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THE RED
APOTHECARY
JOHN HORNE

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BY

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I

DO YOU NOT THINK THAT NATURE LIKES TO
BE WHIMSICAL SOMETIMES ?

ENVELOPED in the fluffy sheepskins of his heather bed, Eric Melville's form bulged absurdly big ; and the mad-red hair of his head frothed over the homespun pillow and smote its faded grey with an aiding emphasis. It was this roistering red hair that overlaid his name in the thought of the folk and so haunted them that they could only speak of him to each other as "The Red Apothecary." Under his eye, it was "Sir Eric" with them—"Sir" being then an address of courtesy to some men of professional standing, and to superiors, and tendered to him in compliment ; but as soon as the face-to-face transaction was by, it was "The Red Apothecary" that ran readiest to the lip.

Although not tall, he was sturdy in the make-up; and his strength published itself so lustily in every quirk of his muscles that strangers were allured into thinking of him as a man of bulkier substance. His head completed the illusion; it was large, and seemed designed for challenging Fate. He showed a strong yet flexible mouth. When he joked, a corner of it winked—then the ripple galloped quickly across his lips and hunted all over his face for sport. His eyes were pinky and small but too genial to be crafty. His hair rampaged over his head, neck, and face in a fashion that threatened to bring on a total eclipse of all his remaining features.

The people in Gollan were seldom indulged with a view of the Apothecary outside his hermitage. His couch was study, consulting-room, and surgery; and little else than a neighbour's crisis seduced him from its warm harbourage.

It was during the cooling confidences of the night that he took exercise, and kept himself in physical fitness. He tramped the hill-sides and burns when the mood inspired

him. Frequently, too, he gratified himself with lengthy roamings in search of herbs—an employment much to his liking. By such uncanny habits did he sustain his athletic vigour.

As he lounged in the kindly refuge of his couch, he often amused himself by sketching invisible pictures on the wall with his finger—pictures of horses, cots, skulls, poultices, ladies, imps, anything occupying his thoughts at the moment. To any mind stirred by an antic fancy, this invisible menagerie (could the eye have seen it) would have suggested a comic hell or painfully mixed heaven.

Only imaginary pictures could have been transferred to such a canvas, for the wall was little else than a dyke faced with clay. At that date in Scotland's pastoral history (the opening of the eighteenth century), even this was rather a stylish house-wall—especially for the northern districts. The ordinary dwellings of the outlying clachans were built of loose stone and turf. The wind was kept at bay by plugs of straw, heather, or bracken pushed into the openings between the loose stones. During the daytime, light got entrance into the house by the doorway only,

or by the odd gaps in the wall. At nightfall, the light of the dwelling was the peat fire ; but if a stranger roamed in, a split fir-root was ignited and either stuck in the floor or let into a chink in the wall. The fire huddled in the centre of the floor, and a "vent" for the smoke was riven in the turf-thatched roof. In sheepskin wraps, the inmates slept around the fire—their soles to the embers. The only seats were big stones, with the genteel addition of a tree-stump or creepie stool in the more advanced houses. One end of the building was the byre, wherein all the animals of the croft reposed. On larger holdings there was a slim partition cutting the house in two, but in the dwellings of the ploughmen this was reckoned a conceit. As a rule, the cattle rested in one end of the undivided house ; but dogs, swine, and hens frequently roamed by the fireside with the children. The older buildings were so low that a tall man could only stand upright beneath the apex of the roof ; yet these huts, scarcely better than natural caves, were fondly regarded as being cosy enough for every-day necessities.

The Apothecary's house differed from the common class in that it contributed two distinct rooms; each having a "licht hole" (window), glazed with rough brown bottle-glass. The roof, too, was lifted quite two feet above its neighbours; but in the interior its knotty and undressed couplings were equally naked to the eye and just as ebonized with peat-reek. Of trodden earth was the floor; and a ring of stones dyked-in the fire in the working end of the house. The Apothecary's lighting apparatus was a new-fangled affair—it was a cruisie lamp which he had brought with him when he fell on Gollan.

His couch of heather was slightly raised from the ground by supports of unpolished tree-limbs, and was backed into the corner of the room, length-wise to the window. Overhead, depending from a wooden peg, hung a withe saddle with bags—the bags swollen excessively with medicines, phials, powders, a few blacksmith-made instruments, and "boluses, confections, and electuaries." A big sand-glass (for timing his patients' pulse) swung by a noose beside the saddle.

The window-sill was broad, and formed the Apothecary's book-case and hold-all. Dried herbs almost smothered the books ; but one volume lay to the edge ready for reference. It was the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. This was his Koran. Every paragraph and line of the gentle pagan's writings were as dust of gold to him. As he tumbled on his couch—sketching on the wall, advising a patient, or bantering Lexy, his housekeeper—he broke into the *Meditations* continuously, mixing douches of the illustrious emperor's philosophy with his own humorous satire.

Sir Eric's manner was an unstudied yet quite conscious exuberance, whose moods fluttered from open-handed banter to sudden lapses of rare tenderness. Frolicsome exaggeration was his constant diversion, yet it never lacked the support of deliberate good sense and kindness. The characteristic weather of his spirit was fresh and breezy, with now and then a waft of autumny pensiveness. His " Eh ? "—frequently tacked to his sentences in interrogation, or exclamation, and usually indicative of a humorous sally—was distinctive of him ; it was his

shorthand for "What do you say to that?"

Was he leisured, lazy, or ill, to keep abed so stubbornly? Idle he could not be, for he was the only "mediciner" within a hundred-mile excursion; and, although that area was niggard of population, and he compelled most of his patients to consult him at his bedside, yet the testy nature of the northern climate, the undrained morasses of the period, and the mesh-like character of the houses super-induced many agues, "vapours," and rheumatisms, with the "kink-host," the "on-comes," the "dwams"—and attention to these was sufficient to prohibit any lengthened indulgence of leisure.

Nor was the Apothecary lazy. Some of the unkindlier louts were disposed to nurse such a suspicion, but they dared not body it in words. At the real exigency of a poor or distracted patient he would leap up ungrudgingly from his couch and urge his seasoned pony, "Cloutie,"¹ over trackless moors, under darkest skies, and in defiance of rain or sleet. Besides, he was warm and generous at the centre of his nature, though brusque with his

¹ One of the many Scots designations for Satan.

tongue; and to utter criticism of him in Gollan was to bargain for a cudgelling.

He was not ill, either. After the bent of impulsive natures, it is true, he wore himself royally when once aroused, and suffered the penalty of reaction; but otherwise he was in signal health, with an untamed strength and roguish mirthfulness in plenitude.

