

Munro Neil

The Daft Days



Neil Munro
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CHAPTER I

The town's bell rang through the dark of the winter morning with queer little jolts and pauses, as if Wanton Wully Oliver, the ringer, had been jovial the night before. A blithe New-Year-time bell; a droll, daft, scatter-brained bell; it gave no horrid alarums, no solemn reminders that commonly toll from steeples and make good-fellows melancholy to think upon things undone, the brevity of days and years, the parting of good company, but a cheery ditty – “boom, boom, ding-a-dong boom, boom ding, hic, ding-dong,” infecting whoever heard it with a kind of foolish gaiety. The burgh town turned on its pillows, drew up its feet from the bed-bottles, last night hot, now turned to chilly stone, rubbed its eyes, and knew by that bell it was the daftest of the daft days come. It cast a merry spell on the community; it tickled them even in their cosy beds. “Wanton Wully's on the ran-dan!” said the folk, and rose quickly, and ran to pull aside screens and blinds to look out in the dark on window-ledges cushioned deep in snow. The children hugged themselves under the blankets, and told each other in whispers it was not a porridge morning, no, nor Sunday, but a breakfast of shortbread, ham and eggs; and

behold! a beautiful loud drum, careless as 'twere a reveille of hot wild youths, began to beat in a distant lane. Behind the house of Dyce the lawyer, a cock that must have been young and hearty crew like to burst; and at the stables of the post-office the man who housed his horses after bringing the morning mail through night and storm from a distant railway station sang a song, —

“A damsel possessed of great beauty
Stood near by her own father’s gate:
The gallant hussars were on duty;
To view them this maiden did wait.
Their horses were capering and prancing,
Their accoutrements shone like a star;
From the plains they were quickly advancing, —
She espied her own gallant hussar.”

“Mercy on us! six o’clock!” cried Miss Dyce, with a startled jump from her dreams to the floor of her bedroom. “Six o’clock on the New Year’s morning, and I’ll warrant that randy Kate is sound asleep yet,” she said, and quickly clad herself and went to the head of the stair and cried, “Kate, Kate! are ye up yet, Kate? Are ye hearing me, Kate MacNeill?”

From the cavern dark of the lower storey there came back no answer.

She stood with a curious twirly wooden candlestick in her hand in the midst of a house that was dead dumb and desperate dark, and smelled deliciously of things to eat. Even herself, who

had been at the making of most of them the day before, and had, by God's grace, still much of a child's appetite, could not but sniff with a childish satisfaction at this air of a celestial grocery – of plum-puddings and currant-buns, apples and oranges, cordials and spices, toffee and the angelic treacly sweet we call Black Man, – her face lit rosily by the candle lowe, a woman small and soft and sappy, with the most wanton reddish hair, and a briskness of body that showed no sign as yet of her accomplished years. What they were I will never tell you; but this I'll say, that even if they had been eighty she was the kind to cheerily dance quadrille. The daft bell, so plainly in the jovial mood of Wanton Wully Oliver, infected her: she smiled to herself in a way she had when remembering droll things or just for simple jollity, and whoever saw Bell Dyce smile to herself had never the least doubt after that she was a darling. Over the tenements of the town the song of the bell went rollicking, and in its hiccupping pauses went wonderfully another sound far, far removed in spirit and suggestion – the clang of wild geese calling: the “honk, honk” of the ganders and the challenge of their ladies come down adrift in the snow from the bitter north.

But there was no answer from the maid in the kitchen. She had rolled less deliberately than was usual from her blankets to the summons of the six o'clock bell, and already, with the kitchen window open, her bounteous form surged over the two sashes that were always so conveniently low and handy for a gossip with any friendly passer-by on the pavement. She drank the air of the

clean chill morning dark, a heady thing like old Tom Watson's autumn ale, full of the sentiment of the daft days. She tilted an ear to catch the tune of the mail-boy's song that now was echoing mellow from the cobwebbed gloom of the stable stalls, and making a snowball from the drift of the window-ledge she threw it, womanwise, aimlessly into the street with a pretence at combat. The chill of the snow stung sweet in the hot palm of her, for she was young and strong.

"Kate, you wretch!" cried a voice behind her. She drew in her head, to find her mistress in the kitchen with the candlestick in her hand.

"Oh, m'em," cried the maid, no way abashed, banging up the window and hurriedly crushing her more ample parts under the final hooks and eyes of her morning wrapper – "oh, m'em, what a start you gave me! I'm all in a p-p-palpitation. I was just takin' one mouthful of air and thinkin' to myself yonder in the Gaelic that it was time for me to be comin' in and risin' right."

"A Happy New Year to you, Kate MacNeill," said the mistress, taking her hand.

"Just that, just that! and the same to you yourself, Miss Dyce. I'm feeling fine; I'm that glad with everything," said the maid, in some confusion at this unusual relation with her mistress. She shook the proffered hand rapidly from side to side as if it were an egg-switch.

"And see and get the fires on quick now, like a good lass. It would never do to be starting the New Year late, – it would

be unlucky. I was crying to you yonder from the stair-head, and wondering if you were ill, that you did not answer me so quickly as you do for ordinar’.”

“Ill, Miss Dyce!” cried the maid astounded. “Do you think I’m daft to be ill on a New Year’s day?”

“After yon – after yon shortbread you ate yesterday I would not have wondered much if you were,” said Miss Dyce, shaking her head solemnly. “I’m not complaining, but, dear me! it was an awful lump; and I thought it would be a bonny-like thing too, if our first-foot had to be the doctor.”

“Doctor! I declare to goodness I never had need of a doctor to me since Dr Macphee in Colonsay put me in order with oil and things after I had the measles,” exclaimed the maid, as if mankind were like wag-at-the-wa’ clocks and could be guaranteed to go right for years if you blew through them with a pair of bellows, or touched their works with an oily feather.

“Never mind about the measles just now, Kate,” said Miss Dyce, with a meaning look at the blackout fire.

“Neither I was mindin’ them, m’em, – I don’t care a spittle for them; it’s so long ago I would not know them if I saw them; I was just – ”

“But get your fire on. You know we have a lot to do to-day to get everything nice and ready for my nephew who comes from America with the four o’clock coach.”

“America!” cried the maid, dropping a saucepan lid on the floor in her astonishment. “My stars! Did I not think it was from

Chickagoo?”

“And Chicago is in America, Kate,” said her mistress.

“Is it? is it? Mercy on me, how was Kate to know? I only got part of my education, – up to the place where you carry one and add ten. America! Dear me, just fancy! The very place that I’m so keen to go to. If I had the money, and was in America – ”

It was a familiar theme; Kate had not got fully started on it when her mistress fled from the kitchen and set briskly about her morning affairs.

And gradually the household of Dyce the lawyer awoke wholly to a day of unaccustomed stillness and sound, for the deep snow piled in the street and hushed the traffic of wheel, and hoof, and shoe, but otherwise the morning was cheerful with New Year’s day noise. For the bell-ringing of Wanton Wully was scarcely done, died down in a kind of brazen chuckle, and the “honk, honk” of the wild geese sped seaward over gardens and back lanes, strange wild music of the north, far-fetched and undomestic, – when the fife band shrilly tootled through the town to the tune of “Hey, Johnny Cope, are ye waukin’ yet?” Ah, they were the proud, proud men, their heads dizzy with glory and last night’s wine, their tread on air. John Taggart drummed – a mighty drummer, drunk or sober, who so loved his instrument he sometimes went to bed with it still fastened to his neck, and banged to-day like Banagher, who banged furiously, never minding the tune much, but happy if so be that he made noise enough. And the fifers were not long gone down the town, all with

the wrong step but Johnny Vicar, as his mother thought, when the snow was trampled under the feet of playing children, and women ran out of their houses, and crossed the street, some of them, I declare, to kiss each other, for 'tis a fashion lately come, and most genteel, grown wonderfully common in Scotland. Right down the middle of the town, with two small flags in his hat and holly in the lapel of his coat, went old Divine the hawker, with a great barrow of pure gold, crying "Fine Venetian oranges! wha'll buy sweet Venetian oranges? Nane o' your foreign trash. Oranges! Oranges! – rale New Year oranges, three a penny; bloods, a bawbee each!"

The shops opened just for an hour for fear anybody might want anything, and many there were, you may be sure, who did, for they had eaten and drunken everything provided the night before – which we call Hogmanay, – and now there were currant-loaves and sweet biscuits to buy; shortcake, sugar and lemons, ginger cordial for the boys and girls and United Presbyterians, boiled ham for country cousins who might come unexpected, and P. & A. MacGlashan's threepenny mutton-pies (twopence if you brought the ashet back), ordinarily only to be had on fair-days and on Saturdays, and far renowned for value.

Miss Minto's Millinery and Manteau Emporium was discovered at daylight to have magically outlined its doors and windows during the night with garlands and festoons of spruce and holly, whereon the white rose bloomed in snow; and Miss Minto herself, in a splendid crimson cloak down to the heels,

and cheeks like cherries, was standing with mittens and her five finger-rings on, in the middle door, saying in beautiful gentle English “A Happy New Year” to every one who passed – even to George Jordon, the common cowherd, who was always a little funny in his intellects, and, because his trousers were bell-mouthed and hid his feet, could never remember whether he was going to his work or coming from it, unless he consulted the Schoolmaster. “The same to you, m’em, excuse my hands,” said poor George, just touching the tips of her fingers. Then, because he had been stopped and slewed a little from his course, he just went back the way he had come.

Too late got up the red-faced sun, too late to laugh at Wanton Wully’s jovial bell, too late for Taggart’s mighty drumming, but a jolly winter sun, – ’twas all that was wanted among the chimneys to make the day complete.

First of all to rise in Dyce’s house, after the mistress and the maid, was the master, Daniel Dyce himself.

And now I will tell you all about Daniel Dyce: it is that behind his back he was known as Cheery Dan.

“Your bath is ready, Dan,” his sister had cried, and he rose and went with chattering teeth to it, looked at it a moment, and put a hand in the water. It was as cold as ice, because that water, drinking which, men never age, comes from high mountain bens.

“That for ye to-day!” said he to the bath, snapping his fingers. “I’ll see ye far enough first!” And contented himself with a slighter wash than usual, and shaving. As he shaved he hummed

all the time, as was his habit, an ancient air of his boyhood; to-day it was

“Star of Peace, to wanderers weary,”

with not much tone but a great conviction, – a tall, lean, clean-shaven man of over fifty, with a fine long nose, a ruddy cheek, keen grey eyes, and plenty of room in his clothes, the pockets of him so large and open it was no wonder so many people tried, as it were, to put their hands into them. And when he was dressed he did a droll thing, for from one of his pockets he took what hereabouts we call a pea-sling, that to the rest of the world is a catapult, and having shut one eye, and aimed with the weapon, and snapped the rubber several times with amazing gravity, he went upstairs into an attic and laid it on a table at the window with a pencilled note, in which he wrote —

A New Year's Day Present

for a Good Boy

from

An Uncle who does not like Cats

He looked round the little room that seemed very bright and cheerful, for its window gazed over the garden to the east and to the valley where was seen the King's highway. "Wonderful! wonderful!" he said to himself. "They have made an extraordinary job of it. Very nice indeed, but just a shade ladylike. A stirring boy would prefer fewer fal-lals."

There was little indeed to suggest the occupation of a stirring boy in that attic, with its draped dressing-table in lilac print, its looking-glass flounced in muslin and pink lover's-knots, its bower-like bed canopied and curtained with green lawn, its shy scent of pot-pourri and lavender. A framed text in crimson wools, the work of Bell Dyce when she was in Miss Mushet's seminary, hung over the mantelpiece enjoining all beholders to

Watch and Pray

Mr Dyce put both hands into his trousers pockets, bent a little, and heaved in a sort of chirruping laughter. “Man’s whole duty, according to Bell Dyce,” he said, “‘Watch and Pray’; but they do not need to have the lesson before them continually yonder in Chicago, I’ll warrant. Yon’s the place for watching, by all accounts, however it may be about the prayer. ‘Watch and Pray’ – h’m! It should be Watch *or* Pray – it clearly cannot be both at once with the world the way it is; you might as well expect a man to eat pease-meal and whistle strathspeys at the same time.”

He was humming “Star of Peace” – for the tune he started the morning with usually lasted him all day, – and standing in the middle of the floor contemplating with amusement the ladylike adornment of the room prepared for his Chicago nephew, when a light step fell on the attic stairs, and a woman’s voice cried, “Dan! Dan Dyce! Coo-ee!”

He did not answer.

She cried again after coming up a step or two more, but still he did not answer. He slid behind one of the bed-curtains.

