill-mothered lad interpreted her care over him, but she would not have been surprised to know that the two were merry in her absence. She knew that, in some of her own moods, it would be a relief to think that that awful eye of God was not upon her. But she little thought that even in the lawless proceedings about to follow, her Robert, who now felt such a relief in her absence, would be walking straight on, though blindly, towards a sunrise of faith, in which he would know that for the eye of his God to turn away from him for one moment would be the horror of the outer darkness.

Merriment, however, was not in Robert's thoughts, and still less was mischief. For the latter, whatever his grandmother might think, he had no capacity. The world was already too serious, and was soon to be too beautiful for mischief. After that, it would be too sad, and then, finally, until death, too solemn glad. The moment he heard of his grandmother's intended visit, one wild

hope and desire and intent had arisen within him.

When Betty came to the parlour door to lay the cloth for their dinner, she found it locked.

'Open the door!' she cried, but cried in vain. From impatience she passed to passion; but it was of no avail: there came no more response than from the shrine of the deaf Baal. For to the boys it was an opportunity not at any risk to be lost. Dull Betty never suspected what they were about. They were ranging the place like two tiger-cats whose whelps had been carried off in their absence—questing, with nose to earth and tail in air, for the scent of their enemy. My simile has carried me too far: it was only a dead old gentleman's violin that a couple of boys was after—but with what eagerness, and, on the part of Robert, what alternations of hope and fear! And Shargar was always the reflex of Robert, so far as Shargar could reflect Robert. Sometimes Robert would stop, stand still in the middle of the room, cast a mathematical glance of survey over its cubic contents, and then dart off in another inwardly suggested direction of search. Shargar, on the other hand, appeared to rummage blindly without a notion of casting the illumination of thought upon the field of search. Yet to him fell the success. When hope was growing dim, after an hour and a half of vain endeavour, a scream of utter discordance heralded the resurrection of the lady of harmony. Taught by his experience of his wild mother's habits to guess at those of douce Mrs. Falconer, Shargar had found the instrument in her bed at the foot, between the feathers and the mattress. For one happy

moment Shargar was the benefactor, and Robert the grateful recipient of favour. Nor, I do believe, was this thread of the still thickening cable that bound them ever forgotten: broken it could not be.

Robert drew the recovered treasure from its concealment, opened the case with trembling eagerness, and was stooping, with one hand on the neck of the violin, and the other on the bow, to lift them from it, when Shargar stopped him.

His success had given him such dignity, that for once he dared to act from himself.

'Betty 'll hear ye,' he said.

'What care I for Betty? She daurna tell. I ken hoo to manage her.'

'But wadna 't be better 'at she didna ken?'

'She's sure to fin' oot whan she mak's the bed. She turns 't ower and ower jist like a muckle tyke (dog) worryin' a rottan (rat).'

'De'il a bit o' her s' be a hair wiser! Ye dinna play tunes upo' the boxie, man.'

Robert caught at the idea. He lifted the 'bonny leddy' from her coffin; and while he was absorbed in the contemplation of her risen beauty, Shargar laid his hands on Boston's Four-fold State, the torment of his life on the Sunday evenings which it was his turn to spend with Mrs. Falconer, and threw it as an offering to the powers of Hades into the case, which he then buried carefully, with the feather-bed for mould, the blankets for sod, and the counterpane studiously arranged for stone, over it.

He took heed, however, not to let Robert know of the substitution of Boston for the fiddle, because he knew Robert could not tell a lie. Therefore, when he murmured over the volume some of its own words which he had read the preceding Sunday, it was in a quite inaudible whisper: 'Now is it good for nothing but to cumber the ground, and furnish fuel for Tophet.'