Do you not think that Nature likes to be whimsical sometimes? Now and then she switches our textbooks out of doors and issues supplementary and unclassified material. And if she finished Eric Melville after an unconventional pattern to please herself, we can only accept her caprice with thanks. Whether we are entertained or tantalized, we have to chronicle the fact that he often slept when other men waked, and waked when they slept; that his clothes went off or on with his moods, and were scanty at all times; and that his humour was a surer guide to him than wisdom to the learned. To lie in bed—lie, humming to his spirit, mixing all his medicines with wholesome drolleries, translating patches of his beloved *Meditations*, creating instantaneous invisibilities on his

clay wall, and drinking many quaichs of ale, to the amazement of Lexy his housekeeper—this was his daily charter of delights.

There are some natures so attune to the simple rapture of existence that the swaddlings of position or wealth are not only superfluities but irksome intrusions. The cheap ecstasy of being alive is all-sufficient, and each day brings a round of artless entertainment which will never pall while the pulses tap. Of the few who are born to this regretless life, the Apothecary was one; and Lexy was surely another.

Lexy was a slip of the same root as himself—spirit of his spirit, tongue of his tongue. She matched his every mood. So aptly was this done that he was hardly conscious of movement in his sensations, having no alternative atmosphere to affect his mercury. Did he feign anger? The affectation arrested her instantly. Did he squirt boiling sarcasm at her? He was in turn scalded. His laugh was the forerunner of hers. And, through all, there sang a soft tide of mutual goodwill that glorified the crudest incident and sweetened the most brackish trial. A perfect under-

standing held every encounter in gracious equipoise.

On that afternoon they were warm at a bout of tonguing when the timid dirl of a staff on the door commanded a truce.

“Wha the deil is this, noo?” grunted the Apothecary, seemingly ruffled at the disturbance.

“Wha kens? Maybe Auld Nick himsel’,” responded Lexy.

“Maybe, lass—maybe; a cronie o’ yer ain,” was how he answered her.

He laughed at the sally, and she was fain to retort; but he waved his hand towards the door and said, “Awa’!”

She waddled to her own end of the house; tugged back the tirling-pin that barred the door, and opened it.

“Oh, it’s ye, Roger!” she exclaimed. “Come awa’ in, guidman.”

“That’s jist what I cam’ for, Lexy,” replied the figure in the twilight, creeping over the threshold and shambling awkwardly into the Apothecary’s apartment.

Roger was dominie, beadle, and gravedigger in Gollan. He was a man of nigh

sixty years, with an ungainly body and a pair of trailing splay feet. He was shaven, and his face was pulled together like a shrivelled potato. A smile never played holiday with Roger's features; his was a monkey-mirth—if he enjoyed a joke, his face never gave hint of the entertainment. In truth, he was too serious for ordinary every-day exhibition; but the meagre fees he received for teaching, the trying times he had passed through as beadle of a church whose practice had been over-turned, his occupation as grave-digger—all these had tended to augment a natural solemnity of disposition and to drown out any possible qualifications for gaiety. He had on his head the usual broad blue bonnet of his day and was dressed in rough blue homespun. Unshapely, awkward brogues encased his ponderous feet and gave them a noisy importance.

As Roger entered the inner apartment, the Apothecary heaved himself over in his bed to face him.

“Weel, Roger, what's yer news the nicht? Hes the wife anither bairn—eh?”

“Sir Eric, ye're aye jokin'—nearly,” replied

the solemn Roger. (He never seemed able to make up his mind anent a subject; and after delivering the most absolute opinion, he invariably qualified it by adding "nearly" as an addendum of salvation.) "Gin I'm spared efter ye, Sir Eric," he ventured, "I'll be sure to hear ye lauchin' in yer kist (coffin)."

The Apothecary took it with his accustomed gaiety.

"Faigs, I wad lek that aboon a' things, Roger! It wad gluff (frighten) the deil himsel' to hear a corp yatterin' (chattering) an' lauchin'—eh, Roger! An' gin it wad but scare him clean oot o' Gollan, I wad wish to be a corp afore nicht!"

The dominie was scant of humour and could not accommodate a continuous dose. He therefore bluntly unseated the Apothecary in his canter by announcing authoritatively, in the voice of one who had something to say, "Nae mair, Sir Eric! The new preacher hes come."

The Apothecary flung himself up with a hurried lunge.

"Come!" he repeated in a surprised voice. "An' whaur is he—eh?"

“ He’s awa’ ower-by in my hoose, Sir Eric, takin’ a moothfu’ o’ kail efter his lang ride. Ye ken the manse is empty an’ there’s no’ a corner for him to lie doon in——”

“ But *ye* hae nae room for him, man ! ”

“ That’s jist what I cam’ to speir (ask) ye about, Sir Eric. There’s nae room for him, as ye weel say, at my fireside—an’——”

The Apothecary leapt into a provocative laugh.

“ Na, faigs, Roger ! An’ gin ye gang on gettin’ bairns at the speed ye has keepit up, ye’ll sune hae to tether them on the roof ! ”

“ Oh, ye for jokin’,” responded the shrinking figure, endeavouring to enjoy the frolic. “ I’m aye sayin’ ye’ll dee wi’ a joke in yer gullet—nearly.”

The Apothecary suddenly sobered, after his manner. “ Tell me,” he said, “ whan cam’ the preacher ? ”

“ No’ lang syne. He cam’ in wi’ Macroarie this efternoon.”

“ Wi’ Macroarie ! Hoo did the preacher fa’ in wi’ that boxin’ ram—eh ? ”

Roger skirmished with his cumbersome feet and wished to evade the inquiry, for Macroarie

was the Satan of the country-side—a tough stirk who knew neither fear nor caution.

“ I ken but this, Sir Eric,” he answered finally, “ that they forgethered by the way an’ cam’ into Gollan thegither.”

“ A lamb an’ a tiger, Roger ! ” The man of phials and clysters chuckled. “ We’re in luck, my jo, sure’s I’m inside my skin ! ’Tween twa sich corbies (crows), Gollan may win redemption yet ! Opposites mak’ guid blends. What say ye, Roger—eh ? ”

As if he had not heard the appeal, Roger intimated that the preacher thought Macroarie a good man.

“ Wait till Macroarie gets fou an’ cleiks (catches) a grip on the scruff o’ his neck, Roger : there’ll be rousin’ fun then—eh ? But the preacher has begood (begun) on the richt man, onyway ; an’ gin he hauls Macroarie to the kirk, dang me gin I winna gang mysel’ ! ”

“ Weel, Sir Eric, that wad be a sicht to mak’ us a’ prood—nearly.”

“ Ay, ay, Roger ; ye’re aye there or there about, as the man said to his liver. But, auld neebor, anent (concerning) this prophet

that's come to us : tell him that gin he winna object to lie in a neuk o' my chaumer (chamber), he's walcome to mak' his nest here. Rax him ower to me, Roger."

