МАРГАРЕТ ОЛИФАНТ

THE UNJUST STEWARD OR THE MINISTER'S DEBT

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The Unjust Steward / or The Minister's Debt:

Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
A SUDDEN ALARM

Elsie and Roderick Buchanan were the son and daughter, among a number of others, of the Rev. George Buchanan, a minister much esteemed in the city of St. Rule, and occupying a high place among the authorities and influential personages of that place. They were members of a large family, and not important members, being the youngest. It is true that they were not two boys or two girls, but a girl and boy; but being so, they were as nearly inseparable as a boy and girl could be. They were called in the family the Twins, though there was quite a year, a year and a day as in a fairy tale, between them. It was the girl who was the elder of the two, which, perhaps, accounted for the fact that they were still the same height as well as so very like each other that in their infancy it was scarcely possible to know them apart, so that the name of the Twins was quite appropriate. Elsie was fourteen, and Roderick, better known as

Rodie, according to the Scotch love of diminutives, just thirteen. Up to this age, their lessons and their amusements had gone on together,—the girls in St. Rule's, from the beginning of time, having been almost as athletic as the boys, and as fond of the links and the harbour, while the old Scotch fashion of training them together had not yet given way before the advancing wave of innovation, which has so much modified education in Scotland. They were in the same class, they read the same books, they had the same lessons to prepare. Elsie was a little more diligent, Rodie more strong in his Latin, which was considered natural for a boy. They helped each other mutually, he being stronger in the grammar, she more "gleg" at construing. She went all wrong in her tenses, but jumped at the meaning of a thing in a way that sometimes astonished her brother. In this way, they were of great assistance to each other in their school life.

The other side of life, the amusements and games, were not nearly of so much importance, even with children, then as now. It was the object of his elders and masters rather to curb Rodie's enthusiasm for football than to stimulate it, notwithstanding his high promise as a player; and the gentlemen who played golf were exceedingly impatient of laddies on the links; and as for girls presuming to show their faces there, would have shown their disapprobation very pointedly; so that, except for a few "holes" surreptitiously manufactured in a corner (even the Ladies' Links being as yet non-existent), the youngsters found little opportunity of cultivating that now all-important game. They turned out,

however, sometimes early, very early, of a morning, or late in the afternoon, and in their hurried performances, Elsie as yet was almost as good as her brother, and played up to him steadily, understanding his game, when they two of a summer evening, when all the club was at dinner, and nobody about to interfere, played together in a single. Lawn-tennis was still far in the future, and it had not been given to the children to do more than stand afar off and admire at the performance of the new game called croquet, which had just been set up by an exclusive society on the Castle Green. Who were the little Buchanans to aspire to take part in such an Olympian contest among the professors and their ladies? They looked on occasionally from a pinnacle of the ruins, and privately mocked between themselves at the stiffness of a great man's learned joints, or the mincing ways of the ladies, sending confusing peals of laughter over the heads of the players at any mishap, till the indignant company used the rudest language in respect to the Buchanan bairns, along, it must be allowed, with the Beaton bairns and the Seaton bairns, and several more scions of the best families, and threatened to put them out of the Castle ruins altogether: though everybody knew this was a vain threat, and impossible to carry out. It was strictly forbidden that these young people should ever adventure themselves in a boat, the coast being so dangerous, a prohibition which Elsie did not resent, having distinguished herself as a very bad sailor, but against which Rodie kicked with all his might. The reader will therefore see that they were not encouraged to spend

their strength in athletics, which is so much the custom now.

Perhaps this encouraged in them the delight in books which they had shown from a very early age. It was always possible to keep the Twins quiet with a story-book, their elders said, though I confess that Rodie began to show symptoms of impatience with Elsie's books, and unless he got a story "of his own kind," was no longer so still and absorbed as in early days. The stories he loved, which were "of his own kind," were, I need not say, tales of adventure, which he was capable of reading over and over again till he knew by heart every one of the Crusoe-like expedients of his seafaring or land-louping heroes. Elsie had a weakness for girl's stories, full of devotion and self-abnegation, and in which little maidens of her own age set all the world right, which perhaps, naturally, did not appeal to Rodie. But there was one series which never failed in its attraction for both. In Mr. Buchanan's library there was a set of the *Waverleys*, such as formed part of the best of the plenishing for a new household in those days when they were but recent publications, as it still continues we hope to do in every house which desires to fortify itself against the tedium of the years. The children were never tired of *Ivanhoe* and *Quentin Durward*, and the *Fair Maid of Perth*. Indeed, there was not one of them that had not its lasting charm, though perhaps the preponderance of a lassie in the *Heart of Midlothian*, for instance, dulled Rodie's enthusiasm a little; while Elsie, more catholic, was as profoundly interested in Harry Bertram's Adventures, and followed Rowland Græam through all

that happened in the Castle of Lochleven, with as warm interest as heart could desire. They thought, if that wildly presumptuous idea could be entertained, that Sir Walter was perhaps mistaken about bloody Claverhouse, but that, no doubt, was owing to their natural prejudices and breeding. One of their most characteristic attitudes was over one of these books (it was the edition in forty-eight volumes, with the good print and vignettes on the title-pages), spread out between them (they broke all the backs of his books, their father complained) their heads both bent over the page, with faint quarrels arising now and then that Elsie read too fast, and turned the page before Rodie was ready, or that Rodie read too slow and kept his sister waiting, which furnished a little mutual grievance that ran through all the reading, manifested now and then by a sudden stroke of an elbow, or tug at a page.

The place in which they chiefly pursued their studies was a little round corner, just big enough to hold them, which adjoined their father's study, and which, like that study, was lined with books. It was really a small turret, the relic of some older building which had been tacked to the rambling house, old-fashioned enough in its roomy irregularity, but not nearly so old as the little ashen-coloured tower, pale as with the paleness of extreme old age, which gave it distinction, and afforded a very quaint little adjunct to the rooms on that side. There was scarcely more than room enough in it for these two to sit, sometimes on an old and faded settle, sometimes on the floor, as the humour seized them. They were on the floor, as it happened, at the special moment

which I am about to describe. The inconvenience of this retreat was that it was possible from that retirement to hear whatever might be said in the study, so that the most intimate concerns of the family were sometimes discussed by the father and mother in the hearing of these two little creatures, themselves unseen. There was nothing in this to blame them for, for it was well known that the turret was their haunt, and Mr. Buchanan, when reminded of it by some little scuffling or exchange of affectionate hostilities, would sometimes be moved to turn them out, as disturbing his quiet when he was busy with his sermon. But in many other cases their presence was forgotten, and there were not many secrets in the innocent household. On the other hand, Elsie and Rodie were usually far too much occupied with their book to pay any attention to what the rather tedious discussions of father and mother—usually about money, or about Willie and Marion the two eldest, who were about to be sent out in the world, or other insignificant and long-winded questions of that description —might be about.

And I cannot tell for what exquisite reason it was, that on this particular day their minds were attracted to what was going on in the study; I think they must have been reading some scene in which the predominance of lassies (probably the correspondence of Miss Julia Mannering, what I have always felt disposed to skip) had lessened Rodie's interest, but which Elsie, much distracted by the consciousness of his rebellion, but for pride of her own sex pretending to go carefully through, yet was only half occupied

with, occasioned this openness of their joint minds to impression. At all events, they both heard their mother's sudden entrance, which was hurried indeed, and also flurried, as appeared a thing not quite common with her. They heard her come in with a rapid step, and quick panting breath, as if she had run up-stairs. And "William," she said, standing by the writing-table, they felt sure, which was also a usual thing for her to do—"William, have you heard that old Mr. Anderson is very bad to-day, and not expected to live?"

"Old Mr. Anderson!" he said, in a surprised and troubled tone.

"So they say. The Lord help us, what shall we do? Willie's outfit just paid for, and not a penny to the fore. Oh, my poor man!"

"It's very serious news," their father said; "but let us hope that both for his sake and our own it may not be true."

"Ill news is aye true," said Mrs. Buchanan, with a sound of something like a sob.

Why should mamma be so troubled about old Mr. Anderson, the children said to themselves, giving each other a look?

"That is just want of faith, my dear," he replied.

"Oh, I've no doubt it's want of faith! it's all in God's hands, and He can bring light out of darkness, I know; but oh! William, it's not always that He thinks fit to do that! You know as well as me. And if this time it should not be His will?"

"Mary," he said, "let us not forestall the evil; perhaps it will never come; perhaps there will be a way out of it—at the worst

we must just bear it, my dear."

"Oh, I know that, I know that!" she cried, with a sound of tears in her voice. "You gave your word to pay it if he died, immediately thereafter, that there might be no talking. Wasn't that the bargain?"

"That was the bargain," he said.

"But we never thought it was to come like this, at the worst moment, just after the siller is gone for Willie's outfit."

"Mary, Mary, it is worse for him than for us."

"Do you think so, do you think so?" she cried, "and you a minister! I do not think that. He is an old man, and a good man, and if all we believe is true, it will be a happy change for him. Who has he to leave behind him? Na, he will be glad to go. But us with our young family! Oh, the power of that filthy siller; but for that, what happier folk could be, William, than just you and me?"

"We must be thankful for that, Mary," said the minister, with a quiver. "We might have had worse things than the want of money; we might have had sickness or trouble in our family, and instead of that they're all well, and doing well."

"Thank God for that!" mamma said, fervently, and then there was a pause.

"I will have to go at once to the man of business, and tell him," father said; "that was in the bargain. There was no signing of paper, but I was to go and tell; that was part of the bargain."

"And a very hard part," his wife cried, with a long sigh. "It is

like sharpening the sword to cut off your own head. But, maybe," she said, with a little revival of courage, "Mr. Morrison is not a hard man; maybe he will give you time."