Robert must now hide the violin better than his grannie had done, while at the same time it was a more delicate necessity, seeing it had lost its shell, and he shrunk from putting her in the power of the shoemaker again. It cost him much trouble to fix on the place that was least unsuitable. First he put it into the well of the clock-case, but instantly bethought him what the awful consequence would be if one of the weights should fall from the gradual decay of its cord. He had heard of such a thing happening. Then he would put it into his own place of dreams and meditations. But what if Betty should take a fancy to change her bed? or some friend of his grannie's should come to spend the night? How would the bonny leddy like it? What a risk she would run! If he put her under the bed, the mice would get at her strings—nay, perhaps, knaw a hole right through her beautiful body. On the top of the clock, the brass eagle with outspread wings might scratch her, and there was not space to conceal her. At length he concluded—wrapped her in a piece of paper, and placed her on the top of the chintz tester of his bed, where there was just room between it and the ceiling: that would serve till he bore her to some better sanctuary. In the meantime she was safe,

and the boy was the blessedest boy in creation.

These things done, they were just in the humour to have a lark with Betty. So they unbolted the door, rang the bell, and when Betty appeared, red-faced and wrathful, asked her very gravely and politely whether they were not going to have some dinner before they went back to school: they had now but twenty minutes left. Betty was so dumfoundered with their impudence that she could not say a word. She did make haste with the dinner, though, and revealed her indignation only in her manner of putting the things on the table. As the boys left her, Robert contented himself with the single hint:

'Betty, Bodyfauld 's i' the perris o' Kettledrum. Min' ye that.'

Betty glowered and said nothing.

But the delight of the walk of three miles over hill and dale and moor and farm to Mr. Lammie's! The boys, if not as wild as colts —that is, as wild as most boys would have been—were only the more deeply excited. That first summer walk, with a goal before them, in all the freshness of the perfecting year, was something which to remember in after days was to Falconer nothing short of ecstasy. The westering sun threw long shadows before them as they trudged away eastward, lightly laden with the books needful for the morrow's lessons. Once beyond the immediate purlieus of the town and the various plots of land occupied by its inhabitants, they crossed a small river, and entered upon a region of little hills, some covered to the top with trees, chiefly larch, others cultivated, and some bearing only heather, now nursing in secret

its purple flame for the outburst of the autumn. The road wound between, now swampy and worn into deep ruts, now sandy and broken with large stones. Down to its edge would come the dwarfed oak, or the mountain ash, or the silver birch, single and small, but lovely and fresh; and now green fields, fenced with walls of earth as green as themselves, or of stones overgrown with moss, would stretch away on both sides, sprinkled with busily-feeding cattle. Now they would pass through a farm-steading, perfumed with the breath of cows, and the odour of burning peat—so fragrant! though not yet so grateful to the inner sense as it would be when encountered in after years and in foreign lands. For the smell of burning and the smell of earth are the deepest underlying sensuous bonds of the earth's unity, and the common brotherhood of them that dwell thereon. Now the scent of the larches would steal from the hill, or the wind would waft the odour of the white clover, beloved of his grandmother, to Robert's nostrils, and he would turn aside to pull her a handful. Then they clomb a high ridge, on the top of which spread a moorland, dreary and desolate, brightened by nothing save 'the canna's hoary beard' waving in the wind, and making it look even more desolate from the sympathy they felt with the forsaken grass. This crossed, they descended between young plantations of firs and rowan-trees and birches, till they reached a warm house on the side of the slope, with farm-offices and ricks of corn and hay all about it, the front overgrown with roses and honeysuckle, and a white-flowering plant unseen of their eyes

hitherto, and therefore full of mystery. From the open kitchen door came the smell of something good. But beyond all to Robert was the welcome of Miss Lammie, whose small fat hand closed upon his like a very love-pudding, after partaking of which even his grandmother's stately reception, followed immediately by the words 'Noo be dooce,' could not chill the warmth in his bosom.

I know but one writer whose pen would have been able worthily to set forth the delights of the first few days at Bodyfauld —Jean Paul. Nor would he have disdained to make the gladness of a country school-boy the theme of that pen. Indeed, often has he done so. If the writer has any higher purpose than the amusement of other boys, he will find the life of a country boy richer for his ends than that of a town boy. For example, he has a deeper sense of the marvel of Nature, a tenderer feeling of her feminality. I do not mean that the other cannot develop this sense, but it is generally feeble, and there is consequently less chance of its surviving. As far as my experience goes, town girls and country boys love Nature most. I have known town girls love her as passionately as country boys. Town boys have too many books and pictures. They see Nature in mirrors— invaluable privilege after they know herself, not before. They have greater opportunity of observing human nature; but here also the books are too many and various. They are cleverer than country boys, but they are less profound; their observation may be quicker; their perception is shallower. They know better what to do on an emergency; they know worse how to order their ways.