CHAPTER II

Alison Dyce came lightly up the rest of the stair, whistling blithely, in spite of her sister Bell's old notion that whistling women and crowing hens are never canny. She swept into the room. People in the town – which has a forest of wood and deer behind it – used to say she had the tread and carriage of a young wild roe, and I can well assure you she was the girl to walk with on a winter day! She had in her hand a book of poems called 'The Golden Treasury' and a spray of the herb called Honesty, that thrives in poor men's gardens. Having laid them down on the table without noticing her brother's extraordinary Present for a Good Boy, she turned about and fondled things. She smoothed the bed-clothes as if they covered a child, she patted the chair-backs with an air of benediction, she took cushions to her breast like one that cuddled them, and when she touched the mantel-piece ornaments they could not help it but must start to chime. It was always a joy to see Alison Dyce redding-up, as we say; though in housewifery, like sewing, knitting, and cooking, she was only a poor second to her sister Bell. She tried, from duty, to like these occupations, but, oh dear! the task was beyond her: whatever she had learned from her schooling in Edinburgh and Brussels, it was not the darning of hose and the covering of rhubarb-tarts.

Her gift, said Bell, was management.

Tripping round the little attic, she came back by-and-by to the table at the window to take one last wee glimpse inside 'The Golden Treasury,' that was her own delight and her notion of happy half-hours for the ideal boy, and her eye fell for the first time on the pea-sling and the note beside it.

She read, and laughed, and upon my word, if laughter like Ailie Dyce's could be bought in perforated rolls, there would be no demand for Chopin and Schumann on the pianolas. It was a laugh that even her brother could not resist: a paroxysm of coughing burst from behind the curtains, and he came out beside her chuckling.

"I reckoned without my hoast," said he, gasping.

"I was sure you were upstairs," said Alison. "You silly man! Upon my word! Where's your dignity, Mr Dyce?"

Dan Dyce stood for a second a little bit abashed, rubbing his chin and blinking his eyes as if their fun was a thing to be kept from brimming over. "I'm a great wag!" said he. "If it's dignity you're after, just look at my velvet coat!" and so saying he caught the ends of his coat skirts with his fingers, held them out at arm's-length, and turned round as he might do at a fit-on in his tailor's, laughing till his hoast came on again. "Dignity, quo' she, just look at my velvet coat!"

"Dan, Dan! will you never be wise?" said Ailie Dyce, a humorsome demoiselle herself, if you believe me.

"Not if I keep my health," said he. "You have made a bonny-like show of the old garret, between the two of you. It's as smart

as a lass at her first ball.”

“I think it’s very nice; at least it might be worse,” interrupted Alison defensively, glancing round with satisfaction and an eye to the hang of the frame round “Watch and Pray.” Bell’s wool-work never agreed with her notions, but, as she knew that her tarts never agreed with Bell, she kept, on that point, aye discreetly dumb.

“Poor little Chicago!” said her brother. “I’m vexed for the wee fellow. Print chintz, or chint prints, or whatever it is; sampler texts, and scent, and poetry books – what in the world is the boy to break?”

“Oh, you have seen to that department, Dan!” said Ailie, taking the pea-sling again in her hand. “‘A New Year’s Day Present for a Good Boy from an Uncle who does not like Cats.’ I declare that *is* a delightful way of making the child feel quite at home at once.”

“Tuts! ’Tis just a diversion. I know it’ll cheer him wonderfully to find at the start that if there’s no young folk in the house there’s some of the eternal Prank. I suppose there are cats in Chicago. He cannot expect us to provide him with pigs, which are the usual domestic pets there, I believe. You let my pea-sling alone, Ailie; you’ll find it will please him more than all the poetry and pink bows. I was once a boy myself, and I know.”

“You were never anything else,” said Alison. “And never will be anything else. It is a pity to let the child see at the very start what an irresponsible person his uncle is; and besides, it’s cruel

to throw stones at cats.”

“Not at all, not at all!” said her brother briskly, with his head quizzically to the side a little, in a way he had when debating in the Court. “I have been throwing stones for twenty years at those cats of Rodger’s that live in our garden and I never hit one yet. They’re all about six inches too short for genuine sport. If cats were Dachshund dogs, and I wasn’t so fond of dogs, I would be deadly. But my ado with cats is just one of the manly old British sports, like trout-fishing and curling. You take your fun out in anticipation, and the only difference is you never need to carry a flask. Still, I’m not without hope that my nephew from Chicago may have a better aim than I have.”

“You are an old – an old goose, Dan Dyce, and a Happy New Year to you!” said his sister, putting her arms suddenly round his neck and kissing him.

“Tuts! the coming of that child’s ta’en your head,” said the brother, reddening, for sisters never kiss their own brothers in our part, – it’s so sentimental, it’s so like the penny stories. “A Good New Year to you, Ailie,” and “Tuts!” he said again, looking quite upset, till Ailie laughed and put her arm through his and drew him downstairs to the breakfast to which she had come to summon him.

The Chicago child’s bedroom, left to itself, chilly a bit like Highland weather, but honest and clean, looked more like a bower than ever: the morning sun, peeping over garden trees and the chimneys of the lanes, gazed particularly on the table where

the pea-sling and the poetry book lay together.

And now the town was thronged like a fair-day, with such stirring things happening every moment in the street that the servant, Kate, had a constant head out at the window, "putting by the time," as she explained to the passing inquirer, "till the Mustress would be ready for the breakfast." That was Kate, – she had come from an island where they make the most of everything that may be news, even if it's only brandy-sauce to pudding at the minister's; and Miss Dyce could not start cutting a new bodice or sewing a button on her brother's trousers but the maid billowed out upon the window-sash to tell the tidings to the first of her sex that passed.

Over the trodden snow she saw the people from the country crowd in their Sunday clothes, looking pretty early in the day for gaiety, all with scent on their handkerchiefs (which is the odour of festive days for a hundred miles round burgh towns); and town people, less splendid in attire, as folk that know the difference between a holiday and a Sabbath, and leave their religious hard hats at home on a New Year's day; children, too, replete with bun already, and all succulent with the juice of Divine's oranges. She heard the bell begin to peal again, for Wully Oliver – fie on Wully Oliver! – had been met by some boys who told him the six o'clock bell was not yet rung, and sent him back to perform an office he had done with hours before. He went to his bell dubiously, something in the dizzy abyss he called his mind that half convinced him he had rung it already.

“Let me pause and consider,” he said once or twice when being urged to the rope, scratching the hair behind his ears with both hands, his gesture of reflection. “Was there no’ a bairn – an auld-fashioned bairn – helped to ca’ the bell already, and wanted to gie me money for the chance? It runs in my mind there was a bairn, and that she had us aye boil-boiling away at eggs; but maybe I’m wrong, for I’ll admit I had a dram or two and lost the place. I don’t believe in dram-dram-dramming, but I aye say if you take a dram, take it in the morning and you get the good of it all day. It’s a tip I learned in the Crimea.” But at last they convinced him the bairn was just imagination, and Wanton Wully Oliver spat on his hands and grasped the rope, and so it happened that the morning bell on the New Year’s day on which my story opens was twice rung.

The Dyce handmaid heard it pealing as she hung over the window-sash with her cap agee on her head. She heard from every quarter – from lanes, closes, tavern rooms, high attics, and back-yards – fifes playing; it was as if she leaned over a magic grove of great big birds, each singing its own song – “Come to the Bower,” or “Monymusk,” or “The Girl I left Behind Me,” noble airs wherein the captain of the band looked for a certain perfection from his musicians before they marched out again at midday. “For,” said he often in rehearsals, “anything will do in the way of a tune in the dark, my sunny boys, but it must be the tiptop of skill, and no discordancy, when the eyes of the world are on us. One turn more at ‘Monymusk,’ sunny boys, and then

we'll have a skelp at yon tune of my own composure."

Besides the sound of the bell and the universal practice of the fifes there were loud vocalists at the Cross, and such laughter in the street that Kate was in an ecstasy. Once, uplifted beyond all private decorum, she kilted her gown and gave a step of a reel in her kitchen solitude.

"Isn't it cheery, the noise!" she exclaimed delightly to the letter-carrier who came to the window with the morning's letters. "Oh, I am feeling beautiful! It is – it is – it is just like being inside a pair of bagpipes."

He was a man who roared, the postman, being used to bawling up long common-stairs in the tenements for the people to come down to the foot themselves for their letters – a man with one roguish eye for the maiden and another at random. Passing in the letters one by one, he said in tones that on a quieter day might be heard half up the street, "Nothing for you, yourself, personally, Kate, but maybe there'll be one to-morrow. Three big blue anes and seven wee anes for the man o' business himsel', twa for Miss Dyce (she's the wonderfu' correspondent!), and ane for Miss Alison wi' the smell o' scented perfume on't – that'll be frae the Miss Birds o' Edinburgh. And I near forgot – here's a post-caird for Miss Dyce: hearken to this —

"Child arrived Liverpool yesterday; left this morning for Scotland. Quite safe to go alone, charge of conductor. Pip, pip! Molyneux."

"Whatna child is it, Kate?"

“Pip, pip!’ What in the world’s ‘Pip, pip’? The child is brother William’s child, to be sure,” said Kate, who always referred to the Dyce relations as if they were her own. “You have heard of brother William?”

“Him that was married on the play-actress and never wrote home?” shouted the letter-carrier. “He went away before my time. Go on; quick, for I’m in a desperate hurry this mornin’.”

“Well, he died abroad in Chickagoo. God have mercy on him dying so far away from home, and him without a word of Gaelic in his head! and a friend o’ his father ’s bringing the boy home to his aunties.”

“Where in the world’s Chickagoo?” bellowed the postman.

“In America, of course, – where else would it be but in America?” said Kate contemptuously. “Where is your education not to know that Chickagoo is in America, where the servant-maids have a pound a-week of wages, and learn the piano, and can get married when they like quite easy?”

“Bless me! do you say so?” cried the postman in amazement, and not without a pang of jealousy.

“Yes, I say so!” said Kate in the snappish style she often showed to the letter-carrier. “And the child is coming this very day with the coach-and-twice from Maryfield railway station – oh them trains! them trains! with their accidents; my heart is in my mouth to think of a child in them. Will you not come round to the back and get the Mustress’s New Year dram? She is going to give a New Year dram to every man that calls on business this

day. But I will not let you in, for it is in my mind that you would not be a lucky first-foot.”

“Much obleeged,” said the postman, “but ye needna be feared. I’m not allowed to go dramming at my duty. It’s offeecial, and I canna help it. If it was not offeecial, there’s few letter-carriers that wouldna need to hae iron hoops on their heids to keep their brains from burstin’ on the day efter New Year.”

Kate heard a voice behind her, and pulled her head in hurriedly with a gasp, and a cry of “Mercy, the start I got!” while the postman fled on his rounds. Miss Dyce stood behind, in the kitchen, indignant.

“You are a perfect heartbreak, Kate,” said the mistress. “I have rung for breakfast twice, and you never heard me, with your clattering out there to the letter-carrier. It’s a pity you cannot marry the glee party, as Mr Dyce calls him, and be done with it.”

“Me marry him!” cried the maid indignantly. “I think I see myself marryin’ a man like yon, and his eyes not neighbours.”

“That’s a trifle in a husband if his heart is good: the letter-carrier’s eyes may – may skew a little, but it’s not to be wondered at, considering the look-out he has to keep on all sides of him to keep out of reach of every trollop in the town who wants to marry him.”

And leaving Kate speechless at this accusation, the mistress of the house took the letters from her hands and went to the breakfast-table with them.

She had read the contents of the post-card before she reached

the parlour; its news dismayed her.

“Just imagine!” she cried. “Here’s that bairn on his way from Liverpool his lee-lone, and not a body with him!”

“What! what!” cried Mr Dyce, whose eyes had been shut to say the grace. “Isn’t that actor-fellow, Molyneux, coming with him, as he promised?”

Miss Dyce sunk in a chair and burst into tears, crushing the post-card in her hand.

“What does he say?” demanded her brother.

“He says – he says – oh, dear me! – he says ‘Pip, pip!’” quoth the weeping sister.

CHAPTER III

“I misdoubted Mr Molyneux from the very first,” said Ailie, turning as white as a clout. “From all his post-cards he was plainly too casual. Stop it, Bell, my dear – have sense; the child’s in a Christian land, and in care of somebody who is probably more dependable than this delightful Molyneux.”

Mr Dyce took out an old, thick, silver verge. “Nine o’clock,” he said, with a glance at its creamy countenance. “Molyneux’s consignment is making his first acquaintance with Scottish scenery and finding himself, I hope, amused at the Edinburgh accent. He’ll arrive at Maryfield – poor wee smout! – at three; if I drive over at twelve, I’ll be in time to meet him. Tuts, Bell, give over; he’s a ten-year-old and a Dyce at that, – there’s not the slightest fear of him.”