"I'm obligated (obliged) to ye, Sir Eric," responded the relieved dominie, sluttering away eagerly from the Apothecary's bedside, now that his mission had ended successfully.

As he reached the outer compartment of the house, the Apothecary flung a volley of instructions to his housekeeper. "Hi, Lexy ! Gie Roger a wamefu' o' ale to tichten his skin.—An' tak' satisfaction whan ye're in the face o't, Roger : lek the cat wi' the haggis."

II

“COME AWA’ BEN!”

WHEN the preacher arrived at the Apothecary’s house, escorted by Roger, he was silently admitted by Lexy. She bowed stiffly, and directed him to the door of her master’s apartment. “A brave man! Oh, a brave man!” she muttered approvingly to herself as the minister stepped through her kitchen; and “A guid e’en, Roger,” she said in the same breath, closing her door on the departing dominie.

Lexy’s eulogium was not misapplied. The minister exhibited a taut and pliant figure. He appeared to be reaching forty years of age, and was on the tip of six feet in height, with colossean shoulders and limbs in proportion. His face was ruddy—almost too highly coloured—and was accompanied by

a pair of glittering blue eyes. The cast of the face was somewhat effeminate, and the effect was accentuated by the fine brown hair of his head, and whiskers tapering out into nearly invisible threads. Indeed, his face belied his figure. When his vivid blue eyes called the visitor to a momentary interview, the impression was apt to be rather maidenly ; but, as soon as he turned away, and attention fell on his figure, he appeared as one fit to be a conqueror.

As he entered the Apothecary’s room, the reclining sultan saluted him with unstudied affability. “Come awa’ ben!” was the welcome.

The arrival stepped up to the heather couch. “I am the new minister,” he announced modestly.

The Apothecary ran his glance over him. “The new minister, are ye?” Then—with a humorous grin—“An’ wha the deil sent ye—eh?”

“*He* didn’t, anyway, good neighbour,” replied the preacher, who had evidently been supplied by Roger with a key for the Apothecary’s lock.

“ ‘ He ? ’ Wha’s ‘ he ’ ? ”

“ Your friend whom you have just mentioned.”

The Apothecary spluttered with glee at the pleasantry. “ Oh, that’s a rare stroke o’ wit ! Ye’ll dae, brither pilgrim ; ye’ll dae, I tell ye ! Gie’s yer loof (open hand), man ! ” He snatched the preacher’s extended hand and shook it amid clamorous expressions of goodwill and admiration. Then casting off the welcomed hand again, and settling back on his couch, he continued : “ Weel, it’s ae comfort to ken that the deil didna send ye ; though I’m no’ sure but ye micht fare better gin ye hed him at yer back noo and then.”

“ Well, to be plain, Sir Eric, you know that the Commissioners for the Northern Counties of Scotland sent me ; and of course——”

“ Nae doot, nae doot ! An’ tell me, did the same Commissioners send ye wi’ a clenched fist, an’ a stoot cudgel, an’ a body o’ dragoons, an’ rowth (plenty) o’ hell-fire—eh ? ”

“ Well, hardly ”—with an amused smile.

“ Ah, well, ye can gang back the gate (way) ye cam’. Ye’ll be o’ nae mair eese (use) in

Gollan than a rabbit, unless ye hae cudgels an’ claymores.—I say, can ye fecht?”

The sudden query startled the preacher, and he answered somewhat firmly that he had not come to fight but to preach and pray.

The Apothecary made pretence of astonishment. He set his face toward the kitchen, and cried, “Hi, Lexy! Did ye hear yon? He disna ken the louts hereawa’.” Then turning again to his visitor (the feigned amusement carousing his face), he delivered himself characteristically. “Preach an’ pray! Man, ye micht as weel spit at a gush o’ lichtnin’ an’ think to put it oot as tame the gowks o’ Gollan wi’ a psalm-buik. Faigs, gin ye canna clash them weel ’tween the een wi’ yer fist, an’ dang sense into them wi’ ilka clure, yer preachin’ winna dae muckle guid, holy brither. Come ower here again till I feel yer muscles.”

A trifle abashed, yet manly and confident, the minister strode a step nearer.

The Apothecary birsed his fingers into the biceps of the extended arm. “Jist as I thocht! Faigs, ye hae a piece o’ thrawn leather in yer airm, my man,” he exclaimed

admiringly. "Ye didna get thae muscles without some sair exercise, I'll warrant ye. I'll wager ye a snuff, noo, ye hae thrown twa or three blows at luckless loons in the days o' yer devilment—eh?"

"I am forced to admit as much, Sir Eric; but those were thoughtless days, and they are past now."

"Past! They maun come back again! Tak' my advice an' batter ilka son o' Adam ye meet, till ye scatter fear amang them lek a fever, an' then ye may expeck to owertak' some guid; but, tak' my word, ye'll dae it nae sooner. A crouse cock is respeckit on a' middenheids, man. Na, na; preach an' pray gin ye maun; but it's aye true that a guid calf is better than a calf o' a guid kind. Dicht the neb o' ilka gowk wi' yer fist, an' he'll fa' doon an' worship ye. Gin ye dinna dae that, ye can scart yer leg an' hie back the gate ye cam'."

The preacher protested. "I should be sorry to think that my mission was to hurt men. I would rather heal them, neighbour."

"Heal them! Ye canna heal what isna sair! Na, na; raise the bruises first, an'

then lay on the clysters an’ ointment. Why wad ye poultice a halesome leg—eh ? ”

The visitor was shattered by his host’s tempestuous eloquence. He knew something by report of the district to which he had come, and he was aware that a tough undertaking awaited him. He knew, too, that in the religious overturnings introduced by contending Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism the foundations of reverence for church ordinances had been rent to the centre, and that bigotry and faction and fanaticism, side by side with unreined laxity, had bewildered the people ; but he had an apostle’s faith in his Message, and hoped to become a torch-bearer of enlightenment rather than a sword-bearer of terror. He stood silent and somewhat embarrassed while these reflections again summoned his attention.

The silence invited his host to explanations.

“ Ye see, man, it’s lek this,” he said seriously, prising himself again to a more upright posture. “ As I needna tell ye, Episcopacy hes jist got a dunt (blow) in this country, an’ ye are the first Presbyter we hae seen in this negleckit spot. The Revolution, an’ the

Covenanting Crusade, an' a' thae bickerin' whigmaleeries, hae hardly been heard o' sae far north as Gollan, an' sae the fowks are as dour as a cuddy for Episcopacy yet, an' they'll clod ony Presbyter that daur show his nose. Ye ken that, as well as mysel'."

Anxious to know whether his host was friend or foe, the preacher interjected the question, "Of what persuasion are you yourself, sir?"