"Maybe our old friend will pull through," papa said, slowly.

"That would be the best of all," she said, but not in a hopeful tone. And presently they heard her shut the door of the study, and go down-stairs again, with something very different from the flying step with which she came.

The children did not stir, they did not even turn the leaf; they felt all at once that it was better that their presence there should not be known. They had heard such consultations before, and sometimes had been auditors of things they were not desired to hear; but they had never, they thought, heard anything so distinctly before, nor anything that was of so much importance. They were very much awe-stricken to hear of this thing that troubled father so, and made mother cry, without understanding very well what it was—old Mr. Anderson's illness, and Willie's outfit, and something about money, were all mixed up in their minds; but the relations between the one and the other were not sufficiently clear.

Presently they heard papa get up and begin to walk about the room. He did this often when he was deep in thought, composing his sermon, and then he would often say over and over his last sentence by way of piecing it on, they supposed to the next. So that it did not trouble, but rather reassured them, to hear him saying something to himself, which gave them the idea that he

had returned to his work, and was no longer so much disturbed about this new business. When they heard him say, "no signing of papers, no signing of papers, but to go and tell," they were somewhat disturbed, for that did not sound like a sermon. But, presently, he sat down again and drew a book towards him, and they could hear him turning over the leaves. It was, there could be no doubt, the large Bible—large because it was such big print, for father's eyes were beginning to go—which always lay on his table. He turned over the leaves as they had so often heard him doing; no doubt it was some reference he was looking up for his sermon. He must have found what he wanted very soon, for there was a little silence, and then they heard him say, with great emphasis—"Then the Lord commended the unjust steward." He said it very slowly, pausing upon almost every word. It was the way he said over his text when he was pondering over it, thinking what he was to say. Then he began to read. It was to be a long text this time; Rodie tried to whisper in his sister's ear, but Elsie stopped him, quietly, with emphatic signs and frowns.

"He called every one of his Lord's debtors and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my Lord? And he said an hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill and sit down quickly and write fifty." Then there was another pause. And again father spoke, so clearly, with such a distinct and emphatic voice that they thought he was speaking to them, and looked at each other fearfully. "The Lord commended the unjust steward." There was something awful in his tone: did he mean

this for them, to reprove them? But they had done nothing, and if the Lord commended that man, surely there could be nothing to be so severe upon.

Elsie and Rodie missed everything that was pleasant that afternoon. It was thought they were on the hills, or on the sands, and nobody knew they were shut up there in the turret, now thoroughly alarmed, and terrified to change their position, or make themselves audible in any way, or to turn a leaf of their book, or to move a finger. In all their experience—and it was considerable—father had never been like this before. After a while, he began again, and read over the whole parable: and this he repeated two or three times, always ending in that terrible tone, which sounded to the children like some awful sentence, "The Lord commended the unjust steward"—then they would hear him get up again, and pace about the room, saying over and over those last words; finally, to their unspeakable relief, he opened the door, and went slowly down-stairs, so slowly that they sat still, breathless, for two minutes more, until his footsteps had died away.

Then the two children sprang up from their imprisonment, and stretched their limbs, which were stiff with sitting on the floor. They rushed out of the room as quickly as possible, and got out into the garden, from whence there was an exit toward the sea. The one thing which, without any consultation, they were both agreed upon, was to keep out of sight of father and mother, so that nobody might divine in what way they had been spending

the afternoon. They did not, however, say much to each other about it. When they had got quite clear, indeed, of all possible inspection, and were out upon the east sands, which were always their resort when in disgrace or trouble, Rodie ventured to hazard an opinion on the situation.

"Papa's text is an awfu' kittle one to-day," he said. "I wonder if he'll ding it out."

"Oh, whisht!" said Elsie, "yon's not his text; he was never like that before."

"Then what is it?" said Rodie; but this was a question to which she would give no reply.

As they returned home, towards the twilight, they passed old Mr. Anderson's house, a large, old-fashioned mansion in the High Street, and gazed wistfully at the lights which already appeared in the upper windows, though it was not dark, and which looked strange and alarming to them as if many people were about, and much going on in this usually silent house.

"Does he need so many candles to die by?" said Rodie to his sister.

"Oh, perhaps he is better, and it's for joy," said Elsie, taking a more hopeful view.

Their father came out from the door, as they gazed, awe-stricken, from the other side of the street. His head was sunk upon his breast; they had never seen him so cast down before. His aspect, and the fact that he passed them without seeing them, had a great effect upon the children. They went home very quietly,

and stole into the house without making any of the familiar noises that usually announced their arrival. However, it cheered them a little to find that their mother was very busy about Willie's outfit, and that their eldest sister Marion was marking all his new shirts in her fine writing, with the small bottle of marking ink, and the crow quill. The interest of this process and the pleasure of getting possession of the hot iron, which stamped that fine writing into a vivid black, gave a salutary diversion to Elsie's thoughts. As for Rodie, he was very hungry for his supper, which had an equally salutary effect.

CHAPTER II.
A FRIEND IN NEED

Mr. Buchanan, the minister of St. Leonard's Church, was a member of a poor, but well-connected family in the West of Scotland, to which district, as everybody knows, that name belongs; and it is not to be supposed that he came to such advancement as a church in a university town all at once. He had married early the daughter of another minister in Fife, and it was partly by the interest procured by her family, and partly by the great reputation he had attained as a preacher, that he had been promoted to his present charge, which was much more important and influential than a mere country parish. But a succession of flittings from manse to manse, even though each new transfer was a little more important than the previous one, is hard upon a poor clergyman's purse, though it may be soothing to his self-esteem; and St. Leonard's, though St. Rule was an important port, had not a very large stipend attached to it. Everybody dwelt upon the fact that it was a most important post, being almost indeed attached to the university, and with so large a sphere of influence over the students. But influence is a privilege and payment in itself, or is supposed to be, and cannot be made into coin of the realm, or even pound notes, which are its equivalent. Mr. Buchanan himself was gratified, and he was solemnised, and

felt his responsibility as a power for good over all those young men very deeply, but his wife may be forgiven, if she sighed occasionally for a few more tangible signs of the importance of his post. On the contrary, it led them into expenses to which a country minister is not tempted. They had to take their share in the hospitalities of the place, to entertain strangers, to give as seldom as possible, but still periodically, modest dinner-parties, a necessary return of courtesy to the people who invited them. Indeed, Mrs. Buchanan was like most women in her position, the soul of hospitality. It cost her a pang not to invite any lonely person, any young man of whom she could think that he missed his home, or might be led into temptation for want of a cheerful house to come to, or motherly influence over him. She, too, had her sphere of influence; it hurt her not to exercise it freely. Indeed, she did exercise it, and was quite unable often to resist the temptation of crowding the boys up at dinner or supper, in order to have a corner for some *protégé*. "It was a privilege," she said, but unfortunately it was an expensive one, plain though these repasts were. "Oh, the siller!" this good woman would say, "if there was only a little more of that, how smoothly the wheels would run."

The consequence of all this, however, of the frequent removals, of the lapses into hospitality, the appearances that had to be kept up, and, finally, the number of the family, had made various hitches in the family progress. Settling in St. Rule's, where there was no manse, and where a house had to be taken,

and new carpets and curtains to be got, not to speak of different furniture than that which had done so very well in the country, had been a great expense; and all those changes which attend the setting out of young people in the world had begun. For Marion, engaged to another young minister, and to be married as soon as he got a living, there was the plenishing to think of, something more than the modern trousseau, a provision which included all the household linen of the new house; and, in short, as much as the parents could do to set the bride forth in a becoming and liberal manner. And Willie, as has been told, had his outfit for India to procure. These were the days before examinations, when friends—it was a kindly habit superseded now by the changed customs of life—put themselves to great trouble to further the setting out in life of a clergyman's sons. And William Buchanan had got a writership, which is equivalent, I believe, to an appointment in the Civil Service, by the exertions of one of his father's friends. The result of these two desirable family events, the provision for life of two of its members, though the very best things that could have happened, and much rejoiced over in the family, brought with them an appalling prospect for the father and mother when they met in private conclave, to consider how the preliminaries were to be accomplished. Where were Willie's outfit and Marion's plenishing to come from? Certainly not out of the straightened stipend of the Kirk of St. Leonard, in the city of St. Rule. Many anxious consultations had ended in this, that money must be borrowed in order to make the good fortune

of the children available—that is to say, that the parents must put themselves under a heavy yoke for the greater part of their remaining life, in order that the son and the daughter might make a fair and equal start with their compeers. It is, let us thank heaven, as common as the day that such sacrifices should be made, so common that there is no merit in them, nor do the performers in the majority of cases think of them at all except as simple necessities, the most everyday duties of life. It was thus that they appeared to the Buchanans. They had both that fear and horror of debt which is, or was, the accompaniment of a limited and unelastic income with most reasonable people. They dreaded it and hated it with a true instinct; it gave them a sense of shame, however private it was, and that it should be betrayed to the world that they were *in debt* was a thing horrible to them. Nevertheless, nothing remained for them but to incur this dreadful reproof. They would have to pay it off slowly year by year; perhaps the whole of their remaining lives would be overshadowed by this, and all their little indulgences, so few, so innocent, would have to be given up or curtailed. The prospect was as dreadful to them —nay, more dreadful—than ruin and bankruptcy are to many nowadays. The fashion in these respects has very much changed. It is perhaps the result of the many misfortunes in the landed classes, the collapse of agriculture, the fall of rents; but certainly in our days the confession of poverty is no longer a shame; it is rather the fashion; and debts sit lightly on many shoulders. The reluctance to incur them, the idea of discredit involved in them

is almost a thing extinguished and gone.