“Ten years old, and in a foreign country – if you can call Scotland a foreign country,” cried Miss Dyce, still sobbing with anger and grief. “Oh, the cat-witted scamp, that Molyneux, – if I had him here!”

The dining-room door opened and let in a yawning dog of most plebeian aspect, longest lie-abed of the household, the clamour of the street, and the sound of sizzling bacon, followed by Kate’s majestic form at a stately glide, because she had on her new stiff lilac print that was worn for breakfast only on Sundays and holidays. “You would think I was never coming,” she said

genially, and smiled widely as she put the tray on the sideboard. This that I show you, I fear, is a beggarly household, absurdly free from ceremony. Mr Dyce looked at his sister Ailie and smiled; Ailie looked at her sister Bell and smiled. Bell took a hairpin or two out of their places and seemed to stab herself with them viciously in the nape of the neck, and smiled not at all nor said anything, for she was furious with Molyneux, whom she could see in her mind's eye – an ugly, tippling, frowsy-looking person with badly polished boots, an impression that would have greatly amused Mrs Molyneux, who, not without reason, counted her Jim the handsomest man and the best dressed in the profession in all Chicago.

“I’m long of coming, like Royal Charlie,” Kate proceeded, as she passed the ashets on to Miss Dyce; “but, oh me! New Year’s day here is no’ like New Year’s day in the bonny isle of Colonsay.”

Mr Dyce said grace and abstractedly helped himself alternately from both ends of a new roll of powdered butter. “Dan, dear, don’t take the butter from both ends, – it spoils the look,” said Bell.

“Tuts!” said he. “What’s the odds? There’ll be no ends at all when we’re done with it. I’m utterly regardless of the symmetrical and the beautiful this morning. I’m savage to think of that man Molyneux. If I was not a man of peace I would be wanting to wring Mr Molyneux’s neck,” and he twisted his morning roll in halves with ferocious hands.

“Dan!” said Ailie, shocked. “I never heard you say anything so bloodthirsty in all my life before. I would never have thought it of you.”

“Maybe not,” he said. “There’s many things about me you never suspected. You women are always under delusions about the men – about the men – well, dash it! about the men you like. I know myself so well that there is no sin, short of one or two not so accounted, that I cannot think myself capable of. I believe I might be forced into robbing a kirk if I had no money and was as hungry as I was this morning before that post-card came to ruin a remarkably fine New-Year’s-day appetite, or even into murdering a man like Molyneux who failed in the simplest duties no man should neglect.”

“I hope and trust,” said Bell, still nervous, “that he is a wiselike boy with a proper upbringing, who will not be frightened at travelling and make no mistakes about the train. If he was a Scotch laddie, with the fear of God in him, I would not be a bit put about for him, for he would be sure to be asking, asking, and if he felt frightened he would just start and eat something, like a Christian. But this poor child has no advantages. Just American!”

Ailie sat back in her chair, with her teacup in her hand, and laughed, and Kate laughed quietly – though it beat her to see where the fun was; and the dog laughed likewise – at least it wagged its tail and twisted its body and made such extraordinary sounds in its throat that you could say it was laughing.

“Tuts! you are the droll woman, Bell,” said Mr Dyce, blinking

at her. "You have the daftest ideas of some things. For a woman who spent so long a time in Miss Mushet's seminary and reads so much at the newspapers, I wonder at you."

"Of course his father was Scotch, that's one mercy," added Bell, not a bit annoyed at the reception of her pious opinions.

"That is always something to be going on with," said Mr Dyce mockingly. "I hope he'll make the most of that great start in life and fortune. It's as good as money in his pocket."

Bell put up a tiny hand and pushed a stray curl (for she had a rebel chevelure) behind her ear, and smiled in spite of her anxiety about the coming nephew. "You may laugh if you like, Dan," she said emphatically, perking with her head across the table at him; "but I'm *proud*, I'm PROUD, I'm PROUD I'm Scotch." ("Not apologising for it myself," said her brother softly.) "And you know what these Americans are! Useless bodies, who make their men brush their own boots, and have to pay wages that's a sin to housemaids, and eat pie even-on."

"Dear me! is that true, or did you see it in a newspaper?" said her brother. "I begin to be alarmed myself at the possibilities of this small gentleman now on his way to the north, in the complete confidence of Mr Molyneux, who must think him very clever. It's a land of infant prodigies he comes from; even at the age of ten he may have more of the stars and stripes in him than we can eradicate by a diet of porridge and a curriculum of Shorter Catechism and Jane Porter's 'Scottish Chiefs.' Faith, I was fond of Jane myself when I read her first: she was nice and bloody.

A big soft hat with a bash in it, perhaps; a rhetorical delivery at the nose, 'I guess and calculate' every now and then; a habit of chewing tobacco" ("We'll need a cuspidor," said Ailie *sotto voce*); "and a revolver in his wee hip-pocket. Oh, the darling! I can see him quite plainly."

"Mercy on us!" cried the maid Kate, and fled the room all in a tremor at the idea of the revolver.

"You may say what you like, but I cannot get over his being an American," said Bell solemnly. "The dollar's everything in America, and they're so independent!"

"Terrible! terrible!" said her brother ironically, breaking into another egg fiercely with his knife, as if he were decapitating the President of the United States.

Ailie laughed again. "Dear, dear Bell!" she said, "it sounds quite Scotch. A devotion to the dollar is a good sound basis for a Scotch character. Remember there are about a hundred bawbees in a dollar: just think of the dollar in bawbees, and you'll not be surprised that the Americans prize it so much."

"Renegade!" said Bell, shaking a spoon at her.

"Provincial!" retorted Ailie, shaking a fork at Bell.

"Star of Peace, to wanderers weary,
Bright the beams that shine on me,'

– children, be quiet," half-sung, half-said their brother. "Bell, you are a blether; Ailie, you are a cosmopolitan, a thing accursed.

That's what Edinburgh and Brussels and your too brisk head have done for you. Just bring yourself to our poor parochial point of view, and tell me, both of you, what you propose to do with this young gentleman from Chicago when you get him."

"Change his stockings and give him a good tea," said Bell promptly, as if she had been planning it for weeks. "He'll be starving of hunger and damp with snow."

"There's something more than dry hose and high tea to the making of a man," said her brother. "You can't keep that up for a dozen years."

"Oh, you mean education!" said Bell resignedly. "That's not in my department at all."

Ailie expressed her views with calm, soft deliberation, as if she, too, had been thinking of nothing else for weeks, which was partly the case. "I suppose," she said, "he'll go to the Grammar School, and get a good grounding on the classic side, and then to the University. I will just love to help him so long as he's at the Grammar School. That's what I should have been, Dan, if you had let me – a teacher. I hope he's a bright boy, for I simply cannot stand what Bell calls – calls –"

"Diffies," suggested Bell.

"Diffies; yes, I can *not* stand diffies. Being half a Dyce I can hardly think he will be a diffy. If he's the least like his father, he may be a little wild at first, but at least he'll be good company, which makes up for a lot, and good-hearted, quick in perception, fearless, and –"

“And awful funny,” suggested Bell, beaming with old, fond, glad recollections of the brother dead beside his actor wife in far Chicago.

“Fearless, and good fun,” continued Ailie. “Oh, dear Will! what a merry soul he was. Well, the child cannot be a fool if he’s like his father. American independence, though he has it in – in – in clods, won’t do him any harm at all. I love Americans – do you hear that, Bell Dyce? – because they beat that stupid old King George, and have been brave in the forest and wise on the prairie, and feared no face of king, and laughed at dynasties. I love them because they gave me Emerson, and Whitman, and Thoreau, and because one of them married my brother William, and was the mother of his child.”

Dan Dyce nodded; he never quizzed his sister Ailie when it was her heart that spoke and her eyes were sparkling.

“The first thing you should learn him,” said Miss Dyce, “is ‘God save the Queen.’ It’s a splendid song altogether; I’m glad I’m of a kingdom every time I hear it at a meeting, for it’s all that’s left of the olden notions the Dyces died young or lost their money for. You’ll learn him that, Ailie, or I’ll be very vexed with you. I’ll put flesh on his bones with my cooking if you put the gentleman in him.”

It was Bell’s idea that a gentleman talked a very fine English accent like Ailie, and carried himself stately like Ailie, and had wise and witty talk for rich or poor like Ailie.

“I’m not so sure about the university,” she went on. “Such

stirks come out of it sometimes; look at poor Maclean, the minister! They tell me he could speak Hebrew if he got anybody to speak it back slow to him, but just imagine the way he puts on his clothes! And his wife manages him not so bad in broad Scotch. I think we could do nothing better than make the boy a lawyer; it's a trade looked up to, and there's money in it, though I never could see the need of law myself if folk would only be agreeable. He could go into Dan's office whenever he is old enough."

"A lawyer!" cried her brother. "You have first of all to see that he's not an ass."

"And what odds would that make to a lawyer?" said Bell quickly, snapping her eyes at the brother she honestly thought the wisest man in Scotland.

"Bell," said he, "as I said before, you're a haivering body – nothing else, though I'll grant you bake no' a bad scone. And as for you, Ailie, you're beginning, like most women, at the wrong end. The first thing to do with your nephew is to teach him to be happy, for it's a habit that has to be acquired early, like the liking for pease-brose."

"You began gey early yourself," said Bell. "Mother used to say that she was aye kittling your feet till you laughed when you were a baby. I sometimes think that she did not stop it soon enough."

"If I had to educate myself again, and had not a living to make, I would leave out a good many things the old dominie thought needful. What was yon awful thing again? – mensuration.

To sleep well and eat anything, fear the face of nobody in bashfulness, to like dancing, and be able to sing a good bass or tenor, – that’s no bad beginning in the art of life. There’s a fellow Brodie yonder in the kirk choir who seems to me happier than a king when he’s getting in a fine boom-boom of bass to the tune Devizes; he puts me all out at my devotions on a Lord’s day with envy of his accomplishment.”

“What! envy too!” said Alison. “Murder, theft, and envy – what a brother!”

“Yes, envy too, the commonest and ugliest of our sins,” said Mr Dyce. “I never met man or woman who lacked it, though many never know they have it. I hope the great thing is to be ashamed to feel it, for that’s all that I can boast of myself. When I was a boy at the school there was another boy, a great friend of my own, was chosen to compete for a prize I was thought incapable of taking, so that I was not on the list. I envied him to hatred – almost; and saying my bits of prayers at night I prayed that he might win. I felt ashamed of my envy, and set the better Daniel Dyce to wrestle with the Daniel Dyce who was not quite so big. It was a sair fight, I can assure you. I found the words of my prayer and my wishes considerably at variance – ”

“Like me and ‘Thy will be done’ when we got the word of brother William,” said Bell.

“But my friend – dash him! – got the prize. I suppose God took a kind of vizzy down that night and saw the better Dan Dyce was doing his desperate best against the other devil’s-Dan, who

mumbled the prayer on the chance He would never notice. There was no other way of accounting for it, for that confounded boy got the prize, and he was not half so clever as myself, and that was Alick Maitland. Say nothing about envy, Ailie; I fear we all have some of it until we are perhaps well up in years, and understand that between the things we envy and the luck we have there is not much to choose. If I got all I wanted, myself, the world would have to be much enlarged. It does not matter a docken leaf. Well, as I was saying when my learned friend interrupted me, I would have this young fellow healthy and happy and interested in everything. There are men I see who would mope and weary in the middle of a country fair – God help them! I want to stick pins in them sometimes and make them jump. They take as little interest in life as if they were undertakers.”

“Hoots! nobody could weary in this place at any rate,” said Bell briskly. “Look at the life and gaiety that’s in it. Talk about London! I can hardly get my sleep at night quite often with the traffic. And such things are always happening in it – births and marriages, engagements and tea-parties, new patterns at Miss Minto’s, two coaches in the day, and sometimes somebody doing something silly that will keep you laughing half the week.”

“But it’s not quite so lively as Chicago,” said Mr Dyce. “There has not been a man shot in this neighbourhood since the tinker kind of killed his wife (as the fiscal says) with the pistol. You’ll have heard of him? When the man was being brought on the scaffold for it, and the minister asked if he had anything to say

before he suffered the extreme penalty of the law, ‘All I have got to say,’ he answered, starting to greet, ‘is that this’ll be an awful lesson to me.’”

“That’s one of your old ones,” said Bell; but even an old one was welcome in Dyce’s house on New Year’s day, and the three of them laughed at the story as if it had newly come from London in Ailie’s precious ‘Punch.’ The dog fell into a convulsion of merriment, as if inward chuckles tormented him – as queer a dog as ever was, neither Scotch terrier nor Skye, Dandy Dinmont nor Dachshund, but just dog, – dark wire-haired behind, short ruddy-haired in front, a stump tail, a face so fringed you could only see its eyes when the wind blew. Mr Dyce put down his hand and scratched it behind the ear. “Don’t laugh, Footles,” he said. “I would not laugh if I were you, Footles, – it’s just an old one. Many a time you’ve heard it before, sly rogue. One would think you wanted to borrow money.” If you could hear Dan Dyce speak to his dog, you would know at once he was a bachelor: only bachelors and bairnless men know dogs.