The Apothecary was derailed. "Me? Oh, I'm naethin' in particular. My God is neither a Presbyter nor an Episcopalian, but jist the guid Faither o' a' the race. I hae lived wi' Mahometans an' ither——"

"So you have been abroad, then?" broke in the listener again.

"Oh, no muckle, man—jist a wee while whan I was young."

Whether the Apothecary was modest of his journeyings or feared that the preacher might suspect him of too great elasticity on account of his contact with heathens, is uncertain; but he hastened out of that bypath and drew back to the highway of his observations.

“What I was ettlin’ (intending) to say is this—that I’ll be yer henchman through hail an’ lichtnin’, but dinna forget what I telled ye. If ye haena a dour skull, gang hame till it grows thick. Oh, but they’re a flock o’ douce lambs hereawa’! Man, gin Macroarie hits ye a clure whan he’s fou, he’ll start a leak in ye that’ll dreep (drip) a’ yer days. Hoo wad ye lek that, eh? Besides, guid cronie, the Episcopal flunkey wha was here afore ye, could drink ilka man o’ them blin’, an’ so he had them by the thrapple. They’re a’ horn-mad aboot him bein’ ta’en awa’. Tak’ my word for’t, they’ll search hell itsel’ for bleezin’ fire to hurl at ye.”

The preacher was sobered. “Well, neighbour,” he answered, “if you have correctly described your last minister’s character, there is all the more reason why I should show the people a better example. The oppression may be severe, but everything has an end——”

“Na; a ring hes nane. An’ ye’ll jist be crawlin’ in a circle, lek a trapped lobster.”

The Apothecary had struck in somewhat impatiently. And now, to plug further

debate, he added familiarly, " I say, can ye play shinty—eh ? "

" N-no ; that is to say—well, I have attempted it at times."

" Weel, gin ye can spruce up in that, it may save ye the drinkin' an' fechtin'. Shinty is o' some consequence in Gollan ; although no' sae popular as wrastlin', flingin' the hemmer, puttin' the stane, an' tossin' the caber."¹

The stranger became more confidential. " Well, I may say that I have adventured my hand in these things in former times, but only as a diversion to more serious matters."

" Ah, weel, preacher, ye maun mak' them yer evangelists noo. . . . I say, are ye sure ye can wrastle ? "

His visitor allowed that he had thrown every man with whom he had wrestled.

¹ Highland Games have always included wrestling, throwing the hammer (an iron ball fixed to a shaft, swung round the head, and thrown over the left shoulder), putting the stone (a stone or ball poised on the right hand and flung forward), and tossing the caber (a heavy pole laid against the shoulder, caught at the lower end with both hands and twirled round as it is cast off).

The Apothecary flushed like one over whose brain flamed a glorious discovery. “So, man! Ye can wrestle, can ye—eh?”

“Yes”—and the frank admission indicated certainty.

“An’ fling the hemmer?”

“Well, I have thrown the hammer frequently.”

“An’ putt the stane?”

“Yes—somewhat.”

“An’ can ye tak’ a side at shinty?—eh?”

“If need be, I dare say I might.”

The Apothecary kicked off his sheepskin coverings in ecstasy and sprang to the floor. Standing bare-legged before his companion, he grasped his hand with ten devouring fingers. “Ye’ll dae; ye’ll dae, I tell ye! There’s nae fear o’ ye—deil a bit! ’Tween us baith we’ll cudgel the sinners o’ Gollan into the Kingdom.”

His listener was both startled and pleased. “We must try milder methods, neighbour,” he said.

The man of medicine relaxed his grip and stepped back, hurrying his glance over the powerful physique of the preacher. “What

say ye !” he gasped. “ A man wi’ a trunk lek Goliath, to wander roond wi’ a psalm-buik in his loof ! Fecht, man ; fecht ! Tak’ a short an’ sure gait (style), an’ cram grace into them wi’ yer neive (fist).”

His glance of sarcastic humour was not lost on the preacher, but “ I am firm in my peaceful intentions,” he replied.

“ An’ sae am I, preacher. But we’re o’ twa minds as to hoo peace is to be brocht to Gollan.”

“ In any case, I don’t think that we should do ill that good may come.”

“ No ; nor guid that ill may come, either. ‘ He that sleeps wi’ dougs maun rise wi’ fleas.’ Ye can train yer doug withoot sleep-in’ wi’ him.”

“ Well, we needn’t begin the fighting just now, anyhow,” laughed the minister.

“ Maybe no’, preacher ; maybe no’.” He strode to the entrance leading into Lexy’s end. “ Lexy, lass, get a bed laid for the man, an’ see that he pants for naething.” Returning to his visitor, he came to a stand before him, with his hands on his haunches and at his ease. “ Ye’ll hae to sleep in this

chaumer (chamber) alang wi’ me. I haena anither neuk to gie ye.”

The stranger assured him that he would be quite comfortable.

“It’ll be yer ain faut gin ye’re no’,” observed his host, moving over to his couch again. With the edge of the sheepskin in his hand and a foot on the bed, he remembered that he had not ascertained his guest’s name. “I haena speired what they ca’ ye?” was how he put his query.

“Caleb North, Sir Eric.”

“Ah, weel, Maister North, mak’ yersel’ at hame, for believe me ye’re walcome. I’m gaun to my ba-ba (bed) again. Gin ye hear me gettin’ up in the nicht-time, an’ scutterin’ about the hoose, dinna be frichted. I whiles canna sleep, an’ then I get to my shanks an’ daunner roond a bit; an’ sometimes I gang oot for a trachle (long walk). Sae tak’ nae fear. Guid e’en to ye! Lexy’ll lay doon a bed for ye an’ see ye weel happit.”

III

“ BE YE THE NEW GOSPELLER ? ”

THE Apothecary belied his own warning. In a few minutes he was swinging into his dream-country to the sonorous music of his nasal chanter ; and throughout the night he held on his way to the pant of the self-same tune.

Mr. North squandered his patience in trying to lure the angel of sleep. His mind was like a choppy sea, mastered by no governing tide. What the Apothecary had said about Episcopacy and Presbyterianism was, he knew, not over-stated, though spoken never so brusquely. The tides of religious contention which had submerged now this system and now that, had nearly spent themselves ere reaching the shores of the interior Highlands and made hardly any com-

motion when breaking on the beach. The people were drenched in superstition. Ignorance was every man's inheritance. Witches were more potent than presbyteries.

The preacher was intelligent, and educated up to the standard of his day ; and all the features of the situation crept clearly within the range of his comprehension. He knew full well that a task of drudgery awaited him : ay, and maybe suffering—not in physical form, but scornful, contemptuous, trying. He had in some degree measured himself against those conditions when he slung the knapsack to his shoulders, but, viewed nearer at hand by aid of the Apothecary's warning, they now menaced the soldier's strength. The problem of his plan of action troubled him, almost unnerved him. His anxieties dragooned him out of all sleep and rest. He must secure some relief by motion.