When Mr. Buchanan set out one black morning on the dreadful enterprise of borrowing money, his heart was very sore, and his countenance clouded. He was a man of a smiling countenance on ordinary occasions. He looked now as if disgrace had overtaken him, and nothing but despair was before him. It was not that he had an evil opinion of human nature. He had, perhaps, notwithstanding what it is now the fashion to call his Calvinistic creed, almost too good an opinion of human nature. It has pleased the literary class in all times, to stigmatise the Calvinistic creed as the origin of all evil. I, for one, am bound to say that I have not found it to be so, perhaps because dogmatical tenets hold, after all, but a small place in human hearts, and that the milk of human kindness flows independent of all the formal rules of theology. Mr. Buchanan was no doubt a Calvinist, and set his hand unhesitatingly to all the standards. But he was a man who was for ever finding out the image of God in his fellow men, and cursing was neither on his lips nor in his heart. He did not religiously doubt his fellow creature or condemn him. The tremour, the almost despair, the confusion of face with which he set out to borrow money was not because of any dark judgment on other men. It was the growth of that true sense of honour, exaggerated till it became almost a defect, which his Scotch traditions and his narrow means combined to foster in him. An honourable rich man may borrow without scruple, for there is no reason in his mind why he should not pay. But to an honourable

poor man it is the thing most dreadful in the world, for he knows all the difficulties, the almost impossibility of paying, the chance of being exposed to the world in his inmost concerns, the horror of ruin and a roup, the chance of injuring another man, and dying under the shame of indebtedness, all these miseries were in Mr. Buchanan's mind when he went out on his terrible mission. He would rather have marched through a shower of bullets, or risked his life in any other way.

He went to old Mr. Anderson, who had been the head of the bank, and who was still believed to be the highest authority in any kind of financial matter. He had retired from the bank, and from all active business several years before. He was an elder of the church; and from the beginning of Mr. Buchanan's incumbency had been one of his greatest admirers and friends. He was, besides all this, a wealthy old man, and had no children nor any near relative to come after him. It was not, however, with any thought of the latter circumstance, or indeed expectation of actual help from himself that the minister sought this old gentleman. He thought of the bank, which, according to Scottish methods, gives advantages to struggling people, and intended only to ask Mr. Anderson's advice as to what should be done, perhaps if emboldened by his manner to ask him to be his surety, though the thought of making such a request to any man bathed the minister in a cold dew of mental anguish. Had he been asked by any other poor man what reception such an application would have received from Mr. Anderson, he would have bidden that

other take courage.

"He is the kindest man in the world," he would have said. But when it came to be his own case the minister's heart sank within him. He could not have been more miserable had his old friend, instead of being the kindest, been the most cold-hearted man in the world.

There is, perhaps, no more wonderful sensation in life, than that complete and extraordinary relief which seems to fill the heart with a sudden flood of undreamed of ease and lightness, when a hand is held out to us all at once in our trouble, and the help which we have not believed possible, comes. Mr. Buchanan could not believe his ears when the old banker's first words fell upon him.

"Possible! oh, yes, more than possible; how could you doubt it?" he said. The poor man felt himself float off those poor feet that had plodded along the street so heavily, into an atmosphere of ease, of peace, of consolation unspeakable. The thing could be done. Instead of bringing a cold shade over his friend's face, it brought a light of kindness, even of pleasure. Yes, of pleasure, pleasure in being trusted, in being the first to whom recourse was made, in being able to give at once relief. It was so great a gleam of that sunshine which sometimes comes out of a human face, brighter than the very sun in the firmament, that poor Buchanan was dazzled, and for the moment made to think better even of himself as calling forth such friendship and kindness. A glow came into his heart, not only of gratitude but of approval. To see a

man do what in one circumstance is the highest and noblest thing to do, to feel him exceed all our expectations, and play the part almost of a beneficent God to misfortune, what more delightful spectacle is there, even if it had nothing to do with ourselves. Mr. Buchanan poured forth all his soul to his old friend, who understood everything at half a word, and only hesitated to think which would be the best way of fulfilling his wishes. It was by old Anderson's advice at last that the idea of the bank was abandoned. He decided that it would be better to lend the money to the minister himself.

"We will have no fixed times or seasons," he said. "You shall pay me just as you can, as you are able to put by a little, and we'll have no signing of papers. You and me can trust each other; if I die before you, as naturally I will, you'll make it up to my heirs. If you, which God forbid, should die before me, there will be no use of paper to trouble your wife. It's just between you and me, nobody has any business to make or mell in the matter. I have no fine laddie to put out in the world, the more's the pity; and you have, and a bonnie lassie too, I wish you joy of them both. We'll just say nothing about it, my dear sir, just a shake of the hand, and that's all there's needed between you and me."

"But, Mr. Anderson, how can I accept this? You must let me give you an acknowledgment. And then the interest–"

"Toots," said the old man, "interest! what's fifteen pounds to me? I hope I can live and enjoy myself without your fifteen pounds. Nonsense, minister! are you too proud to accept a kindly

service, most kindly offered and from the heart, from an old man, that you have done both good and pleasure to many a day?"

"Oh, proud, no, not proud," cried Buchanan, "unless it were proud of you, old friend, that have the heart to do such a blessed thing."

"Hoot," said the old man, "it's nothing but filthy siller, as your good wife says."

This had been the bargain, and it was a bargain which probably gave more pleasure to the lender than to the borrower. It redoubled the old gentleman's interest in the family, and indeed made him take a personal share in their concerns, which pricked the parents a little, as if he felt a certain right to know all about Willie's outfit and Marion's plenishing. He gave his advice about the boy's boxes, and his gun, and kindly criticised his clothes, and warned them not to pay too much for boots and shoes, and other outside articles, pressing certain makers upon them with almost too warm a recommendation. And he liked to see Marion's sheets and her napery, and thought the damask tablecloths almost too fine for a country manse, where, except on a presbytery meeting or the Monday's dinner after a sacramental occasion, there would be no means of showing them. But all this was very harmless, though it sometimes fretted the recipients of his bounty, who could not explain to their children the sudden access of interest on the part of old Anderson in all their concerns.

And now to think, while the first year had not more than passed, when William's outfit had just been paid off to the

utmost farthing, and Marion's bill for her napery and her stock of personal linen, that the old man should die! I judge from Mr. Anderson's reference to fifteen pounds (five per cent. being the usual interest in those days, though I am told it is much less now), that the sum that Mr. Buchanan had borrowed was three hundred pounds, for I presume he had certain urgent bills to provide for as well as Willie and May. Fifty pounds was still in the bank, which was a reserve fund for Marion's gowns and her wedding expenses, etc. And to think that just at that moment, when as yet there had not been time to lay up a penny towards the repayment of the loan, that this whole house of cards, and their comfort and content in the smoothing away of their difficulties should, in a moment, topple about their ears! There seemed even some reason for the tone of exasperation which came into Mrs. Buchanan's voice in spite of herself. Had he done it on purpose it could scarcely have been worse. And indeed it looked as if it had been done on purpose to drop them into deeper and deeper mire.

Mr. Buchanan fought a battle with himself, of which no one had the faintest idea, when his wife left him that afternoon. She indeed never had the faintest idea of it, nor would any one have known had it not been for the chance that shut up those two children in the turret-room. They did not understand what they had heard, but neither did they forget it. Sometimes, the one would say to the other:

"Do you remember that afternoon when we were shut up in the turret and nobody knew?" When such a thing had happened

before, they had laughed; but at this they never laughed, though they could not, till many years had passed, have told why. The boy might have forgotten, for he had a great many things to think of as the toils of education gathered round him and bound him faster and faster; but the girl, perhaps because she had not so much to do, there being no such strain of education in those days for female creatures, never forgot. She accompanied her father unconsciously in his future, during many a weary day, and pitied him when there was no one else to pity.

In the meantime, as the children saw, Mr. Buchanan went out; he went to old Mr. Anderson's house to inquire for him before he did any of his usual afternoon duties. And after he had completed all these duties, he went back again, with a restlessness of anxiety which touched all the people assembled round the dying man, his brother who had been summoned from Glasgow, and his doctors, one of whom had come from Edinburgh, while the other was the chief practitioner of St. Rule's, and his nurses, of whom there were two, for he had no one of his own, no woman to take care of him. They thought the minister must be anxious about the old gentleman's soul that he should come back a second time in the course of the afternoon, and Dr. Seaton himself went down-stairs to reply to his inquiries.

"I am afraid I cannot ask you to come up-stairs, for he is past all that," he said, in the half scornful tone which doctors sometimes assume to a clerical visitor.

"Is he so bad as that?" said the minister.

"I do not say," said Dr. Seaton, "that our patient may not regain consciousness. But certainly, for the present, he is quite unable to join in any religious exercises."

"I was not thinking of that," said Mr. Buchanan, almost humbly, "but only to take the last news home. Mr. Anderson has been a good friend to me."

"So he has been to many," said Dr. Seaton. "Let us hope that will do more for him where he is going than prayer."

"Prayer can never be out of place, Dr. Seaton," said the minister. He went away from the door angry, but still more cast down, with his head sunk on his breast as the children had seen him. He had no good news to take home. He had no comfort to carry with him up to his study, whither he went without pausing, as he generally did, to say a word to his wife. He had no word for anybody that evening. All night long he was repeating to himself the words of the parable, "Sit down quickly, and take thy bill, and write fifty." Could God lead men astray?