“I hope and trust he’ll have decent clothes to wear, and none of their American rubbish,” broke in Bell, back to her nephew again. “It’s all nonsense about the bashed hat; but you can never tell what way an American play-actor will dress a bairn: there’s sure to be something daft-like about him – a starry waistcoat or a pair of spats, – and we must make him respectable like other boys in the place.”

“I would say Norfolk suits, the same as the banker’s boys,”

suggested Ailie. "I think the banker's boys always look so smart and neat."

"Anything with plenty of pockets in it," said Mr Dyce. "At the age of ten a boy would prefer his clothes to be all pockets. By George! an entire suit of pockets, with a new penny in every pocket for luck, would be a great treat," – and he chuckled at the idea, making a mental note of it for a future occasion.

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Bell emphatically, for here she was in her own department. "The boy is going to be a Scotch boy. I'll have the kilt on him, or nothing."

"The kilt!" said Mr Dyce.

"The kilt!" cried Ailie.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

It was a loud knocking at the front door. They stopped the talk to listen, and they heard the maid go along the lobby from the kitchen. When she opened the door, there came in the cheerful discord of the street, the sound of a pounding drum, the fifes still busy, the orange-hawker's cry, but over all they heard her put her usual interrogation to visitors, no matter what their state or elegance.

"Well, what is't?" she asked, and though they could not see her, they knew she would have the door just a trifle open, with her shoulder against it, as if she was there to repel some chieftain of a wild invading clan. Then they heard her cry, "Mercy on me!" and her footsteps hurrying to the parlour door. She threw it open, and stood with some one behind her.

“What do you think? Here’s brother William’s wean!” she exclaimed in a gasp.

“My God! Where is he?” cried Bell, the first to find her tongue. “He’s no hurt, is he?”

“*It’s no’ a him at all – it’s a her!*” shrieked Kate, throwing up her arms in consternation, and stepping aside she gave admission to a little girl.

CHAPTER IV

The orphan child of William and Mary Dyce, dead, the pair of them, in the far-off city of Chicago, stepped quite serenely into an astounded company. There were three Dyces in a row in front of her, and the droll dog Footles at her feet, and behind her, Kate, the servant, wringing her apron as if it had newly come from the washing-boyne, her bosom heaving. Ten eyes (if you could count the dog's, hidden by his tousy fringe) stared at the child a moment, and any ordinary child would have been much put out; but this was no common child, or else she felt at once the fond kind air of home. I will give you her picture in a sentence or two. She was black-haired, dark and quick in the eye, not quite pale but olive in complexion, with a chin she held well up, and a countenance neither shy nor bold, but self-possessed. Fur on her neck and hood (Jim Molyneux's last gift), and a muff that held her arms up to the elbows, gave her an aspect of picture-book cosiness that put the maid in mind at once of the butcher's Christmas calendar.

It was the dog that first got over the astonishment: he made a dive at her with little friendly growls, and rolled on his back at her feet, to paddle with his four paws in the air, which was his way of showing he was in the key for fun.

With a cry of glee she threw the muff on the floor and plumped beside him, put her arms about his body and buried her

face in his fringe. His tail went waving, joyous, like a banner. “Doggie, doggie, you love me,” said she in an accent that was anything but American. “Let us pause and consider, – you will not leave this house till I boil you an egg.”

“God bless me, what child’s this?” cried Bell, coming to herself with a start, and, pouncing on her, she lifted her to her feet. Ailie sank on her hands and knees and stared in the visitor’s face. “The kilt, indeed!” said Mr Dyce to himself. “This must be a warlock wean, for if it has not got the voice and sentiment of Wanton Wully Oliver I’m losing my wits.”

“Tell me this, quick, are you Lennox Dyce?” said Bell all trembling, devouring the little one with her eyes.

“Well, I just guess I am,” replied the child calmly, with the dog licking her chin. “Say, are you Auntie Bell?” and this time there was no doubt about the American accent. Up went her mouth to them to be kissed, composedly: they lost no time, but fell upon her, Ailie half in tears because at once she saw below the childish hood so much of brother William.

“Lennox, dear, you should not speak like that; who in all the world taught you to speak like that?” said Bell, unwrapping her.

“Why, I thought that was all right here,” said the stranger. “That’s the way the bell-man speaks.”

“Bless me! Do you know the bell-man?” cried Miss Dyce.

“I rang his old bell for him this morning – didn’t you hear me?” was the surprising answer. “He’s a nice man; he liked me. I’d like him too if he wasn’t so tired. He was too tired to speak sense; all

he would say was, 'I've lost the place; let us pause and consider,' and 'Try another egg.' I said I would give him a quarter if he'd let me ring his bell, and he said he'd let me do it for nothing, and my breakfast besides. 'You'll not leave this house till I boil an egg for you' – that's what he said, and the poor man was so tired and his legs were dreff'le poorly!" Again her voice was the voice of Wully Oliver; the sentiment, as the Dyces knew, was the slogan of his convivial hospitality.

"The kilt, indeed!" said Mr Dyce, feeling extraordinarily foolish, and, walking past them, he went upstairs and hurriedly put the pea-sling in his pocket.

When he came down, Young America was indifferently pecking at her second breakfast with Footles on her knee, an aunt on either side of her, and the maid Kate with a tray in her hand for excuse, open-mouthed, half in at the door.

"Well, as I was saying, Jim – that's my dear Mr Molyneux, you know – got busy with a lot of the boys once he landed off that old ship, and so he said, 'Bud, this is the – the – justly cel'brated Great Britain; I know by the boys; they're so lonely when they're by themselves; I was 'prehesive we might have missed it in the dark, but it's all right.' And next day he bought me this muff and things and put me on the cars – say, what funny cars you have! – and said 'Good-bye, Bud; just go right up to Maryfield, and change there. If you're lost anywhere on the island just holler out good and loud, and I'll hear!' He pretended he wasn't caring, but he was pretty blinky 'bout the eyes, and I saw he wasn't anyway gay,

so I never let on the way I felt myself.”

She suggested the tone and manner of the absent Molyneux in a fashion to put him in the flesh before them. Kate almost laughed loud out at the oddity of it; Ailie and her brother were astounded at the cleverness of the mimicry; Bell clenched her hands, and said for the second time that day, “Oh! that Molyneux, if I had him!”

“He’s a nice man, Jim. I can’t tell you how I love him – and he gave me heaps of candy at the depot,” proceeded the unabashed new-comer. “‘Change at Edinburgh,’ he said; ‘you’ll maybe have time to run into the Castle and see the Duke; give him my love, but not my address. When you get to Maryfield hop out slick and ask for your uncle Dyce.’ And then he said, did Jim, ‘I hope he ain’t a loaded Dyce, seein’ he’s Scotch, and it’s the festive season.’”

“The adorable Jim!” said Ailie. “We might have known.”

“I got on all right,” proceeded the child, “but I didn’t see the Duke of Edinburgh; there wasn’t time, and uncle wasn’t at Maryfield, but a man put me on his mail carriage and drove me right here. He said I was a caution. My! it was cold. Say, is it always weather like this here?”

“Sometimes it’s like this, and sometimes it’s just ordinary Scotch weather,” said Mr Dyce, twinkling at her through his spectacles.

“I was dreff’le sleepy in the mail, and the driver wrapped me up, and when I came into this town in the dark he said, ‘Walk

right down there and rap at the first door you see with a brass man's hand for a knocker; that's Mr Dyce's house.' I came down, and there wasn't any brass man, but I saw the knocker. I couldn't reach up to it, so when I saw a man going into the church with a lantern in his hand, I went up to him and pulled his coat. I knew he'd be all right going into a church. He told me he was going to ring the bell, and I said I'd give him a quarter – oh, I said that before. When the bell was finished he took me to his house for luck – that was what he said – and he and his wife got right up and boiled eggs. They said I was a caution, too, and they went on boiling eggs, and I couldn't eat more than two and a white though I tried *and* tried. I think I slept a good while in their house; I was so fatigued, and they were all right; they loved me, I could see that. And I liked them some myself, though they must be mighty poor, for they haven't any children. Then the bell-man took me to this house, and rapped at the door, and went away pretty quick for him before anybody came to it, because he said he was plain-soled – what's plain-soled anyhow? – and wasn't a lucky first-foot on a New Year's morning.”

“It beats all, that's what it does!” cried Bell. “My poor wee whitterick! Were ye no' frightened on the sea?”

“Whitterick, whitterick,” repeated the child to herself, and Ailie, noticing, was glad that this was certainly not a diffy. Diffies never interest themselves in new words; diffies never go inside themselves with a new fact as a dog goes under a table with a bone.

“Were you not frightened when you were on the sea?” repeated Bell.

“No,” said the child promptly. “Jim was there all right, you see, and he knew all about it. He said, ‘Trust in Providence, and if it’s *very* stormy, trust in Providence and the Scotch captain.’”

“I declare! the creature must have some kind of sense in him, too,” said Bell, a little mollified by this compliment to Scotch sea-captains. And all the Dyces fed their eyes upon this wonderful wean that had fallen among them. ’Twas happy in that hour with them; as if in a miracle they had been remitted to their own young years; their dwelling was at long last furnished! She had got into the good graces of Footles as if she had known him all her life.

“Say, uncle, this is a funny dog,” was her next remark. “Did God make him?”

“Well – yes, I suppose God did,” said Mr Dyce, taken a bit aback.

“Well, isn’t He the darndest! This dog beats Mrs Molyneux’s Dodo, and Dodo was a looloo. What sort of a dog is he? Scotch terrier?”

“Mostly not,” said her uncle, chuckling. “It’s really an improvement on the Scotch terrier. There’s later patents in him, you might say. He’s a sort of mosaic; indeed, when I think of it you might describe him as a pure mosaic dog.”

“A Mosaic dog!” exclaimed Lennox. “Then he must have come from scriptural parts. Perhaps I’ll get playing with him

Sundays. Not playing loud out, you know, but just being happy. I love being happy, don't you?"

"It's my only weakness," said Mr Dyce emphatically, blinking through his glasses. "The other business men in the town don't approve of me for it; they call it frivolity. But it comes so easily to me I never charge it in the bills, though a sense of humour should certainly be worth 12s. 6d. a smile in the Table of Fees. It would save many a costly plea."

"Didn't you play on Sunday in Chicago?" asked Ailie.

"Not out loud. Poppa said he was bound to have me Scotch in one thing at least, even if it took a strap. That was after mother died. He'd just read to me Sundays, and we went to church till we had pins and needles. We had the Reverend Ebenezer Paul Frazer, M.A., Presbyterian Church on the Front. He just preached and preached till we had pins and needles all over."

"My poor Lennox!" exclaimed Ailie, with feeling.

"Oh, I'm all right!" said young America blithely. "I'm not kicking."

Dan Dyce, with his head to the side, took off his spectacles and rubbed them clean with his handkerchief; put them on again, looked at his niece through them, and then at Ailie, with some emotion struggling in his countenance. Ailie for a moment suppressed some inward convulsion, and turned her gaze, embarrassed from him to Bell, and Bell catching the eyes of both of them could contain her joy no longer. They laughed till the tears came, and none more heartily than brother William's

child. She had so sweet a laugh that there and then the Dyces thought it the loveliest sound they had ever heard in their house. Her aunts would have devoured her with caresses. Her uncle stood over her and beamed, rubbing his hands, expectant every moment of another manifestation of the oddest kind of child mind he had ever encountered. And Kate swept out and in between the parlour and the kitchen on trivial excuses, generally with something to eat for the child, who had eaten so much in the house of Wanton Wully Oliver that she was indifferent to the rarest delicacies of Bell's celestial grocery.

"You're just – just a wee witch!" said Bell, fondling the child's hair. "Do you know, that man Molyneux – "

"Jim," suggested Lennox.

"I would Jim him if I had him! That man Molyneux in all his scrimping little letters never said whether you were a boy or a girl, and we thought a Lennox was bound to be a boy, and all this time we have been expecting a boy."

"I declare!" said the little one, with the most amusing drawl, a memory of Molyneux. "Why, I always was a girl, far back as I can remember. Nobody never gave me the chance to be a boy. I s'pose I hadn't the clothes for the part, and they just pushed me along anyhow in frocks. Would you'd rather I was a boy?"

"Not a bit! We have one in the house already, and he's a fair heart-break," said her aunt, with a look towards Mr Dyce. "We had just made up our minds to dress you in the kilt when your rap came to the door. At least, I had made up my mind; the others

are so thrawn! And bless me! lassie, where's your luggage? You surely did not come all the way from Chicago with no more than what you have on your back?"