Early in the dozing April dawning, he left his couch and crept forth from the house. The Apothecary was still on his merry journey, to the drone of his bagpipes, and Lexy lay fast in the caress of oblivion.

His faith built towers of hope out of the

experiences of earlier saints. The martyrs tramped to fire and flood, yet ever with carols on their lips; the flame licked holy hands of their flesh, and reddened cheeks that had never blushed with a sense of wrong; and his Covenanting forefathers had slept on frosty hill-sides and dreamt of heaven. He was in the royal line!

Peering round, he set himself to gain some knowledge of the district in which he was to labour. It was a blurred dawn, however, and he could only discern the things immediately about his feet and the dimmest suggestions of what swept further out from him. He was standing on a piece of level ground, gently sloping to a broad valley which threw itself in gradual uplifts to a distant skyline in front—at that moment obscured. Down the flanks of the valley a shallow stream lagged, groping through the soil for the easiest passage-ways, and then lounging out of sight on the left. The land immediately around lay flat and mossy; and from the foot of the hills on the right, across the river and away into the level lands on the left, the homes and crofts of Gollan wandered.

There were no roads. Tracks might run across the land and meander over the hills, but roads were luxuries of the south. There was no use for them. A cart was still undreamt of—the peats and corn being dragged on hurdles (“trail-carts”), whose shafts, tied at the upper end to the horse, trailed by the other on the ground.

As Mr. North stood in the blinking dawn he saw that the part of land near him was roadless as described. He noted the Apothecary’s garden, too, before the door—a hedgeless, dykeless splotch of ground occupied with herbs, shrubs, hyssop, rue, celandine, camomile, horehound, mint, and a few flowers. This was the physician’s dispensary. His medicines were alive; and the majority of them were unmolested until some case of illness demanded their service, or winter came in and they were hung up for preservation.

While the preacher stood thus, peering narrowly about him and mentally etching these general impressions on his attention, a lumbering fellow passed on his way to his labour in the fields.

Mr. North saluted him.

The yokel looked at him glumly. "Be ye the new gospeller?" he asked heavily.

Anxious to witness the effect of his admission, the preacher readily answered, "Yes."

The fellow lifted a clod from the turf. Poising it on his fingers, he skimmed it out below his left arm and smote Mr. North on the brow, clouding his eyes with earth. "Tak' that, then!" he growled, and trudged on indifferently.

For some minutes the minister was stunned. The impact from the damp clod almost dazed him like the kick of a hoof, and its disengaged earth had so assaulted his eyes that he had no sight left. The pain, too, became instantly vexatious. He turned himself in the direction of the house and stretched out his hands in search of its walls. By studied carefulness he won the gable, crept cautiously round to the front, and groped for the entrance.

Lexy was on her feet, and was coming to the door in search of him. The Apothecary had arrived at the end of his dreamy trip and had called her into consciousness.

"Preserve us a'!" gasped Lexy, when she had sight of him. Then gathering a whiff

of breath she asked sympathetically, “What hes com’ ower ye, guid neebour ?”

Mr. North explained.

Lexy muttered a comment to herself, which, being interpreted, meant, “Just what I expected, but not so soon.”

Hearing the voices at the door, the Apothecary cried, “Is that ye, Maister North ? Whaur hae ye been, stravaigin’ (wandering) oot o’ a decent man’s hoose lek a silly loon on the fuddle ? Come awa’ in, or some devout sanct (saint) may spy ye an’ clure ye wi’ a Bible !”

“One of them has done so already,” answered the victim, feeling his way into the apartment, “but not exactly with a Bible.”

As the Apothecary beheld his visitor’s battered countenance he was undecided how to behave ; but when he learned that a parishioner had closed his eyes with a clod, a smile flounced to the rim of his lip and danced across his face in a chuckle. “It’s the early bird that gets the worm !” he remarked with smothered mirthfulness ; then gave him directions how to wash his eyes at once.

While the preacher bathed his face, the Apothecary moralized.

“Ye hae gotten yer first diet o’ Gollan civeelity this mornin’, an’ I houp ye hae a taste for it! Gin ye hed drapped on yer knees afore yon hellicat (violent) tyke, an’ prayed wi’ him, dae ye think he wad hae undertook no’ to fling ony mair clods at ye—eh? Deil a bit o’t! But gin ye hed dashed him ’tween the een (same’s he did *ye*!), an’ driven him hame wi’ a bruise across his nose lek a by-road, he wad hae ta’en awa’ a guid impression o’ ye an’ tell’t a’ the countryside o’ yer capacity—faigs wad he. Bash them, man; bash the sinners, I tell ye!”

“I’ll stand a good deal more than this before I resort to such extremes, Sir Eric,” answered the preacher cheerily, now relieved of the dust from his eyes.

Sir Eric lay back on his couch. “The mud hes been ta’en oot o’ yer een ower sune, my man!”

“I would stand a great deal more, in any case, Sir Eric.”

“Weel, weel, stan’ it, then; but better a finger aff than aye hangin’ by the skin.—

Ye maun be rivin' hungry, though. Hi, Lexy! fetch a quaich o' ale an' some brose for the man. He hes hed his een filled already," he added, grinning at his witticism, "an' noo we maun fill his wame !"

IV

“THE SOUTH COUNTRY IS A FAST PLACE”

AS the preacher's simple repast proceeded, the Apothecary coaxed him to gossip about his journey northwards to Gollan. His jaunty opening was, “Saw ye onybody that kissed ye an' speired for me—eh?”

Plying his mouth with his horn spoon, Mr. North complimented him on being such a canty fellow. “You brighten life's pilgrimage with many a relieving tilt, Sir Eric; and you are very crouse for a man no longer youthful.”

“Man, it's the very life o' an auld bonnet to be weel cockit. But gie me yer crack anent the marvels ye heard o' or saw on yer way to this deil's hole. Chatter awa' lek a clockin' hen, for I'm fain o' a confab wi' ony spunkie wha blesses me wi' his presence.

What's the news frae the sooth country—eh ? ”

“ Ah, the south country is a fast place, Sir Eric,” responded the preacher, catching sight of a theme which had leapt on his mind in Edinburgh. “ The further south the further from grace, I'm afraid. Satan has the helm of affairs yonder.”

“ Ay, man ! Say ye that ? Weel, that'll please the auld rascal. He's lek oorsels : he's keen to be king o' the midden. Whatna tricks is he up to noo—ticklin' the lassies, maybe ? ”

“ Indeed the young folks are not escaping, good friend. Imagine, they are striding about in red hose, and have high heels to their shoes.”

“ The graceless spunkies ! ” exclaimed his audience.