CHAPTER III.
AFTER THE FUNERAL

"After the funeral, after the funeral will be time enough," Mr. Buchanan said, when his wife urged him to get it over, and to have his interview with Mr. Morrison, the man of business, in whose hands all Mr. Anderson's affairs were. Everybody remarked how ill the minister was looking during the week which elapsed between the old man's death and the large and solemn funeral, which filled the entire length of the High Street with black-coated men. It was a funeral *d'estime*. There was no active sorrow among the long train of serious people who conducted his mortal part to its long home, but there were a great many regrets. His was a figure as well known as the great old tower of St. Rule, which is one of the landmarks from the sea, and the chief distinction of the town on land, and he was a man who had been kind to everybody. He had been very well off, and he had lived very quietly, spending but little money on himself, and he had no near relation, only a distant cousin's son, to inherit what he had to leave behind him, for the brother, who was the chief mourner, was a lonely man like himself, and also rich, and without heirs. This being the case, old Mr. Anderson had used his money as few rich men do. He had behaved to many people as he had done to Mr. Buchanan. He had come to the aid of many

of the poor people in St. Rule, the fisher population, and the poor shopkeepers, and many a needy family; therefore, though there were perhaps few tears shed, there was a great and universal regret in all the town. Many men put on their "blacks," and went East, which was their way of indicating the quaint burying-ground that encircled the ruins of the old cathedral, who would not have swelled any other funeral train in the neighbourhood. He was a loss to everybody; but there were few tears. An old man going home, nearer eighty than seventy as the people said, a good old man leaving the world in charity with everybody, and leaving nobody behind whom he would miss much when he got there. A woman, here and there, at her doorhead or her stairfoot, flung her apron over her head as she watched the procession defiling into the wide space before the churchyard, which was visible from the houses at the fishers' end of the lower street. But the tears she shed were for grief's sake, and not for grief—for there was no weeping, no desolation, only a kind and universal regret.

Mr. Buchanan was more blanched and pale than ever, as he walked bareheaded behind the coffin. There was one, everybody said, who had a feeling heart—and many were glad when the ceremonial—always of so very simple a kind in the Scotch church, and in those days scarcely anything at all, a short prayer and no more—was over, with the thought that the minister being evidently so much out of health and spirits, and feeling the loss of the kind old elder so deeply, was just in the condition in which some "get their death," from the exposure and chill of

a funeral. Several of his friends convoyed him home after all was completed, and warned Mrs. Buchanan to take very good care of him, to give him some good, strong, hot toddy, or other restorative, and do all she could to bring back his colour and his spirit.

"We have all had a great loss," said Mr. Moncrieff, who was another leading elder, shaking his head, "but we are not all so sensitive as the minister."

Poor Mrs. Buchanan knew much better than they did what made the minister look so wae. She took all their advices in very good part, and assured his friends that the minister felt their kindness, and would soon be himself again. Alas, there was that interview still to come, which she thought secretly within herself she would have got over had she been the minister, and not have thus prolonged the agony day after day. There were a great many things that Mrs. Buchanan would have done, "had she been the minister," which did not appear in the same light to him—as indeed very commonly happens on either side between married people. But she accepted the fact that she was not the minister, and that he must act for himself, and meet his difficulties in his own way since he would not meet them in hers. She did not comfort him with hot and strong toddy, as the elders recommended; but she did all she knew to make him comfortable, and to relieve his burdened spirit, pointing out to him that Mr. Morrison, the man of business, was also a considerate man, and acquainted with the difficulties of setting

out a family in the world, and impressing upon him the fact that it was a good thing, on the whole, that Willie's outfit had been paid at once, since Mr. Morrison, who would be neither better nor worse of it in his own person, would be, no doubt, on behalf of the heir, who was not of age nor capable of grasping at the money, a more patient creditor than a shop in Edinburgh, where a good discount had been given for the immediate payment of the account.

"They would just have worried us into our graves," Mrs. Buchanan said, and she added that Willie would probably be able to send home something to help in the payment before it had to be made. She said so much indeed, and it was all so reasonable, that poor Buchanan almost broke down under it, and at last implored her to go away and leave him quiet.

"Oh, Mary, my dear, that is all very just," he said, "and I admire your steadfast spirit; but there are things in which I am weaker than you are, and it is I that have to do it while you stay quiet at home."

"Let me do it, Claude," she cried. "I am not feared for Mr. Morrison; and I could tell him all the circumstances maybe as well–"

Perhaps she thought better, and had been about to say so; but would not hurt in any way her husband's delicate feelings. As for Mr. Buchanan, he raised himself up a little in his chair, and a slight flush came to his pale cheek.

"No," he said, "I will not forsake my post as the head of the

house. These are the kind of things that the man has to do, and not the woman. I hope I am not come to that, that I could shelter myself from a painful duty behind my wife."

"Oh, if I had been the minister!" Mrs. Buchanan breathed, with an impatient sigh, but she said,—

"No, Claude, I know well you would never do that," and left him to his thoughts.

She had placed instinctively the large printed Bible, which he always used, on the little table beside him. He would get strength there if nowhere else. The day was gray and not warm, though it was the beginning of June, and a fire had been lighted in the study to serve the purpose, morally and physically, of the hot toddy recommended by the elder. Poor Mr. Buchanan spread his hands out to it when he was left alone. He was very much broken down. The tears came to his eyes. He felt forlorn, helpless, as if there was nothing in heaven or earth to support him. It was a question of money, and was not that a wretched thing to ask God for? The filthy siller, the root of so much evil. He could have demonstrated to you very powerfully, had you gone to ask his advice in such an emergency, that it was not money, but the love of money that was the root of all evil; but in his heart, in this dreadful emergency, he cursed it. Oh, if it were not for money how much the problems of this life would be lessened? He forgot, for the moment, that in that case the difficulties of getting Willie his outfit would have been very much increased. And, instinctively, as his wife had placed it there, he put out his hand for his Bible. Is it possible

that there should be poison to be sucked out of that which should be sweeter than honey and the honeycomb to the devout reader? The book opened of itself at that parable over which he had been pondering. Oh, Mr. Buchanan was quite capable of explaining to you what that parable meant. No one knew better than he for what it was that the Lord commended the unjust steward. He had no excuse of ignorance, or of that bewilderment with which a simple mind might approach so difficult a passage. He knew all the readings, all the commentaries; he could have made it as clear as daylight to you, either in the pulpit or out of the pulpit. And he knew, none better, that in such a case the letter killeth; but the man was in a terrible strait, and his whole soul was bent on getting out of it. He did not want to face it, to make the best of it, to calculate that Willie might, by that time, be able to help, or even that Mr. Morrison was a considerate man, and the heir a minor, and that he would be allowed time, which was his wife's simple conception of the situation. He wanted to get out of it. His spirit shrank from the bondage that would be involved in getting that money together, in the scraping and sparing for years, the burden it would be on his shoulders. A thirst, a fury had seized him to get rid of it, to shake it off. And even the fact that the Bible opened at that passage had its effect on his disturbed mind. He would have reproved you seriously for trying any *sortes* with the Bible, but in his trouble he did this, as well as so many other things of which he disapproved. He knew very well also that he had opened at that passage very often during the past week, and

that it was simple enough that it should open in the same place now. Yet, with instinctive superstition he took the book, holding it in his two hands to open as it would, and his heart gave a jump when he found this strike his eyes: "Sit down quickly, and take thy bill, and write fourscore." These were the words, like a command out of heaven. What if that was not the inner meaning, the sense of the parable? Yet, these were the words, and the Bible opened upon them, and they were the first words that caught his eye.

Suppose that this temptation had come to another man, how clearly would its fallacy have been exposed, what daylight would have been thrown upon the text by the minister? He would have almost laughed at, even while he condemned and pitied, the futile state of mind which could be so led astray. And he knew all that, but it had no effect upon the workings of his own distracted mind at that dreadful moment. He went over it again and again, reading it over aloud as he had done on the first occasion when it had flashed upon his troubled soul, and seemed to give him an occult and personal message. And thus he remained all the rest of the afternoon, with his knees close to the bars of the grate, and his white, thin hands blanched with cold. Surely he had caught a chill, as so many people do in the cold and depression of a funeral. He rather caught at that idea. It might kill, which would be no great harm; or, at least, if he had caught a bad cold, it would, at least, postpone the interview he dreaded—the interview in which he would sit down and take his bill and write fifty—or perhaps fourscore.

"I think I have caught a chill," he said, in more cheerful tones, when he went down-stairs to supper.

But the minister here had reckoned without his wife. It might not be in her province to see Mr. Morrison and arrange with him about the debt, but it certainly was quite in her province to take immediate steps in respect to a bad cold. He had his feet in hot water and mustard before he knew where he was—he was put to bed, and warmly wrapped up, and the hot toddy at last administered, spite of all remonstrances, in a potent measure.

"Mr. Moncrieff said I was to make you take it as soon as you came in; but I just gave in to your humours, knowing how little biddable you were—but not now: you must just go to your bed like a lamb, and do what I bid you now."

And there could not be a word said now as to what was or was not the woman's sphere. If anything was her business at all, decidedly it was her business to keep her family in health. Mr. Buchanan did what he was bid, a little comforted by feeling himself under lawful subjection, which is an excellent thing for every soul, and warm through and through in body, and hushed in nerves, slept well, and found himself in the morning without any chill or sign of a chill, quite well. There was thus no further excuse for him, and he perceived at once in his wife's eyes, as she brought him his breakfast before he got up—an indulgence that always followed the hot-foot bath and the hot drink over-night—that no further mercy was to be accorded to him, and that she would not understand or agree to any further postponement

of so indispensable a duty. When she took away his tray—for these were duties she performed herself, the servants being few, and the work of the house great—she said, patting him upon the shoulder,—

"Now, Claude, my dear, the best time to see Mr. Morrison is about eleven o'clock; that will leave you plenty of time to get up and get yourself dressed. It is a fine morning, and your cold is better. If you like, I will send over to the office to say you are coming."

"There is no necessity for that," Mr. Buchanan said.

"No, no necessity, but it might be safer; so that he might wait for you if he should have any temptation otherwise, or business to take him out."

"If he has business, he will see to it whether he knows I am coming or not," said the minister; "and if I do not see him this morning, I can see him another day."