"You'll be tickled to death to see my trunks!" said Lennox. "I've heaps and heaps of clothes and six dolls. They're all coming with the coach. They wanted me to wait for the coach too, but the mail man who called me a caution said he was bound to have a passenger for luck on New Year's day, and I was in a hurry to get home anyway."

"Home!" When she said that, the two aunts swept on her like a billow and bore her, dog and all, upstairs to her room. She was almost blind for want of sleep. They hovered over her quick-fingered, airy as bees, stripping her for bed. She knelt a moment and in one breath said —

"God — bless — father — and — mother — and — Jim — and — Mrs Molyneux — and — my — aunts — in — Scotland — and — Uncle — Dan — and — everybody — good-night"

And was asleep in the sunlight of the room as soon as her head fell on the pillow.

"She prayed for her father and mother," whispered Bell, with Footles in her arms, as they stood beside the bed. "It's not — it's not quite Presbyterian to pray for the dead; it's very American, indeed you might call it papist."

Ailie's face reddened, but she said nothing.

"And do you know this?" said Bell shamefacedly, "I do it myself; upon my word, I do it myself. I'm often praying for father

and mother and William.”

“So am I,” confessed Alison, plainly relieved. “I’m afraid I’m a poor Presbyterian, for I never knew there was anything wrong in doing so.”

Below, in the parlour, Mr Dyce stood looking into the white garden, a contented man, humming —

“Star of Peace, to wanderers weary.”

CHAPTER V

She was a lucky lassie, this of ours, to have come home to her father's Scotland on that New Year's day, for there is no denying that it is not always gay in Scotland, contrairy land, that, whether we be deep down in the waist of the world and afar from her, or lying on her breast, chains us to her with links of iron and gold, – stern tasks and happy days remembered, ancient stories, austerity and freedom, cold weather on moor and glen, warm hearths and burning hearts. She might have seen this burgh first in its solemnity, on one of the winter days when it shivers and weeps among its old memorials, and the wild geese cry more constant over the house-tops, and the sodden gardens, lanes, wynds, and wells, the clanging spirits of old citizens dead and gone, haunting the place of their follies and their good times, their ridiculous ideals, their mistaken ambitions, their broken plans. Ah, wild geese! wild geese! old ghosts that cry to-night above my dwelling, I feel – I feel and know! She might have come, the child, to days of fast, and sombre dark drugget garments, dissonant harsh competing kettle bells, or spoiled harvests, poor fishings, hungry hours. It was good for her, and it is the making of my story, that she came not then, but with the pure white cheerful snow, to ring the burgh bell in her childish escapade, and usher in with merriment the New Year, and begin her new life happily in the old world.

She woke at noon among the scented curtains, in linen sea-breeze bleached, under the camceil roof that all children love, for it makes a garret like the ancestral cave, and in rainy weather they can hear the pattering feet of foes above them. She heard the sound of John Taggart's drum, and the fifying of "Happy we've been a' thegether," and turning, found upon her pillow a sleeping doll that woke whenever she raised it up, and stared at her in wonderment.

"Oh! – Oh! – Oh! you roly-poley blonde!" cried the child in ecstasy, hugging it to her bosom and covering it with kisses. "I'm as glad as anything. Do you see the lovely little room? I'll tell you right here what your name is: it's Alison; no, it's Bell; no, it's Alibel for your two just lovely, lovely aunties."

Up she rose, sleep banished, with a sense of cheerfulness and expectation, nimbly dressed herself, and slid down the banisters to tumble plump at the feet of her Auntie Bell in the lobby.

"Mercy on us! You'll break your neck; are you hurt?" cried Aunt Bell. "I'm not kicking," said the child, and the dog waved furiously a gladsome tail. A log fire blazed and crackled and hissed in the parlour, and Mr Dyce tapped time with his fingers on a chair-back to an internal hymn.

"My! ain't I the naughty girl to be snoozling away like a gopher in a hole all day? Your clock's stopped, Uncle Dan."

Mr Dyce looked very guilty, and coughed, rubbing his chin. "You're a noticing creature," said he. "I declare it *has* stopped. Well, well!" and his sister Bell plainly enjoyed some amusing

secret.

“Your uncle is always a little daft, my dear,” she said.

“I would rather be daft than dismal,” he retorted, cleaning his glasses.

“It’s a singular thing that the clocks in our lobby and parlour always stop on the New Year’s day, Lennox.”

“Bud; please, say Bud,” pleaded the little one. “Nobody ever calls me Lennox ’cept when I’m doing something wrong and almost going to get a whipping.”

“Very well, Bud, then. This clock gets something wrong with it every New Year’s day, for your uncle, that man there, wants the folk who call never to know the time so that they’ll bide the longer.”

“Tuts!” said Uncle Dan, who had thought this was his own particular recipe for joviality, and that they had never discovered it.

“You have come to a hospitable town, Bud,” said Ailie. “There are convivial old gentlemen on the other side of the street who have got up a petition to the magistrates to shut up the inn and the public-house in the afternoon. They say it is in the interests of temperance, but it’s really to compel their convivial friends to visit themselves.”

“I signed it myself,” confessed Mr Dyce, “and I’m only half convivial. I’m not bragging; I might have been more convivial if it didn’t so easily give me a sore head. What’s more cheerful than a crowd in the house and the clash going? A fine fire, a good

light, and turn about at a story! The happiest time I ever had in my life was when I broke my leg; so many folk called, it was like a month of New Year's days. I was born with a craving for company. Mother used to have a superstition that if a knife or spoon dropped on the floor from the table it betokened a visitor, and I used to drop them by the dozen. But, dear me! here's a wean with a doll, and where in the world did she get it?"

Bud, with the doll under one arm and the dog tucked under the other, laughed up in his face with shy perception.

"Oh, you funny man!" she exclaimed. "I guess you know all right who put Alibel on my pillow. Why! I could have told you were a doll man: I noticed you turning over the pennies in your pants' pocket, same as poppa used when he saw any nice clean little girl like me, and he was the dolliest man in all Chicago. Why, there was treasury days when he just rained dolls."

"That was William, sure enough," said Mr Dyce. "There's no need for showing us your strawberry mark. It was certainly William. If it had only been dolls!"

"Her name's Alibel, for her two aunties," said the child.

"Tuts!" said Mr Dyce. "If I had thought you meant to honour them that way I would have made her twins. But you see I did not know; it was a delicate transaction as it was. I could not tell very well whether a doll or a – a – or a fountain pen would be the most appropriate present for a ten-year-old niece from Chicago, and I risked the doll. I hope it fits."

"Like a halo. It's just sweet!" said the ecstatic maiden, and

rescued one of its limbs from the gorge of Footles.

It got about the town that to Dyces' house had come a wonderful American child who talked language like a minister: the news was partly the news of the mail-driver and Wully Oliver, but mostly the news of Kate, who, from the moment Lennox had been taken from her presence and put to bed, had dwelt upon the window-sashes, letting no one pass that side of the street without her confidence.

“You never heard the like! No' the size of a shillin's worth of ha'pennies, and she came all the way by her lee-lone in the coach from Chickagoo, – that's in America. There's to be throng times in this house now, I'm tellin' you, with brother William's wean.”

As the forenoon advanced Kate's intelligence grew more surprising: to the new-comer were ascribed a score of characteristics such as had never been seen in the town before. For one thing (would Kate assure them), she could imitate Wully Oliver till you almost saw whiskers on her and could smell the dram. She was thought to be a boy to start with, but that was only their ignorance in Chickagoo, for the girl was really a lassie, and had kists of lassie's clothes coming with the coach.

The Dyces' foreigner was such a grand sensation that it marred the splendour of the afternoon band parade, though John Taggart was unusually glorious, walking on the very backs of his heels, his nose in the heavens, and his drumsticks soaring and circling over his head in a way to make the spectators giddy. Instead of following the band till its *répertoire* was suddenly done at five

minutes to twelve at the door of Maggie White, the wine and spirit merchant, there were many that hung about the street in the hope of seeing the American. They thought they would know her at once by the colour of her skin, which some said would be yellow, and others maintained would be brown. A few less patient and more privileged boldly visited the house of Dyce to make their New Year compliments and see the wonder for themselves.

The American had her eye on them.

She had her eye on the Sheriff's lady, who was so determinedly affable, so pleased with everything the family of Dyce might say, do, or possess, and only five times ventured to indicate there were others, by a mention of "the dear Lady Anne – so nice, so simple, so unaffected, so amiable."

On Miss Minto of the crimson cloak, who kept her deaf ear to the sisters and her good one to their brother, and laughed heartily at all his little jokes even before they were half made, or looked at him with large, soft, melting eyes and her lips apart, which her glass had told her was an aspect ravishing. The sisters smiled at each other when she had gone and looked comically at Dan, but he, poor man, saw nothing but just that Mary Minto was a good deal fatter than she used to be.

On the doctor's two sisters, late come from a farm in the country, marvellously at ease so long as the conversation abode in gossip about the neighbours, but in a silent terror when it rose from persons to ideas, as it once had done when Lady Anne had asked them what they thought of didactic poetry, and one of them

said it was a thing she was very fond of, and then fell in a swoond.

On the banker man, the teller, who was in hopeless love with Ailie, as was plain from the way he devoted himself to Bell.

On Mr Dyce's old retired partner, Mr Cleland, who smelt of cloves and did not care for tea.

On P. & A. MacGlashan, who had come in specially to see if the stranger knew his brother Albert, who, he said, was "in a Somewhere-ville in Manitoba."

On the Provost and his lady, who were very old, and petted each other when they thought themselves unobserved.

On the soft, kind, simple, content and happy ladies lately married.

On the others who would like to be.

Yes, Bud had her eye on them all. They never guessed how much they entertained her as they genteelly sipped their tea, or wine, or ginger cordial, – the women of them, – or coughed a little too artificially over the New Year glass, – the men.

"Wee Pawkie, that's what she is – just Wee Pawkie!" said the Provost when he got out, and so far it summed up everything.

The ladies could not tear away home fast enough to see if they had not a remnant of cloth that could be made into such a lovely dress as that of Dyce's niece for one of their own children. "Mark my words!" they said – "that child will be ruined between them. She's her father's image, and he went and married a poor play-actress, and stayed a dozen years away from Scotland, and never wrote home a line."

So many people came to the house, plainly for no reason but to see the new-comer, that Ailie at last made up her mind to satisfy all by taking her out for a walk. The strange thing was that in the street the populace displayed indifference or blindness. Bud might have seen no more sign of interest in her than the hurried glance of a passer-by; no step slowed to show that the most was being made of the opportunity. There had been some women at their windows when she came out of the house sturdily walking by Aunt Ailie's side, with her hands in her muff, and her keen black eyes peeping from under the fur of her hood; but these women drew in their heads immediately. Ailie, who knew her native town, was conscious that from behind the curtains the scrutiny was keen. She smiled to herself as she walked demurely down the street.

“Do you feel anything, Bud?” she asked.

Bud naturally failed to comprehend.

“You ought to feel something at your back; I'm ticklish all down the back because of a hundred eyes.”

“I know,” said the astounding child. “They think we don't notice, but I guess God sees them,” and yet she had apparently never glanced at the windows herself, nor looked round to discover passers-by staring over their shoulders at her aunt and her.

For a moment Ailie felt afraid. She dearly loved a quick perception, but it was a gift, she felt, a niece might have too young.

“How in the world did you know that, Bud?” she asked.

“I just guessed they’d be doing it,” said Bud, “‘cause it’s what I would do if I saw a little girl from Scotland walking down the lake front in Chicago. Is it dre’ffle rude, Aunt Ailie?”

“So they say, so they say,” said her aunt, looking straight forward, with her shoulders back and her eyes level, flushing at the temples. “But I’m afraid we can’t help it. It’s undignified – to be seen doing it. I can see you’re a real Dyce, Bud. The other people who are not Dyces lose a great deal of fun. Do you know, child, I think you and I are going to be great friends – you and I and Aunt Bell and Uncle Dan.”

“And the Mosaic dog,” added Bud with warmth. “I love that old dog so much that I could – I could eat him. He’s the becomingest dog! Why, here he is!” And it was indeed Footles who hurled himself at them, a rapturous mass of unkempt hair and convulsive barkings, having escaped from the imprisonment of Kate’s kitchen by climbing over her shoulders and out across the window-sash.

CHAPTER VI

“I heard all about you and Auntie Bell and Uncle Dan from pop – from father,” said Bud, as they walked back to the house. She had learned already from example how sweeter sounded “father” than the term she had used in America. “He was mighty apt to sit up nights talking about you all. But I don’t quite place Kate: he never mentioned Kate.”