Of course, in this, as in a thousand other matters, Nature will burst out laughing in the face of the would-be philosopher, and bringing forward her town boy, will say, 'Look here!' For the town boys are Nature's boys after all, at least so long as doctrines of self-preservation and ambition have not turned them from children of the kingdom into dirt-worms. But I must stop, for I am getting up to the neck in a bog of discrimination. As if I did not know the nobility of some townspeople, compared with the worldliness of some country folk. I give it up. We are all good and all bad. God mend all. Nothing will do for Jew or Gentile, Frenchman or Englishman, Negro or Circassian, town boy or country boy, but the kingdom of heaven which is within him, and must come thence to the outside of him.

To a boy like Robert the changes of every day, from country to town with the gay morning, from town to country with the sober evening—for country as Rothieden might be to Edinburgh, much more was Bodyfauld country to Rothieden—were a source of boundless delight. Instead of houses, he saw the horizon; instead of streets or walled gardens, he roamed over fields bathed in sunlight and wind. Here it was good to get up before the sun, for then he could see the sun get up. And of all things those evening shadows lengthening out over the grassy wildernesses—for fields of a very moderate size appeared such to an imagination ever ready at the smallest hint to ascend its solemn throne—were a deepening marvel. Town to country is what a ceiling is to a cÃ¦lum.

CHAPTER XVII. ADVENTURES

Grannie's first action every evening, the moment the boys entered the room, was to glance up at the clock, that she might see whether they had arrived in reasonable time. This was not pleasant, because it admonished Robert how impossible it was for him to have a lesson on his own violin so long as the visit to Bodyfauld lasted. If they had only been allowed to sleep at Rothieden, what a universe of freedom would have been theirs! As it was, he had but two hours to himself, pared at both ends, in the middle of the day. Dooble Sanny might have given him a lesson at that time, but he did not dare to carry his instrument through the streets of Rothieden, for the proceeding would be certain to come to his grandmother's ears. Several days passed indeed before he made up his mind as to how he was to reap any immediate benefit from the recovery of the violin. For after he had made up his mind to run the risk of successive mid-day solos in the old factory—he was not prepared to carry the instrument through the streets, or be seen entering the place with it.

But the factory lay at the opposite corner of a quadrangle of gardens, the largest of which belonged to itself; and the corner of this garden touched the corner of Captain Forsyth's, which had formerly belonged to Andrew Falconer: he had had a door made in the walls at the point of junction, so that he could go from his house to his business across his own property: if this door were

not locked, and Robert could pass without offence, what a north-west passage it would be for him! The little garden belonging to his grandmother's house had only a slight wooden fence to divide it from the other, and even in this fence there was a little gate: he would only have to run along Captain Forsyth's top walk to reach the door. The blessed thought came to him as he lay in bed at Bodyfauld: he would attempt the passage the very next day.

With his violin in its paper under his arm, he sped like a hare from gate to door, found it not even latched, only pushed to and rusted into such rest as it was dangerous to the hinges to disturb. He opened it, however, without any accident, and passed through; then closing it behind him, took his way more leisurely through the tangled grass of his grandmother's property. When he reached the factory, he judged it prudent to search out a more secret nook, one more full of silence, that is, whence the sounds would be less certain to reach the ears of the passers by, and came upon a small room, near the top, which had been the manager's bedroom, and which, as he judged from what seemed the signs of ancient occupation, a cloak hanging on the wall, and the ashes of a fire lying in the grate, nobody had entered for years: it was the safest place in the world. He undid his instrument carefully, tuned its strings tenderly, and soon found that his former facility, such as it was, had not ebbed away beyond recovery. Hastening back as he came, he was just in time for his dinner, and narrowly escaped encountering Betty in the transe. He had been tempted to leave the instrument, but no one could tell what might happen,

and to doubt would be to be miserable with anxiety.

He did the same for several days without interruption—not, however, without observation. When, returning from his fourth visit, he opened the door between the gardens, he started back in dismay, for there stood the beautiful lady.