"Oh, Claude, my man, don't put off another day! It will have to be done sooner or later. Do not keep it hanging over you day after day."

"Well, then," said the minister, with some crossness of tone, "for goodsake, if you are so urgent, go away and let me get up. How can I get myself dressed with you there?"

Mrs. Buchanan disappeared without another word. And he had no further excuse for putting off. Even the wife of his bosom, though she knew it would be a bad moment, did not know half how bad it was. Mrs. Buchanan had made up her mind to it,

however it might turn out. She had already planned out how the expenses were to be lessened after Marion's marriage. Elsie was the only other girl, and she was but fourteen. Several years must elapse before it was necessary to bring her out, and give her that share in the pleasures and advantages of youthful life which was her due. And between that time and this there was no privation that the good mother was not ready to undertake in order to pay off this debt. You would have thought to see their frugal living that to spare much from it was impossible, but the minister's wife had already made her plans, and her cheerfulness was restored. It might take them a long time to do it, but Mr. Anderson's heir was only seventeen, and had still a good many years of his minority to run. And Willie by that time would have a good salary, and would be able to help. It would be a case of sparing every sixpence, but still that was a thing that could be done. What a good thing that education was so cheap in St. Rule. John, who was going to be a clergyman, like his father, would have all his training at home in the most economical way. And Alick was to go to Mr. Beaton's, the writer, as soon as he had completed his schooling, without any premium. They might both be able to help if the worst came to the worst, but between her own economies and Willie's help, who had the best right to help, seeing it was greatly on his account the money had been borrowed, she had little doubt that in four years they would manage to repay, at least, the greater part of the three hundred pounds.

This was all straightforward, but the minister's part was not so

straightforward. He read over the parable again before he went down-stairs, and made up his mind finally to take his bill and write fifty. After all, was not this what Mr. Anderson would have desired? He was an old man and took no particular interest in his heir. He would not, of course, have left his money away from him, or injured him in any way. He quite recognised his claim through his father, a cousin whom the old man had never known, but who still was his next of kin; yet, on the other hand, if it came to that, Mr. Anderson was more fully interested in the young Buchanans. He had seen them all grow up, and Willie and Marion had been a great deal more to him than young Frank Mowbray. And Mr. Buchanan was his friend. The minister was persuaded that old Mr. Anderson would far rather have pardoned him the debt than extorted it from him almost at the risk of his life. "Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty." The words of the parable seemed more and more reasonable, more and more adapted to his own case as he read them over and over. What he was about to do seemed to him, at the end, the very right thing to do and the command of heaven.

Mrs. Buchanan met him in the hall with his hat brushed to a nicety, and his gloves laid out upon the table. She came up to him with a brush in her hand, to see if there was the faintest speck upon his broadcloth. She was his valet, and a most cheerful and assiduous one, loving the office. She liked to turn him out spotless, and to watch him sally forth with delight and pride in his appearance, which never failed her. It was one of the ways of

the women of her day, and a pretty one, I think. She was pleased with his looks, as he stood in the hall ready to go out.

"But why are you so pale?" she said; "it is not an affair of life and death. I hope you are not feared for Mr. Morrison."

"I am feared for everybody," said Mr. Buchanan, "that has to do with money."

"Oh, Claude," she said, "I just hate the filthy lucre myself, but it's not a question of life or death. The bairns are all well and doing well, and will pay it off before Frank Mowbray comes of age. I promise you we will. I have it all in my eye. Do not, my dear man, do not look so cast down."

He shook his head but made no answer. He was not thinking of what she said. He was saying over to himself, "Sit down quickly, and take thy bill, and write fourscore."

CHAPTER IV.
TAKE NOW THY BILL AND WRITE FIFTY

Mr. Buchanan went first to the bank, and drew out the money—the residue of the loan which had been placed there for Marion's final equipment. In those days people did not use cheques, as we do now for every purpose. When a man paid a debt, it seemed far more sure and satisfactory to pay it in actual money. To all, except to business men, the other seemed a doubtful, unsatisfactory way, and those who received a cheque made great haste to cash it as if in the meantime the bank might break, or the debtor's balance turn the wrong way. To pay with a simple bit of paper did not seem like paying at all. Mr. Buchanan received his fifty pounds in crisp new notes, pretty notes printed in blue and red. They were like a little parcel of pictures, all clean and new. He looked at them with a forlorn admiration: it was seldom he saw such a thing as a ten-pound note: and here were five of them. Ah, if that had been all! "Sit down quickly and write fourscore." This variant troubled his mind a little in his confusion! But that was measures of wheat, he said to himself, with a distracted sense that this might somehow make a difference. And then he walked up the High Street in the morning sunshine to Mr. Morrison's office; and sure enough the writer

was there and very glad to see him, so that no chance of escape remained.

"I have come to speak to you," the minister said, clearing his throat, and beginning with so much difficulty—he that would read you off an hour's sermon without even pausing for a word!—"about business, Morrison—about a little—monetary transaction there was—between me and our late—most worthy friend–"

"Anderson?" said the writer. And then he added with a half laugh, tempered by the fact that "the death" had been so recent. "Half St. Rule's, I'm thinking, have had monetary transactions with our late friend–"

"He would not permit any memorandum of it to be made," said the minister.

"No: that was just like him: only his estate will be the worse for it; for we can't expect everybody to be so frank in acknowledging as you."

Mr. Buchanan turned the colour of clay, his heart seemed to stop beating. He said: "I need not tell you—for you have a family of your own—that now and then there are expenses that arise."

The lawyer waved his hand with the freemasonry of common experience. "Well I know that," he said; "it is no joke nowadays putting the laddies out in the world. You will find out that with Willie—but what a fine opening for him! I wish we were all as well off."

"Yes, it is a good opening"—if it had not been that all the joy

and the pride in it was quenched by this!—"and that is precisely what I mean, Morrison. It was just Willie—ordinary expenses, of course, my wife and I calculate upon and do our best for—but an outfit–"

"My dear Mr. Buchanan," said the writer, "what need to explain the matter to me. You don't imagine I got my own lads all set out, as thank the Lord they are, without feeling the pinch—ay, and incurring responsibilities that one would wish to keep clear of in the ordinary way of life."

"Yes," said the minister, "that was how it was; but fortunately the money was not expended. And I bring you back the fifty pounds—intact."

Oh, the little, the very little lie it was! If he had said it was not all expended, if he had kept out that little article *the*—*the* fifty pounds implying there was no more. Anyhow, it was very different from taking a bill and writing fourscore. But the criminal he felt, with the cold drops coming out on his forehead, and his hand trembling as he held out—as if that were all! these fifty pounds.

"Now bide a wee, bide a wee," said the writer; "wait till I tell you—Mr. Anderson foresaw something of this kind. Put back your money into your pocket. He foresaw it, the friendly old body that he was; wait till I get you the copy of the will that I have here." Morrison got up and went to one of the boxes, inscribed with the name of Anderson, that stood on the shelves behind him, and after some searching drew out a paper, the heading of

which he ran over *sotto voce*, while Mr. Buchanan sat rigid like an automaton, still holding out in his hand the bundle of notes.

"Here it is," said Mr. Morrison, coming back with his finger upon the place. "You'll see the case is provided for. 'And it is hereby provided that in the case of any persons indebted to me in sums less than a hundred pounds, which are unpaid at the time of my death, that such debts are hereby cancelled and wiped out as if they had never existed, and my executors and administrators are hereby authorised to refuse any payments tendered of the same, and to desire the aforesaid debtors to consider these sums as legacies from me, the testator.'

"Well, sir," said the writer, tilting up his spectacles on his forehead, "I hope that's plain enough: I hope you are satisfied with that."

For a moment the minister sat and gasped, still stretching out the notes, looking like a man at the point of death. He could not find his voice, and drops of moisture stood out upon his forehead, which was the colour of ashes. The lawyer was alarmed; he hurried to a cupboard in the corner and brought out a bottle and a glass. "Man," he said, "Buchanan! this is too much feeling; minister, it is just out of the question to take a matter of business like this. Take it down! it's just sherry wine, it will do you no harm. Bless me, bless me, you must not take it like this—a mere nothing, a fifty pounds! Not one of us but would have been glad to accommodate you—you must not take it like that!"

"Sums under a hundred pounds!" Mr. Buchanan said, but he

stammered so with his colourless lips that the worthy Morrison did not make out very clearly what he said, and, in truth, had no desire to make it out. He was half vexed, half disturbed, by the minister's extreme emotion. He felt it as a tacit indictment against himself.

"One would think we were a set of sticks," he said, "to let our minister be troubled in his mind like this over a fifty pound! Why, sir, any one of your session—barring the two fishers and the farmer– Take it off, take it off, to bring back the blood—it's nothing but sherry wine."

Mr. Buchanan came to himself a little when he had swallowed the sherry wine. He had a ringing in his ears, as if he had recovered from a faint, and the walls were swimming round him, with all the names on the boxes whirling and rushing like a cloud of witnesses. As soon as he was able to articulate, however, he renewed his offer of the notes.

"Take this," he said, "take this; it will always be something," trying to thrust them into the writer's hand.

"Hoot," said Morrison; "my dear sir, will you not understand? You're freely assoilised and leeberated from every responsibility; put back your notes into your own pouch. You would not refuse the kind body's little legacy, and cause him sorrow in his grave, which, you will tell me, is not possible; but, if it were possible, would vex him sore, and that we well know. I would not take advantage and vex him because he was no longer capable of feeling it. No, no; just put them back into your pouch, Buchanan.

They are no use to him, and maybe they will be of use to you."