“Oh, she’s a new addition,” explained Ailie. “Kate is the maid, you know: she came to us long after your father left home, but she’s been with us five years now, and that’s long enough to make her one of the family.”

“My! Five years! She ain’t – she isn’t much of a quitter, is she? I guess you must have tacked her down,” said Bud. “You don’t get helps in Chicago to linger round the dear old spot like that; they get all hot running from base to base, same as if it was a game of ball. But she’s a pretty – pretty broad girl, isn’t she? She couldn’t run very fast; that’ll be the way she stays.”

Ailie smiled. “Ah! So that’s Chicago, too, is it? You must have been in the parlour a good many times at five-o’clock tea to have grasped the situation at your age. I suppose your Chicago ladies lower the temperature of their tea weeping into it the woes they have about their domestics? It’s another Anglo-Saxon link.”

“Mrs Jim said sensible girls that would stay long enough to cool down after the last dash were getting that scarce you had to

go out after them with a gun. You didn't really, you know; that was just Mrs Jim's way of putting it."

"I understand," said Alison, unable to hide her amusement. "You seem to have picked up that way of putting it yourself."

"Am I speaking slang?" asked the child, glancing up quickly and reddening. "Father pro – prosisted I wasn't to speak slang nor chew gum; he said it was things no real lady would do in the old country, and that I was to be a well-off English undefied. You must be dre'ffle shocked, Auntie Ailie?"

"Oh no," said Ailie cheerfully; "I never was shocked in all my life, though they say I'm a shocker myself. I'm only surprised a little at the possibilities of the English language. I've hardly heard you use a word of slang yet, and still you scarcely speak a sentence in which there's not some novelty. It's like Kate's first attempt at sheep's-head broth: we were familiar with all the ingredients except the horns, and we knew them elsewhere."

"That's all right, then," said Bud, relieved. "But Mrs Jim had funny ways of putting things, and I s'pose I picked them up. I can't help it – I pick up so fast. Why, I had scarletina twice! and I picked up her way of zaggerating: often I zaggerate dre'ffle, and say I wrote all the works of Shakespeare, when I really didn't, you know. Mrs Jim didn't mean that she had to go out hunting for helps with a gun; all she meant was that they were getting harder and harder to get, and mighty hard to keep when you got them."

"I know," said Alison. "It's an old British story; you'll hear it often from our visitors, if you're spared. But we're lucky with our

Kate; we seem to give her complete satisfaction, or, at all events, she puts up with us. When she feels she can't put up with us any longer, she hurls herself on the morning newspaper to look at the advertisements for ladies' maids and housekeepers with £50 a-year, and makes up her mind to apply at once, but can never find a pen that suits her before we make her laugh. The servant in the house of Dyce who laughs is lost. You'll like Kate, Bud. We like her; and I notice that if you like anybody they generally like you back."

"I'm so glad," said Bud with enthusiasm. "If there's one thing under the canopy I am, I'm a liker."

They had reached the door of the house without seeing the slightest sign that the burgh was interested in them, but they were no sooner in than a hundred tongues were discussing the appearance of the little American. Ailie took off Bud's cloak and hood, and pushed her into the kitchen, with a whisper to her that she was to make Kate's acquaintance, and be sure and praise her scones, then left her and flew upstairs, with a pleasant sense of personal good-luck. It was so sweet to know that brother William's child was anything but a diffy.

Bud stood for a moment in the kitchen, bashful, for it must not be supposed she lacked a childish shyness. Kate, toasting bread at the fire, turned round and felt a little blate herself, but smiled at her, such a fine expansive smile, it was bound to put the child at ease. "Come away in, my dear, and take a bite," said the maid. It is so they greet you – simple folk! – in the isle of Colonsay.

The night was coming on, once more with snowy feathers. Wanton Wully lit the town. He went from lamp to lamp with a ladder, children in his train chanting and he expostulating with "I know you fine, the whole of you; at least I know the boys. Stop you till I see your mothers!" Miss Minto's shop was open, and shamefaced lads went dubiously in to buy ladies' white gloves, for with gloves they tryst their partners here at New Year balls, and to-night was Samson's fiddle giggling at the inn. The long tenement lands, as flat and high as cliffs, and built for all eternity, at first dark grey in the dusk, began to glow in every window, and down the stairs and from the closes flowed exceeding cheerful sounds. Green fires of wood and coal sent up a cloud above these dwellings, tea-kettles jigged, and sang. A thousand things were happening in the street, but for once the maid of Colonsay restrained her interest in the window. "Tell me this, what did you say your name was?" she asked.

"Leerie, leerie, light the lamps,
Long legs and crooked shanks!" —

"I'm Miss Lennox Brenton Dyce," said Bud primly, "but the Miss don't amount to much till I'm old enough to get my hair up."

"You must be tired coming so far. All the way from that Chickagoo!"

"Chicago," suggested Bud politely.

"Just that! Chickagoo or Chicago, it depends on the way

you spell it,” said Kate readily. “I was brought up to call it Chickagoo. What a length to come on New Year’s day! Were you not frightened? Try one of them brown biscuits. And how are they all keeping in America?”

She asked the question with such tender solicitude that Bud saw no humour in it, and answered gravely —

“Pretty spry, thank you. Have you been there?”

“Me!” cried Kate, with her bosom heaving at the very thought. Then her Highland vanity came to her rescue. “No,” she said, “I have not been exactly what you might call altogether there, but I had a cousin that started for Australia, and got the length of Paisley. It’ll be a big place America? Put butter on it.”

“The United States of America are bounded on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, on the west by the Pacific, on the south by Mexico and the Gulf, and on the north by an imaginary line called Canada. The State of New York alone is as large as England,” said Bud glibly, repeating a familiar lesson.

“What a size!” cried Kate. “Take another of them brown biscuits. Scotland’s not slack neither for size; there’s Glasgow and Oban, and Colonsay and Stornoway. There’ll not be hills in America?”

“There’s no hills, just mountains,” said Bud. “The chief mountain ranges are the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghanies. They’re about the biggest mountains in the world.”

“Talking about big things, look at the big pennyworth of milk we get here,” said Kate, producing a can: it was almost the last

ditch of her national pride.

The child looked gravely into the can, and then glanced shrewdly at the maid.

“It isn’t a pennyworth,” said she sharply, “it’s twopence worth.”

“My stars! how did you know that?” said Kate, much taken aback.

“Cause you’re bragging. Think I don’t know when anybody’s bragging?” said Bud. “And when a body brags about a place or anything, they zaggerate, and just about double things.”

“You’re not canny,” said Kate, thrusting the milk-can back hastily on the kitchen dresser. “Don’t spare the butter on your biscuit. They tell me there’s plenty of money in America. I would not wonder, eh?”

“Why, everybody’s got money to throw at the birds there,” said Bud, with some of the accent as well as the favourite phrase of Jim Molyneux.

“They have little to do; forbye, it’s cruelty. Mind you, there’s plenty of money here too; your uncle has a desperate lot of it. He was wanting to go away to America and bring you home whenever he heard – whenever he heard – Will you not try another of them biscuits? It will do you no harm.”

“I know,” said Bud gravely, – “whenever he heard about my father being dead.”

“I think we’re sometimes very stupid, us from Colonsay,” said the maid regretfully. “I should have kept my mouth shut about

your father. Take *two* biscuits, my dear; or maybe you would rather have short-cake. Yes, he was for going there and then – even if it cost a pound, I daresay, – but changed his mind when he heard yon man Molyneux was bringing you.”

Footles, snug in the child’s lap, shared the biscuits and barked for more.

“I love little Footles,
His coat is so warm,
And if I don’t tease him
He’ll do me no harm,”

said Bud, burying her head in his mane.

“Good Lord! did you make that yourself, or just keep mind of it?” asked the astounded Kate.

“I made it just right here,” said Bud coolly. “Didn’t you know I could make poetry? Why, you poor perishing soul, I’m just a regular wee – wee whitterick at poetry! It goes sloshing round in my head, and it’s simply pie for me to make it. Here’s another —

‘Lives of great men oft remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.’

I just dash them off. I guess I’ll have to get up bright and early to-morrow and touch that one up some. Mostly you can’t make

them good the first try, and then you're bound to go all over them from the beginning and put the good in here and there. That's art, Jim says. He knew an artist who'd finish a picture with everything quite plain about it, and then say, 'Now for the Art!' and fuzz it all with a hard brush."

"My stars! what things you know!" exclaimed the maid. "You're clever – tremendous clever! What's your age?"

"I was born mighty well near ten years ago," said Bud, as if she were a centenarian.

Now it is not wise to tell a child like Lennox Dyce that she is clever, though a maid from Colonsay could scarcely be expected to know that. Till Bud had landed on the British shore she had no reason to think herself anything out of the ordinary. Jim Molyneux and his wife, with no children of their own, and no knowledge of children except the elderly kind that play in theatres, had treated her like a person little younger than themselves, and saw no marvel in her quickness, that is common enough with Young America. But Bud, from Maryfield to her uncle's door, had been a "caution" to the plainly admiring mail-driver; a kind of fairy princess to Wanton Wully Oliver and his wife; the surprise of her aunts had been only half concealed, and here was the maid in an undisguised enchantment! The vanity of ten-year-old was stimulated; for the first time in her life she felt decidedly superior.

"It was very brave of me to come all this way in a ship at ten years old," she proceeded.

“I once came to Oban along with a steamer myself,” said Kate, “but och, that’s nothing, for I knew a lot of the drovers. Just fancy you coming from America! Were you not lonely?”

“I was dre’ffle lonely,” said Bud, who, in fact, had never known a moment’s dullness across the whole Atlantic. “There was I leaving my native land, perhaps never to set eyes on its shores evermore, and coming to a far country I didn’t know the least thing about. I was leaving all my dear young friends, and the beautiful Mrs Molyneux, and her faithful dog Dodo, and – ” here she squeezed a tear from her eyes, and stopped to think of circumstances even more touching.

“My poor wee hen!” cried Kate, distressed. “Don’t you greet, and I’ll buy you something.”

“And I didn’t know what sort of uncle and aunties they might be here, – whether they’d be cruel and wicked or not, or whether they’d keep me or not. Little girls most always have cruel uncles and aunties – you can see that in the books.”

“You were awful stupid about that bit of it,” said the maid emphatically. “I’m sure anybody could have told you about Mr Dyce and his sisters.”

“And then it was so stormy,” proceeded Bud quickly, in search of more moving considerations. “I made a poem about that too, – I just dashed it off; the first verse goes —

‘The breaking waves dashed high
On a stern and rock-bound coast –’

but I forget the rest, 'cept that

‘ – they come to wither there
Away from their childhood’s land.’

The waves were mountains high, and whirled over the deck, and – ”

“My goodness, you would get all wet!” said Kate, putting her hand on Bud’s shoulder to feel if she were dry yet. Honest tears were in her own eyes at the thought of such distressing affairs.

“The ship at last struck on a rock,” proceeded Bud, “so the captain lashed me – ”

“I would lash him, the villain!” cried the indignant maid.

“I don’t mean that; he tied me – that’s lash in books – to the mast, and then – and then – well, then we waited calmly for the end,” said Bud, at the last of her resources for ocean tragedy.

Kate’s tears were streaming down her cheeks, at this conjured vision of youth in dire distress. “Oh dear! oh dear! my poor wee hen!” she sobbed. “I’m so sorry for you.”

“Bud! coo-ie! coo-ie!” came the voice of Aunt Ailie along the lobby, but Bud was so entranced with the effect of her imaginings that she paid no heed, and Kate’s head was wrapped in her apron.

“Don’t cry, Kate; I wouldn’t cry if I was you,” said the child at last, soothingly. “Maybe it’s not true.”

“I’ll greet if I like,” insisted the maid. “Fancy you in that awful shipwreck! It’s enough to scare anybody from going anywhere.

Oh dear! oh dear!” and she wept more copiously than ever.

“Don’t cry,” said Bud again. “It’s silly to drizzle like that. Why, great Queen of Sheba! I was only joshing you: it was as calm on that ship as a milk sociable.”

Kate drew down the apron from her face and stared at her. Her meaning was only half plain, but it was a relief to know that things had not been quite so bad as she first depicted them. “A body’s the better of a bit greet, whiles,” she said philosophically, drying her eyes.

“That’s what I say,” agreed Bud. “That’s why I told you all that. Do you know, child, I think you and I are going to be great friends.” She said this with the very tone and manner of Alison, whose words they were to herself, and turned round hastily and embarrassed at a laugh behind her to find her Aunt had heard herself thus early imitated.