“ I'm afraid the present generation is on the highway to ruin, Sir Eric,” added the good man, finishing his molested observation.

“ Weel, I'm no' verra weel informed as to that same highway, an' canna judge. But the auld Deil is a clever man o' bisness, an' is aye ready to mak' wark for himsel' an' a' his imps——”

“ You observe rightly, Sir Eric,” struck in Mr. North, snatching at an advantageous opening.

The theme was not much to the Apothecary’s liking, however, and he snapped the thread.

“ I say, cronie, wad ye hae a game o’ shinty wi’ me, if I clap on my breeks ? ”

His visitor was dashed by the unexpected change of topic and tone. He evaded the challenge. “ If the people saw me at worldly games so soon, they would think me a strange messenger of Heaven.”

“ I tell ye, they wad think that a leal (true) ane hed come to them at last ; an’ ye wad hae a fu’ kirk the first time ye gaed to the poopit. But it’s chancy (risky) to try preachin’ on Sawbath first. Tak’ my advice, sacred cronie, an’ ca’ on the laird afore ye begin. An’ whan ye gang to see him, mind ye reese (praise) him weel for giein’ ye the nest. He’ll no’ tak’ muckle notice o’ yer thanksgivin’, but he may tak’ a grue at ye if ye owerlook it. (My certie, The Tod’s¹ a ram-stam ox !) Tak’ yer win’ for a day or twa, an’ jist watch

¹ “ Tod,” the laird’s nickname—Scots for fox.

the fowks—ye'll see the cantrips they play on the Sawbath."

"I am fain to begin preaching at once, Sir Eric; but I would be guided by your advice as to the laird. You know him, and I have not that honour."

"Honour! Faigs, ye'll hae that ower sune. He's a stiff-necked sinner—livin' wi' a woman that isna his wife an' yet hes brocht him the only son he can ca' his ain."

"Oh, dear me!"—in a despairing drift of voice. "I thought he was at least an observer of ordinances when he interested himself so far as to act with the Presbytery in the appointment of a minister to the parish."

"Ah, The Tod kens what he's daein'! 'Better a patch than a hole'—d'ye tak' me up? He couldna haud-in the fechtin' tups o' Gollan withoot some kind o' preacher to frichten them noo an' again wi' the threat o' a roastin' hell. But I'm thinkin' ye'll hae as sair a task wi' The Tod himsel' as wi' ony o' them. Man, man, he's jist anither spit-fire Macroarie on a bigger war-horse."

"Macroarie? Was that the man with

whom I forgathered as I approached Gollan ? ”

“ The same.”

“ Well, Sir Eric, I could not help surmising that Macroarie was a frank and sensible man—and godly, too, for I think he informed me that he was a regular communicant at the kirk. Indeed, he said he was an elder.”

“ Wha ? Macroarie ? Macroarie hesna ta'en his carcass to the kirk for mair years than Noah took days to nail up the ark. He only kens a psalm-buik frae a pack o' cairds by the fact that it isna a pack o' cairds, onyway. Oh, ay, Macroarie's a humble disciple ! Only see him in the ale-house on Sawbath, as fou as a cock on a guid midden, an' scatterin' oaths—swatches frae the prophets, I mean——”

Laughter shook the Apothecary's lusty frame at the comic suggestion of Macroarie's saintly habits. When he had subsided, he said bluntly, “ Maister North, Macroarie is a burry (rough) heathen. He hes but ae savin' virtue, an' that's his lassie—as trig a quean (damsel) as ever washed her feet in the burn. Man, if she comes to the kirk, ye'll be that

pack wi' her face that ye'll fa' through yer discourse ! ”

“ I hope she may be as good as she is evidently bonnie, Sir Eric,” replied the preacher, with an air of pleasantry, “ but in my wife I am amply provided.”

The Apothecary was gratified with his visitor's attempt at gaiety. “ An' whan are ye expectin' yer spouse, micht I ask ? ” he inquired genially.

“ As soon as I can set up accommodation in the manse—which, I hope, for your sake, won't be long.”

“ Dinna fash yersel' anent that ! Ye're walcome to bide wi' this auld randy (vagrant) as lang as ye hae min'. Yer company is canty ; an' forby, man, I think ye should fecht yer battles afore ye gird (move quickly) yer spouse to Gollan. Daunt the heathens afore ye tak' her hame, or she'll gang oot o' her wits whan she sees hoo they dow (dare) ye. Faigs, preacher, I dinna ken hoo ye are to keep yer ain wits.”

Mr. North's complacency was not disturbed. “ We must trust in God for that as for all things else, Sir Eric.”

“ Weel, weel, my man, sae be it ! Maybe I trust in Him as weel as ye ; but I aye try to mak’ the job as licht for Him as I can. What say ye to that—eh ? ”

The preacher proceeded to defend his theory that no one could make the Most High his debtor ; but his host deftly plugged the sermonizing loop-hole, and opened another.

“ Ye haena tell’d me o’ yer journey to Gollan yet,” he said, in a fetching tone.

Mr. North remembered that the subject had been suggested to him early in the conversation but that it had been overlaid by subsequent topics. He therefore readily followed the trail laid for him by the Apothecary. Still seated, with the empty quaich in his hands, he told his listener that he hailed from the ancient town of St. Marnock in the southern quarter of Scotland. “ From thence I rode with my wife to Edinbro’ along a highway made level by the hand of man. It is almost a new concern in our Scottish kingdom, and not known so far north as Gollan : but it is exceedingly commodious, as I think.”

“ Man, ye should tak’ the land as God made

it ! ” smirked the Red Fellow mischievously.

His victim ignored the dart. “ The latter portion of my journey I took alone. It was exceedingly tortuous. I was almost entirely at the mercy of common foot-tracks through the heather. Oft my pony waded to the flanks in the morasses, and I, more than once, despaired of reaching my destination. And the country is so open and desolate—moor, and moor, and more moor, with scarcely a tree for shelter.”

The listener brightened. “ Man, talk alang that gate (way) whan ye gang oot-by to see the laird. He’s daft about haein’ trees planted aroond The Cairn, an’ the fowk o’ the country-side winna hear o’t. They hae the notion that trees micht keep the fields damp, so that the corn wadna dry. He’s no begood (begun) yet ; but there’ll be a stram-ash (commotion) whan he gies the order to plant the roots.”

“ That would be a pity, Sir Eric, for the country sorely needs trees, and your people have a wrong conception about them. It is more than likely that our foraging forefathers burnt down whatever forests may have

advantaged the landscape ; but there is no reason why they should not be planted once more. Their absence yields up the country to the spirit of monotony. I rode miles and miles over the most exacting and solitary stretches of heathland, wading sometimes through one bog after another."

"An' didna ye meet onybody ?"

"Only an old cadger trudging along with his pony."