This was how the interview ended. The minister still attempted to deposit his notes upon Mr. Morrison's table, but the lawyer put them back again, doing everything he could to restore his friend and pastor to the calm of ordinary life. Finally, Morrison declaring that he had somebody to see "up the town," and would walk with Mr. Buchanan as far as their ways lay together, managed to conduct him to his own door. He noted, with some surprise, that Mrs. Buchanan opened it herself, with a face which, if not so pale as her husband's, was agitated too, and full of anxiety.

"The minister is not just so well as I would like to see him," he said. "I would keep him quiet for a day or two, and let him fash himself for nothing," he added—"for nothing!" with emphasis.

The good man was much disturbed in his mind by this exhibition of feeling.

"Oh, why were 'writers' made so coarse, and parsons made so fine?" He would have said these words to himself had he known them, which, perhaps he did, for Cowper was a very favourite poet in those days. Certainly that was the sentiment in his mind. To waste all that feeling upon an affair of fifty pounds! The wife had more sense, Mr. Morrison said to himself, though she was frightened too, but that was probably for *his* sake. He went off about his own business, and I will not say that he did not mention the matter to one or two of his brother elders.

"You or me might be ruined and make less fuss about it," he

said.

"When a man had just a yearly stipend and gets behindhand, it's wae work making it up," said the other.

"We must just try and see if we cannot get him a bit augmentation," said Morrison, "or get up a testimonial or something."

"You see, a testimonial could scarcely take the form of money, and what comfort would he get out of another silver teapot?" observed the second elder, prudent though kind.

It was not a much less ordeal for the minister to meet his wife than it had been to meet the lawyer. She knew nothing about his purpose of taking his bill and writing fourscore, and he dared not let her suspect that he had spoken of the "fifty," as if that fifty were his whole debt, or that the debts that were forgiven were debts under a hundred pounds. He said to himself afterwards that it was more Morrison's fault than his, that the lawyer would not let him explain that he had said "this would be something," meaning that this would be an instalment. All these things he said to himself as he sat alone for the greater part of the day, "reading a book," which was supposed to be an amusing book, and recovering from that great strain; but he did not venture to tell his wife of these particulars. What he said to Mrs. Buchanan was that Mr. Anderson had assoilised his debtors in general, and that each man was to consider the loan as a legacy, and that Morrison said he was not entitled to take a penny, and would not. His wife took this news with a burst of grateful tears and blessings on

the name of the good man who had done this kind thing. "The merciful man is merciful, and lendeth and asketh not again," she said. But after this outburst of emotion and relief, her good sense could not but object.

"It is an awfu' deliverance for us, Claude; oh, my man! I had it all planned out, how we were to do it, but it would have been a heavy, heavy burden. God bless him for the merciful thought! But," she added, "I am not clear in my mind that it is just to Frank. To be sure, it was all in his own hand to do what he liked with his own, and the laddie is but a far-off heir; but still he has been trained for that, and to expect a good fortune: and if there are many as we are, Claude–"

"It is not our affair, Mary; he had full command of his faculties, and it was his own to do what he liked with it," her husband said, though with faltering lips.

"Well, that is true," she replied, but doubtfully: "I am not denying a man's right to do what he likes with his own. And if it had been only you, his minister, that perhaps he owed much more to, even his own soul, as Paul says–"

"No, no; not so much as that."

"But if there are many," Mrs. Buchanan went on, shaking her head, "it might be a sore heritage for Frank. Claude, if ever in the days to come we can do anything for that lad, mind I would think it was our duty to prefer him before our very own: for this is a great deliverance, and wrought, as you may say, at his cost but without his consent–"

"My dear, a sum like that," said Mr. Buchanan, with a faint smile and a heavy heart, "is not a fortune."

"That is true, but it is a great deliverance to us; and if ever we can be helpful to him, in siller or in kindness, in health or in sickness–"

There came a rush of tenderness to Mrs. Buchanan's heart, with the tears that filled her eyes, and she could say no more.

"Yes, yes," he said a little fretfully, "yes, yes; though he had no merit in it, and not any such great loss either that I can see."

She judged it wise to leave the minister to himself after this; for, though nerves were not much thought of in those days, she saw that irritability and a tendency to undervalue the great deliverance, which filled her with such overflowing gratitude, had taken the place of more amiable feelings in his mind. It was better to leave him quiet, to recover from his ill mood, and from the consequence of being overdone. "I have so many things to take off my mind," she said to herself. Perhaps she thought the minister's cares—though most people would have thought them so much more important—nothing to hers, which were so many, often so petty, so absorbing, leaving her no time to brood. And had she not provided him with the new *Waverley*, which most people thought the best anodyne for care—that is, among the comforts of this world, not, of course, to count among higher things?

But Mr. Buchanan did not, I fear, find himself capable of having his mind taken off, even by the new *Waverley*. He was

spared, he said to himself, from actual guilt.—Was he spared from actual guilt? He had not required to take his bill and write fourscore. But for that one little word the—*the* fifty (how small a matter!) he had said nothing: and that was not saying anything, it was merely an inference, which his next words might have made an end of; only, that Morrison would not hear my next words. If there was a fault in the matter, it was Morrison's fault. He repeated this to himself fretfully, eagerly, impatient with the man who had saved him from committing himself. Never, never would he commit any business to Morrison's hands! Such a man was not to be trusted; he cared nothing for his client's interest. All that he was intent upon was to relieve the debtor, to joke about the "friendly body," who was so kind, even in his grave. "A sore saint for his heir," Morrison had again said, as was said of the old king—instead of standing for the heir's rights as he ought to have done, and hearing what a man had to say!

And this then was the end of it all—salvation—from all the consequences, even from the very crime itself which he had planned and intended, but had not required to carry out. He had saved everything, his conscience, and his fifty pounds, not to speak of all the rest, the sum which his wife had planned by so many daily sacrifices to make up. He had not, after all, been like the unjust steward. He had said nothing, had not even written the fourscore; he had been saved altogether, even the fifty he had offered. Was this the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes—or what was it? Mr. Buchanan put away the *Waverley*,

which was given him to comfort him, and took up the Bible with the large print. It opened again at that parable; and then, with a great start of pain, he recognised his fate, and knew that henceforward it would open always at that parable, now that the parable was no longer a suggestion of deliverance to him but a dreadful reminder. A convulsive movement went through all his limbs at that thought. Mr. Buchanan had often preached of hell, it was the fashion of his time; but he had never known what he himself meant. Now he knew: this was hell where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. It lay here, not in a vague, unrealised region of fire and brimstone; but here, within the leaves of the New Testament, which was his chief occupation, inspiring all the work of his life. This was hell—to see the book open, the book of life, always at that one place. He had not to wait for it; the worm had begun to gnaw and the fire to burn.

CHAPTER V.
MARION AND ELSIE

It was not till a long time after this that the Rev. Matthew Sinclair, who was the betrothed of Marion Buchanan, got a kirk, and the faithful pair were able to marry. The snowy heaps of Marion's linen, which her mother now spoke of, in the bosom of the family, as in reality a present from old Mr. Anderson, seeing that it was paid for by a loan from him, generously converted into a legacy when he died—had lain spread out, with sprigs of lavender between the folds, in the big press at the head of the nursery stairs for nearly two years, during which time Elsie grew into almost a young woman. Rodie, too, became an ever more and more "stirring" school-boy, less disposed to sit and read from the same book with his sister, and more occupied with outdoor games and the "clanjamfry," as his mother said, of school-fellows and playfellows who were always hanging about waiting for him, or coming with mysterious knockings to the door to ask him out. Some of them, Mrs. Buchanan thought, were not quite proper comrades for the minister's son, but the framework of juvenile society in St. Rule's was extremely democratic, all the classes going to school together according to Scotch precedent—the laird's son and the shoemaker's on the same bench, and Rodie Buchanan cheek by jowl with the fisher laddies from east the

town. In the play hours, it was true, things equalised themselves a little; but there was certainly one fisher laddie his prompter and helper in school, who kept a great ascendancy over Rodie, and would lead him away in long tramps along the sea-shore, when he might have been at football or "at the gouff" with companions of his own standing, and when Elsie was pining for his society at home. Elsie felt the partial desertion of her brother extremely. She missed the long readings together in the turret and elsewhere, and the long rambles, in which Johnny Wemyss had become Rodie's companion, apparently so much more interesting to him than herself. Johnny Wemyss, it was evident, had a great deal of knowledge, which Elsie was inclined, in her ignorance, to be thankful she did not possess; for Rodie would come in with his pockets all full of clammy and wet things—jelly-fish, which he called by some grand name—and the queer things that wave about long fingers on the edges of the pools, and shrink into themselves when you touch them. This was before the days when sea-anemones became a fashionable pursuit, but children brought up by the sea had, of course, known and wondered at these creatures long before science took them up. But to bring them home was a different matter; filling the school-room with nasty, sticky things, which, out of their native element, decayed and made bad smells, and were the despair of the unfortunate maid who had to keep that room in order, and dared not, except in extremity, throw Rodie's hoards away. "It is not Rodie's fault; it is Johnny Wemyss that just tells him nonsense stories," Elsie

said. She would have given her little finger to have gone with him on those rambles, and to have heard all about those strange living things; but already the invisible bonds that confine a woman's movements had begun to cramp Elsie's free footsteps, and the presence of Johnny Wemyss made, she was well aware, her own impossible, though it was just Johnny Wemyss's "nonsense stories" that she desired most to hear.

Rodie condescended to accompany her on her Sunday walk when all St. Rule's perambulated the links from which they were shut out on week-days; but that became the only occasion on which she could calculate on his company, and not even the new *Waverley*, which had failed to beguile the minister from his urgent trouble, could seduce Rodie from his many engagements with his fellows to sit with his sister in the turret, with the book between them as of old.