CHAPTER VII

If Molyneux, the actor, was to blame for sending this child of ten on her journey into Scotland without convoy, how much worse was his offence that he sent no hint of her character to the house of Dyce? She was like the carpet-bag George Jordon found at the inn door one day without a name on it, and saying "There's nothing like thrift in a family," took home immediately, to lament over for a week because he had not the key to open it. There should have been a key to Lennox Brenton Dyce, but Molyneux, a man of post-cards and curt and cryptic epistles generally, never thought of that, so that it took some days for the folk she came among to pick the lock. There was fun in the process, it cannot be denied, but that was because the Dyces were the Dyces; had they been many another folk she might have been a mystery for years, and in the long-run spoiled completely. Her mother had been a thousand women in her time, – heroines good and evil, fairies, princesses, paupers, maidens, mothers, shy and bold, plain or beautiful, young or old, as the play of the week demanded, – a play-actress, in a word. And now she was dead and buried, the bright white lights on her no more, the music and the cheering done. But not all dead and buried, for some of her was in her child.

Bud was born a mimic. I tell you this at once, because so many inconsistencies will be found in her I should otherwise look

foolish to present her portrait for a piece of veritable life. Not a mimic of voice and manner only, but a mimic of people's minds, so that for long – until the climax came that was to change her when she found herself – she was the echo and reflection of the last person she spoke with. She borrowed minds and gestures as later she borrowed Grandma Buntain's pelerine and bonnet. She could be all men and all women except the plainly dull or wicked, – but only on each occasion for a little while; by-and-by she was herself again.

And so it was that for a day or two she played with the phrase and accent of Wanton Wully Oliver, or startled her aunts with an unconscious rendering of Kate's Highland accent, her "My stars!" and "Mercy me's!" and "My wee hens!"

The daft days (as we call New Year time) passed – the days of careless merriment, that were but the start of Bud's daft days, that last with all of us for years if we are lucky. The town was settling down; the schools were opening on Han'sel Monday, and Bud was going – not to the Grammar School after all, but to the Pigeons' Seminary. Have patience, and by-and-by I will tell about the Pigeons.

Bell had been appalled to find the child, at the age of ten, apparently incredibly neglected in her education.

"Of course you would be at some sort of school yonder in America?" she had said at an early opportunity, not hoping for much, but ready to learn of some hedgerow academy in spite of all the papers said of Yales and Harvards and the like.

“No, I never was at school; I was just going when father died,” said Bud, sitting on a sofa, wrapt in a cloak of Ailie’s, feeling extremely tall and beautiful and old.

“What! Do you sit there and tell me they did not send you to school?” cried her aunt, so stunned that the child delighted in her power to startle and amaze. “That’s America for you! Ten years old, and not the length of your alphabets, – it’s what one might expect from a heathen land of niggers, and lynchers, and presidents. I was the best sewer and speller in Miss Mushet’s long before I was ten. My lassie, let me tell you you have come to a country where you’ll get your education! We would make you take it at its best if we had to live on meal. Look at your Auntie Ailie – French and German, and a hand like copperplate; it’s a treat to see her at the old scrutoire, no way put about, composing. Just goes at it like lightning! I do declare if your Uncle Dan was done, Ailie could carry on the business, all except the aliments and sequestrations. It beats all! Ten years old and not to know the A B C!”

“Oh, but I do,” said Bud quickly. “I learned the alphabet off the play-bills, – the big G’s first, because there’s so many Greats and Grands and Gorgeouses in them. And then Mrs Molyneux used to let me try to read Jim’s press notices. She read them first every morning sitting up in bed at breakfast, and said, ‘My! wasn’t he a great man?’ and then she’d cry a little, ’cause he never got justice from the managers, for they were all mean and jealous of him. Then she’d spray herself with the Peau d’espagne and

eat a cracker. And the best papers there was in the land said the part of the butler in the second act was well filled by Mister Jim Molyneux; or among others in a fine cast were J. Molyneux, Ralph Devereux, and O. G. Tarpoll.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, my poor wee whitterick; but it’s all haivers,” said Miss Bell. “Can you spell?”

“If the words are not too big, or silly ones where it’s ‘ei’ or ‘ie,’ and you have to guess,” said Bud.

“Spell cat.”

Bud stared at her incredulously.

“Spell cat,” repeated her aunt.

“K-a-t-t,” said Bud (oh, naughty Bud!).

“Mercy!” cried Bell with horrified hands in the air. “Off you pack to-morrow to the Seminary. I wouldn’t wonder if you did not know a single word of the Shorter Catechism. Perhaps they have not such a thing in that awful heathen land you came from?”

Bud could honestly say she had never heard of the Shorter Catechism.

“My poor neglected bairn,” said her aunt piteously, “you’re sitting there in the dark with no conviction of sin, and nothing bothering you, and you might be dead to-morrow! Mind this, that ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.’ Say that.”

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever,” repeated Bud obediently, rolling her r’s and looking solemn like her aunt.

“Did you ever hear of Robert Bruce, him that watched the spiders?”

Here, too, the naughty Bud protested ignorance.

“He was the saviour of his country,” said Bell. “Mind that!”

“Why, Auntie, I thought it was George Washington,” said Bud, surprised. “I guess if you’re looking for a little wee stupid, it’s me.”

“We’re talking about Scotland,” said Miss Bell severely. “He saved Scotland. It was well worth while! Can you do your sums?”

“I can *not*,” said Bud emphatically. “I hate them.”

Miss Bell said not a word more; she was too distressed at such confessed benightedness; but she went out of the parlour to search for Ailie. Bud forgot she was beautiful and tall and old in Ailie’s cloak; she was repeating to herself Man’s Chief End with rolling r’s, and firmly fixing in her memory the fact that Robert Bruce, not George Washington, was the saviour of his country and watched spiders.

Ailie was out, and so her sister found no ear for her bewailings over the child’s neglected education till Mr Dyce came in humming the tune of the day – “Sweet Afton” – to change his hat for one more becoming to a sitting of the Sheriff Court. He was searching for his good one in what he was used to call “the piety press,” for there was hung his Sunday clothes, when Bell distressfully informed him that the child could not so much as spell cat.

“Nonsense I don’t believe it,” said he. “That would be very

unlike our William.”

“It’s true, – I tried her myself!” said Bell. “She was never at a school: isn’t it just deplorable?”

“H’m!” said Mr Dyce, “it depends on the way you look at it, Bell.”

“She does not know a word of her Catechism, nor the name of Robert Bruce, and says she hates counting.”

“Hates counting!” repeated Mr Dyce, wonderfully cheering up, “that’s hopeful; it reminds me of myself. Forbye its gey like brother William. His way of counting was ‘£1.10. in my pocket, £2 that I’m owing some one, and 10s. I get to-morrow – that’s £5 I have; what will I buy you now?’ The worst of arithmetic is that it leaves nothing to the imagination. Two and two’s four and you’re done with it; there’s no scope for either fun or fancy as there might be if the two and two went courting in the dark and swapped their partners by an accident.”

“I wish you would go in and speak to her,” said Bell, distressed still, “and tell her what a lot she has to learn.”

“What, me!” cried Uncle Dan – “excuse my grammar,” and he laughed. “It’s an imprudent kind of mission for a man with all his knowledge in little patches. I have a lot to learn, myself, Bell; it takes me all my time to keep the folk I meet from finding out the fact.”

But he went in humming, Bell behind him, and found the child still practising Man’s Chief End, so engrossed in the exercise she never heard him enter. He crept behind her, and put his hands

over her eyes.

“Guess who,” said he, in a shrill falsetto.

“It’s Robert Bruce,” said Bud, without moving.

“No, – cold – cold! – guess again,” said her uncle, growling like Giant Blunderbore.

“I’ll mention no names,” said she, “but it’s mighty like Uncle Dan.”

He stood in front of her and put on a serious face,

“What’s this I am hearing, Miss Lennox,” said he, “about a little girl who doesn’t know a lot of things nice little girls ought to know?”

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever,” repeated Bud reflectively. “I’ve got that all right, but what does it mean?”

“What does it mean?” said Mr Dyce, a bit taken aback. “You tell her, Bell; what does it mean? I must not be late for the court.”

“You’re far cleverer than I am,” said Bell. “Tell her yourself.”

“It means,” said Daniel Dyce the lawyer, seating himself on the sofa beside his niece, “that man in himself is a gey poor soul, no’ worth a pin, though he’s apt to think the world was made for his personal satisfaction. At the best he’s but an instrument – a harp of a thousand strings God bends to hear in His leisure. He made that harp – the heart and mind of man – when He was in a happy hour. Strings hale and strings broken, strings slack or tight, there are all kinds of them; the best we can do’s to be taut and trembling for the gladness of God Who loves fine music,

and set the stars themselves to singing from the very day He put them birling in the void. To glorify's to wonder and adore, and who keeps the wondering humble heart, the adoring eye, is to God pleasing exceedingly. Sing, lassie, sing, sing, sing, inside ye, even if ye are as timmer as a cask. God knows I have not much of a voice myself, but I'm full of nobler airs than ever crossed my rusty thrapple. To be grateful always, and glad things are no worse, is a good song to start the morning."

"Ah, but sin, Dan, sin!" said Bell, sighing, for she always feared her own light-heartedness. "We may be too joco."

"Say ye so?" he cried, turning to his sister with a flame upon his visage. "By the heavens above us, no! Sin might have been eternal; each abominable thought might have kept in our minds, constant day and night from the moment that it bred there; the theft we did might keep everlastingly our hand in our neighbour's kist as in a trap; the knife we thrust with might have kept us thrusting for ever and for ever. But no, – God's good! sleep comes, and the clean morning, and the morning is Christ, and every moment of time is a new opportunity to amend. It is not sin that is eternal, it is righteousness, and peace. Joco! We cannot be too joco, having our inheritance."

He stopped suddenly, warned by a glance of his sister's, and turned to look in his niece's face to find bewilderment there. The mood that was not often published by Dan Dyce left him in a flash, and he laughed and put his arms round her.

"I hope you're a lot wiser for my sermon, Bud," said he; "I can

see you have pins and needles worse than under the Reverend Mr Frazer on the Front. What's the American for haivers – for foolish speeches?"

"Hot air," said Bud promptly.

"Good!" said Dan Dyce, rubbing his hands together. "What I'm saying may seem just hot air to you, but it's meant. You do not know the Shorter Catechism; never mind; there's a lot of it I'm afraid I do not know myself; but the whole of it is in that first answer to Man's Chief End. Reading and writing, and all the rest of it, are of less importance, but I'll not deny they're gey and handy. You're no Dyce if you don't master them easily enough."

He kissed her and got gaily up and turned to go. "Now," said he, "for the law, seeing we're done with the gospels. I'm a conveyancing lawyer – though you'll not know what that means – so mind me in your prayers."

Bell went out into the lobby after him, leaving Bud in a curious frame of mind, for Man's Chief End, and Bruce's spider, and the word "joco," all tumbled about in her, demanding mastery.

"Little help I got from you, Dan!" said Bell to her brother. "You never even tried her with a multiplication table."

"What's seven times nine?" he asked her, with his fingers on the handle of the outer door, his eyes mockingly mischievous.

She flushed, and laughed, and pushed him on the shoulder. "Go away with you!" said she. "Fine you ken I could never mind seven times!"

"No Dyce ever could," said he, – "excepting Ailie. Get her

to put the little creature through her tests. If she's not able to spell cat at ten she'll be an astounding woman by the time she's twenty."

The end of it was that Aunt Ailie, whenever she came in, upon Bell's report, went over the street to Rodger's shop and made a purchase. As she hurried back with it, bare-headed, in a cool drizzle of rain that jewelled her wonderful hair, she felt like a child herself again. The banker-man saw her from his lodging as she flew across the street with sparkling eyes and eager lips, the roses on her cheeks, and was sure, foolish man! that she had been for a new novel or maybe a cosmetique, since in Rodger's shop they sell books and balms and ointments. She made the quiet street magnificent for a second – a poor wee second, and then, for him, the sun went down. The tap of the knocker on the door she closed behind her struck him on the heart. You may guess, good women, if you like, that at the end of the book the banker-man is to marry Ailie, but you'll be wrong; she was not thinking of the man at all at all – she had more to do; she was hurrying to open the gate of gold to her little niece.

"I've brought you something wonderful," said she to the child – "better than dolls, better than my cloak, better than everything; guess what it is."

Bud wrinkled her brows. "Ah, dear!" she sighed, "we may be too joco! And I'm to sing, sing, sing even if I'm as – timmer as a cask, and Robert Bruce is the saviour of his country." She marched across the room, trailing Ailie's cloak with her, in an

absurd caricature of Bell's brisk manner. Yet not so much the actress engrossed in her performance, but what she tried to get a glimpse of what her aunt concealed.

"You need not try to see it," said Ailie, smiling, with the secret in her breast. "You must honestly guess."

"Better'n dolls and candies, oh, my!" said Bud; "I hope it's not the Shorter Catechism," she concluded, looking so grave that her aunt laughed.