"An' hed he a dreep (drip) at his neb as big as a turnip ? An' did he yatter aboot a'body's affairs ?"

"Yes, indeed. He was a most entertaining companion in that respect, albeit very worldly, as I thought."

"Ah, I jist thocht it ! It was Wintry Willie."

"Is that his name ?"

"Na ; deil kens what they ca' him—Cochrane, I'm thinkin'. He has aye a blob o' water at the end o' his cauld neb. Hooever the sun shines, it's winter in puir Willie's face ; an' sae we ca' him 'Wintry.' Oh, it winna be lang till we see him in Gollan, tak' my word. He roams a wide circle, the totter-

in' gangrel (wanderer); an' he kens a' the gossip aboot ilka man, woman, bairn, pup, soo, an' weasel for a hunner miles aroond. I'm aye uplifted to see him, for he scoops in a' the crack o' the country-side in his wanderin's, an' by the time he wins to oor door he's fu' to burstin'. Puir Willie, he hes nae siller in his pooch, but his tongue is lined wi' silk, for he disna speak ill o' onybody."

V

“OH, BUT THE TOD’S A BIRKIE!”

THE Sabbath oozed away rather drowsily within the Apothecary’s hut. He simmered between the meditations of Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes (his favourite section of the Bible) and those of his revered Marcus Aurelius. Occasionally, he attempted a splash of banter with Lexy, but she resented such familiarity on that day.

Nobody thought of the kirk : its door had been closed for so many Sabbaths that people had ceased to think of it as having any relation to their life and interest. The women sat in bunches at the end of their houses, combing each other’s hair (“searching of heads” as the session records of the period bluntly christened the practice), and satisfying

their curiosity with driblets of gossip. The men fell to a long programme of athletic sports in the fields, or whisked down the burnside in a torrent of shinty.

All this the preacher saw from the Apothecary’s door ; and, seizing a moment when the performers were absorbed, he stole into the stable to meditate on the subject of his wayward parishioners.

And thus the Sabbath jostled to a close—the Apothecary at his pet authors, the house-keeper drowsing by the fire, the preacher considering his flock, and the parishioners sweating at their sports.

Early next morning “Geordie Flea,” the piper, called the hamlet to work by the sound of his chanters. This was his daily task, and a necessary one for times which had not yet dreamt of clocks and whose popular timepiece was the sun’s shadow on the hearthstone or house-gable. Men lay abed till the throb of Geordie’s music stirred them and floated them off to their tasks.

“There’s Geordie, pair snipe !” exclaimed the Apothecary, as the notes of the pipes drifted into his chamber.

Mr. North offered him the compliments of the day.

He did not seem to hear ; but in a moment or two he answered, “ Ay, it’s a braw mornin’, as ye say ; an’ I’m thinkin’ that ye should gang to ca’ on the laird the day—ye can owercome the distance ’tween noo an’ dayset. Gang an’ pay yer respecks to him : it’ll please him weel to see ye early at it.”

Mr. North arose and dressed, and after partaking of some broiled trout, he prepared to execute his host’s advice. The Apothecary gave him clear instructions as to his way, with many inlaid hints as to his handling of the laird.

“ Whan ye face the laird (oh, but The Tod’s a birkie !), ye maun set yer trust in Providence an’ wag yer tongue weel. Dinna be blate (shy) wi’ him. Ca’ canny, of coorse, an’ gin ye dinna see the bottom, dinna wade ; but mind this, that a coof (coward) is nae company, an’ a man should aye be brave in his ain cause. ‘ He that wad sup kail wi’ the Deil maun use a lang-shanked spoon,’ ye ken ; but the kail may be worth the trouble. I’m a fair scatter-wit, Maister North, but an’ auld

pock (sack) is aye skailin’; an’, man, I’m concerned for ye to get the upstretch o’ yon thrawn cuddy, the laird. Gin he winna gie in wi’ sober handlin’, tak’ him by the thrapple. Stan’ up to him lek a sodger. Awa’ noo!”

Mr. North had scarcely departed when Macroarie (who had noticed his departure) entered the Apothecary’s dwelling in company with his daughter.

“Is that yersel’, Macroarie?” cried the Apothecary, on catching the sound of his voice. “Come awa’ ben.”

The caller strode into the mediciner’s den, his broad blue bonnet tugged down to his eyebrows as if he expected to meet a north-westerly gale on the way. Probably he anticipated a tussle with the Apothecary.

Macroarie was a man of average height. His limbs were not so stout as those of the Apothecary, but when he was stripped at the ball or hammer they seemed packed with plaited sinews. His head of lint-white hair reared itself on his shoulders with a certain massive masterliness. The white hair on his head betokened a softness in his nature which never found encouragement in the expression

of his countenance ; while the short-cropped beard gave his face a noticeable decisiveness. The saint in him was well out of sight, but the fighter lay pack to the skin. Linty hair was too feeble against a gritty grey eye, tight lips, determined jaw, and veins strained by a fullness of animal delight. Feet are for standing on, and Macroarie's served their mission. He literally gripped the ground with them, and his legs and body rose out of them with a rude impressive proportion.

In a more educated age, Macroarie would have been a *douce*, sensible neighbour ; in that age he was a wild, untamed ignoramus, with a determination to be the leading figure in every ploy. He worked the same fields which his father and grandfather had worked before him ; and his chief ambition was to die on the bit of soil that had given him birth. His wife was alive ; and his daughter, Rosey, was their eldest child. He was proud of her in his own animal fashion.

“ Ay, ay, Macroarie,” began the Apothecary when his visitor had pushed his figure into the apartment, “ sae ye cam' ower the hill wi' the new preacher an' telled him ye was a

braw sanct (saint)! Man, man, what imp tempted ye to stun the puir chiel wi’ sich a bagfu’ o’ lees—eh? Did ye never think that auld Satan, the Ill Thief, micht hae nabbed ye wi’ thae lees in yer gullet an’ dragged ye awa’ to his ain rabbit-hole?”

Macroarie sniffed, half-pleased at the recollection of his exploit and yet restless under the flick of the Apothecary’s bantering lash. “Weel, Sir Eric,” he explained, “the halflan (simple fellow) was a’ through-ither at the kind o’ wark he hed to face in the pairish, an’ I thocht to braven him by tellin’ him we was a’ mad for the kirk in Gollan; but I didna say *hoo* we was mad—he’ll fin’ that oot for himsel’ come-time.”

“By my sark, Macroarie, but ye’re the same auld ferret yet! Ay, an’ ye telled him ye was yersel’ an elder!”

“Ye wadna tak’ me for a youngster, wad ye?”—revealing his key to the puzzle.