Elsie, it is true, gradually began to make herself amends for this desertion by forming new alliances of her own with girls of her own age, who have always abounded in St. Rule's; but these did not at all make up to her, as Johnny Wemyss seemed to make up to Rodie, for the separation from her natural companion and fellow. These young ladies were beginning already, as they approached sixteen, to think of balls and triumphs in a way which was different from the romps of old. The world, in the shape of young men older than their boyish companions, and with other intentions, began to open about them. At that time it was nothing very remarkable that girls should marry very early, a

circumstance which, of itself, made a great change in their ideas, and separated them more than anything else could have done from their childish contemporaries of the other sex.

Elsie was in that hot stage of indignation and revolt against sweethearts, and all talk on the subject, which is generally a phase in a girl's development. She was angry at the introduction of this unworthy subject, and almost furious with the girls who chattered and laughed about Bobbie this and Willie that—for in St. Rule's they all knew each other by their Christian names. She could understand that you should prefer your own brother's society to that of any girl, and much wondered that Rodie should prefer any boy to herself—which was one great distinction between girls and boys which she discovered with indignation and shame. "I like Rodie better than anybody, but he likes his Johnny Wemyss better than me! Ay!" she cried, the indignation gaining upon her, "and even if Johnny Wemyss were not there, Ralph Beaton or Harry Seaton, or any laddie—whereas I would give up any lassie for him."

"That is just the way of men," said Marion, her eldest sister, who, being now on the eve of marriage, naturally knew a great deal more than a girl of sixteen.

"Not with Matthew," cried Elsie, who, if she had no experience, was not without observation; "he likes you better than all the men in the world."

"Oh, Matthew!" said Marion, with a blush—"that's different: but when he's used to me," added this discreet young woman

—"Matthew, I've every reason to believe, will just be like the rest. He will play his gouff, though I may be sitting solitary at home—and he will go out to his dinner and argue among his men, and take his walks with Hugh Playfair, or whoever turns up. He will say, 'My dear, I want a long stretch that would be too far for you,' as my father says to my mother. She takes it very well, and is glad he should be enjoying himself, and leaving her at peace to look after her house and her bairns—but perhaps she was not so pleased at first: and perhaps I'll not be pleased either when it comes to that," Marion said, reflectively.

Sense was her great characteristic, and she had, in her long engagement, had much time to turn all these things over in her mind.

"I don't think it will ever come to that—for he cannot let you be for a moment," said Elsie. "I sometimes wish he were a hundred miles away."

"Ah," said Marion, "but you know that will not last; and, indeed, it is better it should not last, for how could you ever get anything done if your man was draigling after you all the day long? No, no, it is more manlike that he should keep till his own kind. You may think you would like to have Rodie at your tail for ever, as when you were little bairns, and called the twins: but you would not, any more than he does– just wait a wee, and you will find that out for yourself: for it should surely be more so with your brother, who is bound to go away from you, when it is so with your man."

"Then I think the disciples were right," said Elsie, who was very learned in her Bible, as became a minister's daughter. "And if the case of a man be so with his wife it would be better not to marry."

"Well, it does not seem that folk think so," said Marion, with a smile, "or it would not have gone on so long. Will you get me the finest dinner-napkins, the very finest ones, out of the big napery press at the head of the stairs?—for I am not sure that they are all marked properly, and time is running on, and everything must be finished."

Marion was very great at marking, whether in white letters worked in satin stitch, or in small red ones done with engrained cotton, or finally with the little bottle of marking-ink and the hot iron with which Elsie still loved to help her—but in the case of the finest dinner-napkins, I need not say that marking-ink was not good enough, and the finest satin stitch was employed.

It need not be added that notwithstanding the reflection above stated Elsie felt a great interest in the revelations of the sister thus standing on the brink of a new life, and so soberly contemplating the prospect before her, not with any idea, as it seemed, of ideal blessedness, nor of having everything her own way.

Marion had been set thinking by the girl's questions, and was ready to go on talking when Elsie returned with the pile of dinner-napkins in her arms, as high as her chin, which reposed upon them. It had been Mrs. Buchanan's pride that no minister's wife in the whole presbytery should have more exquisite linen,

and both mother and daughter were gratified to think that the table would be set out for the dinner on the Monday after the Sacrament as few such tables were. The damask was very fine, of a beautiful small pattern, and shone like white satin. Elsie had a little talent for drawing, and she it was who drew the letters which Marion worked; so that this duty afforded occupation for both.

"It is a little strange, I do not deny," said Marion, "that though they make such a work about us when they are courting and so forth, the men are more content in the society of their own kind than we are: a party that is all lassies, you weary of it."

"Not me!" cried Elsie, all aflame.

"Wait till you are a little older," said the sage Marion; "it's even common to say; though I doubt if it is true, that after dinner we weary for them, if they are too long of coming up-stairs. But they never weary for us: and a man's party is always the most joyful of all, and they like it above everything, and never wish that we were there. I must say I do not understand how this is, considering how dependent they are upon us for their comfort, and how helpless they are, more helpless than a woman ever is. Now, what my father would do if mamma did not see that he was brushed and trimmed up and kept in order, I cannot tell: and no doubt it will be just the same with Matthew. He will come to me crying, 'May, there are no handkerchiefs in my drawer,' or, 'May, the button's off my glove,' as if it was my great fault—and when he is going off to preach anywhere, he will forget his very sermon if I don't take care it's put into his portmanteau.

"Well, my dear! I am no better than my mother, and that is what she has to do: but when they get a few men together, and can gossip away, and talk, and take their glass of toddy, then is the time when they really enjoy themselves. And so it is with the laddies, or even more—you wish for them, but they don't wish for you."

"I wish for none of them, except Rodie, my own brother, that has always been my companion," Elsie said.

"And you would think he would wish for you? but no: his Johnny Wemyss and his Alick Beaton, or was it Ralph?—that's what he likes far best, except, of course, when he falls in love, and then he will run after the lassie wherever she goes, till she takes him, and it's all settled, and then he just goes back to his men, as before. It is a very mysterious thing to me," said Marion, "but I have thought a great deal about it, and it's quite true. I do not like myself," she added, with a pause of reflection, "men that are always at a woman's tails. If you never could turn round or do a thing without your man after you, it would be a great bother. I am sure mamma feels that; she is always easy in her mind when my father is set down very busy to his sermon, or when somebody comes in to talk to him, or he goes out to his dinner with Professor Grant. Then she is sure he will be happy, and it leaves her free. I will just feel the same about Matthew, and he about me. He would not be without me for all the world, but he will never want me when he gets with his own cronies. Now, we always seem to have a kind of want of them."

"You have just said that mamma was quite happy when she got papa off her hands," Elsie said.

"That is a different thing; but do you think for a moment that she would enjoy herself with a party of women as he does at Professor Grant's? That she would not; she is glad to get him off her hands because she is sure he will enjoy himself, and be no trouble to anybody. But that would be little pleasure to her, if she were to do the same: and you yourself, if you had all the Seatons and the Beatons that ever were born–"

"I want only Rodie, my own brother," Elsie said, with indignation.

"And he," said Marion, calmly reflecting, "does not want you; that is just what I say—and what is so queer a thing."

"If the case of a man is so with his wife?" said Elsie, oracularly.

"Toots—the man is just very well off," said Marion. "He gets his wife to take care of him, and then he just enjoys himself with his own kind."

"Then I would never marry," cried Elsie; "not whatever any one might say."

"That is very well for you," said Marion. "You will be the only daughter when I am away; they will be very well contented if you never marry; for, to be left without a child in the house, would be hard enough upon mamma. But even, with all my plenishing ready, and the things marked, and everything settled—not that I would like to part with Matthew, even if there was no plenishing

—I would rather have him without a tablecloth than any other man with the finest napery in the world. But I just know what will happen, and I am quite pleased, and it is of no use going against human nature. For company, they will always like their own kind best. But then, on the other hand, women are not so keen about company. When there's a family, they are generally very well content to bide at home, and be thankful when their man enjoys himself without fashing anybody."

This is not a doctrine which would, perhaps, be popular with women nowadays; but, in Marion's time, it was considered a kind of gospel in its way.

Elsie was not much interested in the view of man, as husband, put forth by her sister. Her mind did not go out towards that development of humanity; but the defection of Rodie, her *own* brother as she said, was a more serious matter. Most girls in as large family have an own brother their natural pair, the one most near to them in age or temperament. It had once been Willie and Marion, just as it had once been Elsie and Rodie; but Elsie could not bear the thought that Rodie might become to her, by his own will, the same as Willie was to Marion—her brother, but not her *own* brother, with no special tie between them. Her mind was constantly occupied by the thought of it, and how it was to be averted. Marion, she thought, had done nothing to lead Willie back when he first began to go after, what Marion called, his own kind, and to jilt his sister: so far from that, she had brought in a stranger into the family, a Matthew, to re-open and widen

the breach, so that it was natural that Willie should go out of nights, and like his young men's parties, and come in much later than pleased father. This was not a thing that Elsie would do —she would bring in no strange man. All the Matthews in the world might flutter round her, but she would never give Rodie any reason to think that there was anybody she wanted but her brother—no, whatever might happen, she would be faithful to Rodie, even if it were true, as Marion said, that men (as if Rodie were a man!) liked their own kind best. Why, she *was* his own kind; who could be so near him as his sister, his own sister, the one that was next in the family?