"It's not the Catechism," said Ailie; "try again. Oh, but you'll never guess! It's a key."

"A key?" repeated Bud, plainly cast down.

"A gold key," said her aunt.

"What for?" asked Bud.

Ailie sat herself down on the floor and drew the child upon her knees. She had a way of doing that which made her look like a lass in her teens; indeed, it was most pleasing if the banker-man could just have seen it! "A gold key," she repeated, lovingly, in Bud's ear. "A key to a garden – the loveliest garden, with flowers that last the whole year round. You can pluck and pluck at them and they're never a single one the less. Better than sweet peas! But that's not all, there's a big garden-party to be at it –"

"My! I guess I'll put on my best glad rags," said Bud. "And the hat with pink." Then a fear came to her face. "Why, Aunt Ailie, you can't have a garden-party this time of the year," and she looked at the window down whose panes the rain was now streaming.

“This garden-party goes on all the time,” said Ailie. “Who cares about the weather? Only very old people; not you and I. I’ll introduce you to a lot of nice people – Di Vernon, and – you don’t happen to know a lady called Di Vernon, do you, Bud?”

“I wouldn’t know her if she was handed to me on a plate with parsley trimmings,” said Bud promptly.

“ – Di Vernon, then, and Effie Deans, and Little Nell, and the Marchioness; and Richard Swiveller, and Tom Pinch, and the Cranford folks, and Juliet Capulet – ”

“She must belong to one of the first families,” said Bud. “I have a kind of idea that I have heard of her.”

“And Mr Falstaff – such a naughty man, but nice too! And Rosalind.”

“Rosalind!” cried Bud. “You mean Rosalind in ‘As You Like It’?”

Ailie stared at her with astonishment. “You amazing child!” said she, “who told you about ‘As You Like It’?”

“Nobody told me; I just read about her when Jim was learning the part of Charles the Wrestler he played on six ’secutive nights in the Waldorf.”

“Read it!” exclaimed her aunt. “You mean he or Mrs Molyneux read it to you.”

“No, I read it myself,” said Bud.

“Now my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods

More free from peril than the envious Court?”

She threw Aunt Ailie’s cloak over one shoulder, put forth a ridiculously little leg with an air of the playhouse, and made the gestures of Jim Molyneux.

“I thought you couldn’t read,” said Ailie. “You little fraud! You made Aunt Bell think you couldn’t spell cat.”

“Oh, Queen of Sheba! did she think I was in earnest?” cried Bud. “I was just pretending. I’m apt to be pretending pretty often; why, Kate thinks I make Works. I can read anything; I’ve read books that big it gave you cramp. I s’pose you were only making-believe about that garden, and you haven’t any key at all, but I don’t mind; I’m not kicking.”

Ailie put her hand to her bosom and revealed the Twopenny she had bought to be the key to the wonderful garden of letters – the slim little grey-paper-covered primer in which she had learned her own first lessons. She held it up between her finger and thumb that Bud might read its title on the cover. Bud understood immediately and laughed, but not quite at her ease for once.

“I’m dre’ffle sorry, Aunt Ailie,” she said. “It was wicked to pretend just like that, and put you to a lot of trouble. Father wouldn’t have liked that.”

“Oh, I’m not kicking,” said Ailie, borrowing her phrase to put her at her ease again. “I’m too glad you’re not so far behind as Aunt Bell imagined. So you like books? Capital! And Shakespeare no less! What do you like best, now?”

“Poetry,” said Bud. “Particularly the bits I don’t understand, but just about almost. I can’t bear to stop and dally with too easy poetry; once I know it all plain and there’s no more to it, I – I – I love to amble on. I – why! I make poetry myself.”

“Really?” said Ailie with twinkling eyes.

“Sort of poetry,” said Bud. “Not so good as ‘As You Like It’ – not *nearly* so good, of course! I have loads of truly truly poetry inside me, but it sticks at the bends, and then I get bits that fit, made by somebody else, and wish I had been spry and said them first. Other times I’m the real Winifred Wallace.”

“Winifred Wallace?” said Aunt Ailie inquiringly.

“Winifred Wallace,” repeated Bud composedly. “I’m her. It’s my – it’s my poetry name. ‘Bud Dyce’ wouldn’t be any use for the magazines; it’s not dinky enough.”

“Bless me, child, you don’t tell me you write poetry for the magazines?” said her astonished aunt.

“No,” said Bud, “but I’ll be pretty liable to when I’m old enough to wear specs. That’s if I don’t go on the stage.”

“On the stage!” exclaimed Ailie, full of wild alarm.

“Yes,” said the child, “Mrs Molyneux said I was a born actress.”

“I wonder, I wonder,” said Aunt Ailie, staring into vacancy.

CHAPTER VIII

Daniel Dyce had an office up the street at the windy corner facing the Cross, with two clerks in it and a boy who docketed letters and ran errands. Once upon a time there was a partner, – Cleland & Dyce the firm had been, – but Cleland was a shy and melancholy man whose only hours of confidence and gaiety came to him after injudicious drams. 'Twas patent to all how his habits seized him, but nobody mentioned it except in a whisper, sometimes as a kind of little accident, for in everything else he was the perfect gentleman, and here we never like to see the honest gentry down. All men liked Colin Cleland, and many would share his jovial hours who took their law business elsewhere than to Cleland & Dyce. That is the way of the world, too; most men keep their jovial-money in a different pocket from where they keep their cash. The time came when it behoved Mr Cleland to retire. Men who knew the circumstances said Dan Dyce paid rather dear for that retirement, and indeed it might be so in the stricter way of commerce, but the lawyer was a Christian who did not hang up his conscience in the “piety press” with his Sunday clothes. He gave his partner a good deal more than he asked.

“I hope you’ll come in sometimes and see me whiles at night and join in a glass of toddy,” said Mr Cleland.

“I’ll certainly come and see you,” said Dan Dyce. And then

he put his arm affectionately through that of his old partner, and added, "I would – I would ca' canny wi' the toddy, Colin," coating the pill in sweet and kindly Scots. Thank God, we have two tongues in our place, and can speak the bitter truth in terms that show humility and love, and not the sense of righteousness, dictate.

"Eh! What for?" said Mr Cleland, his vanity at once in arms.

Dan Dyce looked in his alarmed and wavering eyes a moment, and thought, "What's the use? He knows himself, they always do!"

"For fear – for fear of fat," he said, with a little laugh, tapping with his finger on his quondam partner's widening waistcoat. "There are signs of a prominent profile, Colin. If you go on as you're doing it will be a dreadful expense for watch-guards."

Colin Cleland at once became the easy-osey man again, and smiled. "Fat, man! it's not fat," said he, clapping himself on the waistcoat; "it's information. Do you know, Dan, for a second, there, I thought you meant to be unkind, and it would be devilish unlike you to be unkind. I thought you meant something else. The breath of vulgar suspicion has mentioned drink."

"It's a pity that!" said Mr Dyce, "for a whole cask of cloves will not disguise the breath of suspicion."

It was five years now since Colin Cleland retired among his toddy rummers, and if this were a fancy story I would be telling you how he fell, and fell, and fell; but the truth – it's almost lamentable – is that the old rogue throve on leisure and ambrosial

nights with men who were now quite ready to give the firm of Daniel Dyce their business, seeing they had Colin Cleland all to themselves and under observation. Trust estates and factorages from all quarters of the county came now to the office at the windy corner. A Christian lawyer with a sense of fun, unspotted by the world, and yet with a name for winning causes, was what the shire had long been wanting. And Daniel Dyce grew rich. "I'm making money so fast," he said one day to his sisters (it was before Bud came), "that I wonder often what poor souls are suffering for it."

Said Bell, "It's a burden that's easy put up with. We'll be able now to get a new pair of curtains for the back bedroom."

"A pair of curtains!" said her brother, with a smile to Ailie. "Ay, a score of pairs if they're needed, even if the vogue was Valenciennes. Your notion of wealth, Bell, is Old Malabar's – 'Twopence more, and up goes the cuddy!' Woman, I'm fair rolling in wealth."

He said it with a kind of exultation that brought to her face a look of fear and disapproval. "Don't, Dan, don't," she cried – "don't brag of the world's dross; it's not like you. 'He that hasteth to be rich, shall not be innocent,' says the Proverbs. You must be needing medicine. We should have humble hearts. How many that were high have had a fall!"

"Are you frightened God will hear me and rue His bounty?" said the brother in a whisper. "I'm not bragging; I'm just telling you."

“I hope you’re not hoarding it,” proceeded Miss Bell. “It’s not wise-like – ”

“Nor Dyce-like either,” said Miss Ailie.

“There’s many a poor body in the town this winter that’s needful.”

“I daresay,” said Daniel Dyce coldly. “The poor we have always with us. The thing, they tell me, is decreed by Providence.”

“But Providence is not aye looking,” said Bell. “If that’s what you’re frightened for, I’ll be your almoner.”

“It’s their own blame, you may be sure, if they’re poor. Improvidence and – and drink. I’ll warrant they have their glass of ale every Saturday. What’s ale? Is there any moral elevation in it? Its nutritive quality, I believe, is less than the tenth part of a penny bap.”

“Oh, but the poor creatures!” sighed Miss Bell.

“Possibly,” said Dan Dyce, “but every man must look after himself; and as you say, many a man well off has come down in the world. We should take no risks. I had Black the baker at me yesterday for £20 in loan to tide over some trouble with his flour merchant and pay an account to Miss Minto.”

“A decent man, with a wife and seven children,” said Miss Bell.

“Decent or not, he’ll not be coming back borrowing from me in a hurry. I set him off with a flea in his lug.”

“We’re not needing curtains,” said Miss Bell hurriedly; “the

pair we have are fine.”

Dan finished his breakfast that day with a smile, flicked the crumbs off his waistcoat, gave one uneasy glance at Ailie, and went off to business humming “There is a Happy Land.”

“Oh, dear me, I’m afraid he’s growing a perfect miser,” moaned Bell when she heard the door close behind him. “He did not use to be like that when he was younger and poorer. Money’s like the toothache, a commanding thing.”

Ailie smiled. “If you went about as much as I do, Bell,” she said, “you would not be misled by Dan’s pretences. And as for Black the baker, I saw his wife in Miss Minto’s yesterday buying boots for her children and a bonnet for herself. She called me Miss Ailie, an honour I never got from her in all my life before.”

“Do you think – do you think he gave Black the money?” said Bell in a pleasant excitement.

“Of course he did. It’s Dan’s way to give it to some folk with a pretence of reluctance, for if he did not growl they would never be off his face! He’s telling us about the lecture that accompanied it as a solace to our femininity. Women, you know, are very bad lenders, and dislike the practice in their husbands and brothers.”

“None of the women I know,” protested Bell. “They’re just as free-handed as the men if they had it. I hope,” she added anxiously, “that Dan got good security. Would it be a dear bonnet, now, that she was getting?”

Ailie laughed, – a ridiculous sort of sister this; she only laughed.

Six times each lawful day Daniel Dyce went up and down the street between his house and the office at the windy corner opposite the Cross, the business day being divided by an interval of four hours to suit the mails. The town folk liked to see him passing; he gave the street an air of occupation and gaiety, as if a trip had just come in with a brass band banging at the latest air. Going or coming, he was apt to be humming a tune to himself as he went along with his hands in his outside pockets, and it was an unusual day when he did not stop to look in at a shop window or two on the way, though they never changed a feature once a month. To the shops he honoured thus it was almost as good as a big turnover. Before him his dog went whirling and barking, a long alarm for the clerks to stop their game of Catch-the-Ten and dip their pens. There were few that passed him without some words of recognition.

He was coming down from the office on the afternoon of the Han'sel Monday that started Bud in the Pigeons' Seminary when he met the nurse, old Betty Baxter, with a basket. She put it down at her feet, and bobbed a curtsy, a thing that nowadays you rarely see in Scotland.

"Tuts! woman," he said to her, lifting the basket and putting it in her hand. "Why need you bother with the like of that? You and your curtses! They're out of date, Miss Baxter, out of date, like the decent men that deserved them long ago before my time."

"No, they're not out of date, Mr Dyce," said she; "I'll aye be minding you about my mother; you'll be paid back some day."

“Tuts!” said he again, impatient. “You’re an awful blether: how’s your patient, Duncan Gill?”

“As dour as the devil, sir,” said the nurse. “Still hanging on.”

“Poor man! poor man!” said Mr Dyce. “He’ll just have to put his trust in God.”

“Oh, he’s no’ so far through as all that,” said Betty Baxter. “He can still sit up and take his drop of porridge. They’re telling me you have got a wonderful niece, Mr Dyce, all the way from America. What a mercy for her! But I have not set eyes on her yet. I’m so busy that I could not stand in the close like the others, watching: what is she like?”

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