Robert hesitated for a moment whether to fly or speak. He was a Lowland country boy, and therefore rude of speech, but he was three parts a Celt, and those who know the address of the Irish or of the Highlanders, know how much that involves as to manners and bearing. He advanced the next instant and spoke.

'I beg yer pardon, mem. I thoucht naebody wad see me. I haena dune nae ill.'

'I had not the least suspicion of it, I assure you,' returned Miss St. John. 'But, tell me, what makes you go through here always at the same hour with the same parcel under your arm?'

'Ye winna tell naebody—will ye, mem, gin I tell you?'

Miss St. John, amused, and interested besides in the contrast between the boy's oddly noble face and good bearing on the one hand, and on the other the drawl of his bluntly articulated speech and the coarseness of his tone, both seeming to her in the extreme of provincialism, promised; and Robert, entranced by all the qualities of her voice and speech, and nothing disenchanted by the nearer view of her lovely face, confided in her at once.

'Ye see, mem,' he said, 'I cam' upo' my grandfather's fiddle. But my grandmither thinks the fiddle's no gude. And sae she tuik and she hed it. But I faun't it again. An' I daurna play i' the

hoose, though my grannie's i' the country, for Betty hearin' me and tellin' her. And sae I gang to the auld fact'ry there. It belangs to my grannie, and sae does the yaird (garden). An' this hoose and yaird was ance my father's, and sae he had that door throu, they tell me. An' I thocht gin it suld be open, it wad be a fine thing for me, to haud fowk ohn seen me. But it was verra ill-bred to you, mem, I ken, to come throu your yaird ohn speirt leave. I beg yer pardon, mem, an' I'll jist gang back, and roon' by the ro'd. This is my fiddle I hae aneath my airm. We bude to pit back the case o' 't whaur it was afore, i' my grannie's bed, to haud her ohn kent 'at she had tint the grup o' 't.'

Certainly Miss St. John could not have understood the half of the words Robert used, but she understood his story notwithstanding. Herself an enthusiast in music, her sympathies were at once engaged for the awkward boy who was thus trying to steal an entrance into the fairy halls of sound. But she forbore any further allusion to the violin for the present, and contented herself with assuring Robert that he was heartily welcome to go through the garden as often as he pleased. She accompanied her words with a smile that made Robert feel not only that she was the most beautiful of all princesses in fairy-tales, but that she had presented him with something beyond price in the most self-denying manner. He took off his cap, thanked her with much heartiness, if not with much polish, and hastened to the gate of his grandmother's little garden. A few years later such an encounter might have spoiled his dinner: I have to record no such

evil result of the adventure.

With Miss St. John, music was the highest form of human expression, as must often be the case with those whose feeling is much in advance of their thought, and to whom, therefore, may be called mental sensation is the highest known condition. Music to such is poetry in solution, and generates that infinite atmosphere, common to both musician and poet, which the latter fills with shining worlds.—But if my reader wishes to follow out for himself the idea herein suggested, he must be careful to make no confusion between those who feel musically or think poetically, and the musician or the poet. One who can only play the music of others, however exquisitely, is not a musician, any more than one who can read verse to the satisfaction, or even expound it to the enlightenment of the poet himself, is therefore a poet.—When Miss St. John would worship God, it was in music that she found the chariot of fire in which to ascend heavenward. Hence music was the divine thing in the world for her; and to find any one loving music humbly and faithfully was to find a brother or sister believer. But she had been so often disappointed in her expectations from those she took to be such, that of late she had become less sanguine. Still there was something about this boy that roused once more her musical hopes; and, however she may have restrained herself from the full indulgence of them, certain it is that the next day, when she saw Robert pass, this time leisurely, along the top of the garden, she put on her bonnet and shawl, and, allowing him time to reach his den, followed him,

in the hope of finding out whether or not he could play. I do not know what proficiency the boy had attained, very likely not much, for a man can feel the music of his own bow, or of his own lines, long before any one else can discover it. He had already made a path, not exactly worn one, but trampled one, through the neglected grass, and Miss St. John had no difficulty in finding his entrance to the factory.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.