Elsie went seriously into this question, as seriously as any forsaken wife could do, whose husband was being led astray from her, as she took a melancholy ramble by herself along the east sands, where Rodie never accompanied her now. She asked herself what she could do to bring him back, to make him feel that, however his Johnnys and his Alicks might tempt him for the moment, it was Elsie that was his true friend: she must never scold him, nor taunt him with liking other folk better, she must always be kind, however unkind he might be. With these excellent resolutions warm in her mind, it happened to Elsie to see, almost straight in front of her, hanging on the edge of a pool among the rocks, Rodie himself, in company with Johnny Wemyss, the newly-chosen friend of his heart. Johnny was up to his elbows in the pool, digging out with his hands the strange things and queer beasts to be found therein; and half to show

the charity of her thoughts, half out of curiosity and desire to see what they were about, Elsie hurried on to join them. Johnny Wemyss was a big boy, bigger than Rodie, as old as Elsie herself —roughly clad, with big, much-mended nailed boots, clouted shoon, as he would himself have called them, and his rough hair standing out under the shabby peak of his sailor's cap.

"What are you doing—oh, what are you finding? Let me see," cried Elsie, coming up behind them with noiseless feet on the wet but firm sand.

Johnny Wemyss gave a great start, and raised himself up, drawing his bare and dripping arms out of the water, and standing confused before the young lady, conscious that he was not company for her, nor even for her brother, the minister's son, he who came of mere fisher folk.

But Rodie turned round fierce and threateningly, with his fists clenched in his pockets.

"What are you wanting?" he cried. "Can you not let a person abee? We are no wanting any lassies here."

"Rodie," cried his sister, flushed and almost weeping, "do you say that to me?"

"Ay do I!" cried Rodie, red with wrath and confusion. "What are you wanting? We just want no lassies here."

Elsie gave him but one look of injured love and scorn, and, without saying another word, turned round and walked away.

Oh, May was right! she was only a lassie to her own brother, and he had insulted her before that Johnny, who was the cause

of it all—she only hoped they were looking after her to see how firm she walked, and that she was not crying—no, she would not cry—why should she cry about him, the hard-hearted, unkind boy? and with that, Elsie's shoulders heaved, and a great sob rent her breast.

She had indeed mourned his desertion before: yet this was practically her first revelation of the hollowness of life.

Meanwhile, Rodie was far from comfortable on his side; all the more that Johnny Wemyss gave him a kick with his clouted shoe, and said, with the frankness of friendship:

"Ye little cankered beast—how dare ye speak to her like that? How can she help it if she is a lassie?—it's no her blame!"

CHAPTER VI.
A HOUSEHOLD CONTROVERSY

Notwithstanding the great sobriety of her views, as disclosed above, Marion, on the eve of her marriage, was no doubt the most interesting member of the Buchanan family; and, if anything could have "taken off" the mind of Elsie from her own misfortune, it would have been the admiring and wondering study she was quite unconsciously making of her sister, who had come to the climax of a girl's life, and who regarded it with so staid and middle-aged a view. Marion had always been a very steady sort of girl all her life, it was common to say. There was no nonsensical enthusiasm about her. Even when in love—that is, in the vague and gaseous period, before it has come to anything, when most girls have their heads a little pardonably turned, and the excitement of the new thing runs strong in their veins—even then, her deportment had been everything that could be desired in a minister's daughter, and future minister's wife. There had been no contrivings of meetings, no lingering on the links or the sands. Never once, perhaps, in that period when even a lassie is allowed to forget herself a little, had Marion failed to be at home in time for prayers, or forgot any of her duties. She was of the caste of the Scotch minister, in which the woman as well as the man belongs more or less to a sacred

profession, and has its character to keep up. But, no doubt, it was owing to the sober tone of her own mind that she took at so early an age, and so exciting a moment of her career, the very sensible and unexalted views which she expressed so clearly. The Rev. Matthew Sinclair was neither cold nor negligent as a lover; he was limited by duty, and by a purse but indifferently filled. He could only come to see her after careful arrangement, when he could afford it, and when he could secure a substitute in his work. He could not shower presents upon her, even daily bouquets or other inexpensive luxuries. In those days, if you had a garden at your hand, you might bring your beloved "a flower"—that is, a bunch of flowers—roses and southernwood, and bachelor's buttons and gilly-flowers, with a background of the coloured grasses, called gardener's garters in Scotland, tightly tied together; but there were no shops in which you could find the delicate offerings, sweet smelling violets, and all the wonders of the South—which lovers deal in nowadays. But he did his part very manfully, and Marion had nothing to complain of in his attentions. Yet, as has been made apparent, she was not deceived. She did not expect, or even wish, to attach him to her apron strings. She was quite prepared to find that, in respect of "company," that is society, he would prefer, as she said, his own kind. And she did not look forward to this with any prevision of that desolate sense of the emptiness of the world and all things, which was in the mind of Elsie when her brother told her that he wanted no lassies there. Marion knew that if she

went into her husband's study when two or three of the brethren were gathered together, her entrance would probably stop a laugh, and her husband would look up and say, "Well, my dear?" interrogatively, with just the same meaning, though less roughly than that of Rodie. She had seen it in her mother's case; she accepted it as quite natural in her anticipations of her own. This curious composure made her, perhaps, all the more interesting —certainly a more curious study—to Elsie, who had fire and flame in her veins incomprehensible to the elder sister. Elsie followed her about with that hot iron to facilitate the marking, and drank in her words with many a protest against them. Let it not be supposed that Marion marked her own "things" with the vulgarity of marking-ink; but she marked the dusters and the commoner kinds of napery, the coarser towels and sheets, all the inferior part of her plenishing in this common way, an operation which occupied a good many mornings, during which there went on much edifying talk. Sometimes, while they sat at one end of the large dining-table in the dining-room,—for it was not permitted to litter the drawing-room with this kind of work, —Mrs. Buchanan would be seated at the other, with her large basket of stockings to darn, or other domestic mendings, and, in that case, the talk was more varied, and went over a wider field. Naturally, the mother was not quite philosophic or so perfectly informed as was the young daughter on the verge of her life.

"I hear," said Mrs. Buchanan, "that old Mr. Anderson's house in the High Street is getting all prepared and made ready for

young Frank Mowbray and his mother. She is not a very wise woman, and very discontented. I fear that the old man left much less than was expected. When I think how good he was to us, and that Willie's outfit and your plenishing are just, so to speak, gifts of his bounty, I feel as if we were a kind of guilty when I hear of his mother's complaint. For, if he had not given us, and other people as well as much as he did, there would have been more for her, or at least for her Frank."

"But she had nothing to do with it, mother," said Marion; "and he had a good right to please himself, seeing it was all his own."

"All that is quite true," said Mrs. Buchanan; "I made use of the very same argument myself when your father was so cast down about it, and eager to pay it back, and James Morrison would not listen to him. I just said, 'It's in the very Scripture—Shall I not do what I like with my own?' And then your father tells me that you must not always take the words of a parable for direct instruction, and that the man who said that was meaning—but if you ask him, he will tell you himself what we were to understand."

"Was it the one about the unjust steward?" asked Elsie, suddenly looking up, with the heated iron in her hand.

"What would the unjust steward have to do with it?" said Mrs. Buchanan, astonished. "Neither your father nor Mr. Anderson would go for instruction to the unjust steward. Your father had a fine lecture on that, that he delivered about a year and a half ago. You never mind your father's best things, you bairns, though one would think you might be proud of them."

"I mind that quite clearly," said Marion; "and, mother, if you'll no be angry, I would like to say that it did not satisfy my mind. You would have thought he was excusing yon ill man: and more than that, as if he thought our Lord was excusing him: and, though it was papa that said it, that was what I could not bide to hear."

It may be supposed how Elsie, with her secret knowledge, pricked up her ears. She sat with the iron suspended in her hand, letting Marion's initials grow dry upon the linen, and forgetting altogether what she was about.

"I am astonished that you should say that," said the mother, giving a little nod; "that will be some of Matthew's new lights —for, I am sure, he explained as clear as could be that it was the man's wisdom, or you might say cunning, that the Lord commended, so to speak, as being the best thing for his purpose, though his purpose was far from being a good one. Your father is not one that, on such a subject, ever gives an uncertain note."

"It is an awfu' difficult subject for an ordinary congregation," said Marion. "Matthew is just as little a man for new lights as papa; but still he did say, that for a common congregation–"

"I thought it would be found that Matthew was at the bottom of it," said Mrs. Buchanan, with a laugh; "though it would set a young man better to hold his peace, and make no comments upon one that has so much more experience than himself."

"You are a little unjust to Matthew," said Marion, nodding in her turn; "he made no more comment than any of the

congregation might have done—or than I did myself. He is just very careful what he says about papa. He says that theology, like other things, makes progress, and that there's more exegesis and—and other things, since my father's time—which makes a difference; but he has always a great opinion of papa's sermons, and says you may learn a great deal from them, even when–"

"I am sure we are much beholden to him," said Mrs. Buchanan, holding her head high. "It's delicate of him to spare your feelings; for, I suppose, however enlightened you may be beyond your fellows, you must still have some kind of objection to hear your father criticised."

"Oh, mother, how can you take it like that?" said Marion; "there was no criticism. If anything was said, it was more me than him. I said I could not bide to hear a word, as if our Lord might have approved such an ill man. And he said it was dangerous for a mixed congregation, and that few considered the real meaning of a parable, but just took every word as if it was instruction."

"And that was just your father's strong point. He said it was like taking another man's sail to fill up a leak in a boat. You would praise the man for getting the first thing he could lay his hands on to save himself and his crew, but not for taking his neighbour's sail—that was just his grand point; but there are some folk that will always take things in the matter-of-fact way, to the letter, and cannot understand what's expounded according to the spirit. That, however, has always just been your father's special gift," said the minister's wife, *de facto*. She, who was

only a minister's wife in expectation, ought to have bowed her head; but, being young and confident, even though so extremely reasonable, Marion could not subdue herself to that better part.

"That was just what Matthew said—dangerous for a mixed congregation," she repeated; "the most of them just being bound by nature to the letter, and very matter-of-fact–"

"No doubt Matthew is a great authority," said Mrs. Buchanan, with a violent snap of her big scissors.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.