The Apothecary leapt to the hint. “Oh, Macroarie, ye randy, the Ill Thief hes haud o’ ye by the neb an’ taes; an’ some day he’ll lay ye on his brander (gridiron) an’ roast ye lek a troot.”

Macroarie drew down his bonnet and muttered, "Lat him haud on till he gets me!"

This broadside joke conquered them both, and they gave in to a spill of merriment.

When the jolly tide had ebbed somewhat, the Apothecary drew breath to tell him of the minister's journey. "The puir chiel is awa' ower the hill the day to ca' on the laird. They'll hae a rackit afore dayset, I'm thinkin'; but I jalouse (suspect) he'll stan' up to The Tod.—I say, Macroarie, gin ye plague the preacher as lang as he's aneath my roof, I'll scatter yer brains lek a flea's. Are ye hearin'—eh?"

"Ye needna fear, Sir Eric," answered the wily one. "It's only whan I'm fou that I hae a taste for gossellers!"

"Weel, dinna forget. Gin ye an' me haud thegither to see that he's no tramped on——"

"Oh, faigs, there's nae 'haud' in it, Sir Eric," interrupted Macroarie. "Na, na! I'm for the Episcopal, an' I'll no swallow a Presbyter—na, deil a bit."

"Weel, weel," urged the Apothecary sharply, "haud by auld Nick himsel', gin ye hae a mind. But tak' tent (notice) o'

this—ye mauna meddle wi’ the preacher as lang as he’s aneath my roof. Gin ye lift a fist on him I’ll thraw yer neck lek a hen’s.”

The Apothecary’s tone had assumed a seriousness which it sometimes did when wholesome badinage had spent itself without reward. Macroarie now saw that he meant what he said, and the crafty sinner made his escape from the possibility of further compromise by saying, “Ah, weel, I didna come here the day to gossip anent ony gospeller, Sir Eric. I cam’ here to get yer mind on my dochter.”

“An’ what’s wrang wi’ Rosey?”

“Faigs, if I kent that, I wadna hae come here to speir.”

The “mediciner” smiled. “Man, Macroarie, ye hae a perfect waterspoot o’ a tongue! Noo, gie ower yer daffin’ (joking) an’ tell me aboot yer lassie——”

“Oh, she’s at han’ hersel’. She’s crackin’ wi’ Lexy in the ither end”—for the first time intimating that he had brought her with him.

“Hi, Rosey, come here!” commanded the Apothecary, setting himself well up in his couch, in order to receive his patient.

With much hesitation and more shyness, Rosey Macroarie answered the rousing summons. She was light-haired like her father, and his grey eyes had softened to a tender blue in hers, which floated in sunny gentleness. She was as tall as Macroarie himself, and had a hint of his vigour in her limbs. As the custom of the times decreed, she had a rude shawl over her shoulders, while a woollen petticoat fell slightly below her knees. Her head, of course, was bare, allowing a homely freedom to her linty hair; and her feet also were without covering. She was a flush and healthy maiden of some eighteen summers—handsome without the cheateries of art—whose total impression was that of a sweet and thrifty young woman, with qualities which were not on parade but were likely enough to flourish under tuition.

“Come awa’ ower beside me, lass,” said the Apothecary kindly, holding out his hand.

“She’s mistrysted wi’ the dwams (faintings) an’ vapours, I’m thinkin’,” explained her father clumsily, as his daughter stepped shyly nearer.

“What’s this ye hae been daein’ to yersel’,

lass—eh?” began her adviser, now taking her by the hand. “Are ye in love, bairn? Dinna blush: love’s a thing we a’ get tickled wi’. I hae been tickled wi’ it mysel’—maistly in my feet, though! Put oot yer tongue, Rosey; ay, that way.” He scrutinized her tongue. “Naethin’ wrang wi’ yer tongue, lass; an’ that’s a rare thing to say o’ a woman.” Reaching to his saddle-bag, he pulled down his huge sand-glass. Laying his finger on her pulse, he counted its beats while he watched the hurrying sand. “Na; naethin’ muckle wrang there, either,” he announced at length, tossing the sand-glass into the sill of the window. “Boo doon, my cushie doo, an’ lat me soond yer chest.” Fitting his ear to her bosom, he commanded her to “Pump awa’ lek a mariner on a sinkin’ ship.—Ay, that way. Harder yet, though; pech awa’, lass.” Listening intently to her deep breathing for a minute, he then pushed her from him playfully, saying, “Thank ye for the cuddle, Rosey.”

“An’ what’s wrang wi’ her, Sir Eric?” queried her father, seeing that the examination was complete.

“Wrang? Deil a hait (whit), my jo. There’s jist a wee bit win’ rumblin’ aboot her stamack an’ joupin’ to her heid. We’ll sune gie that a fleg (fright).” Reaching to the window-sill, he drew down a small jar and handed it to Macroarie. “See, auld neebour, gie her a scrapin’ o’ that whan she cares to tak’ it, an’ in a day or twa she’ll be skelpin’ aboot as lively as a courtier wi’ a flea in his hose.”

VI

ITS WALLS WERE BLACK, WEATHER-BEATEN AND DEFLIANT

WHEN Mr. North set out from the house of the Red Apothecary, he swung to the left for the burn.

The stream was broad but scarcely two feet deep, and his pony took it without breathing. Rising on the other bank, rider and pony faced for the gently ascending moor which lay as a foot-rug to the distant hill. It was ill riding through the slubbery mosses and broken ground, but by zig-zagging to the tracks gouged out by the rains and melted snows, and twining about the islands which stood in the rips of broken surface, the preacher warily won the hill-side, and rose to the upland as neatly as if he had been a mariner with a compass.

All climbers, whatever their quest, tarry on each height to look around them. When a ledge is reached Nature whispers, "Take a breath here"—and, while obeying her advice, the climber accepts the advantage of his eminence to view the scene around him. As Mr. North ascended the hill and drew close to a Picts mound, he instinctively brought his pony to a stand and looked back on the jibing path by which he had travelled. Little cuts of it were visible here and there, made conspicuous by the stones which dotted the rain tracks; but only snatches of winding loops could be thus seen—the rest was hidden by heath. "Such is my life," mused the preacher. "As I look back on it, there are many mysterious gaps in it—only glints of it here and there can I see clearly."

He gazed in conscious satisfaction on the landscape, his eye gliding from one part of it to another in a circling movement till it rounded to the farm-house which the Apothecary said was to be his halting-stage, and at which he was to inquire of his further journey. The sight of the house recalled him to his errand, and he at once resumed his route.

In brief time he touched the skirts of the farm, whose hedgeless, treeless exposure enabled him to pick his way to the house without delay. He had little occasion to rap at the door, for a visitor in those days was a rarity and was eyed and discussed long ere he reached the house.

The door was opened by a stout, matronly woman, whose shoon proclaimed her the wife of a well-to-do farmer.

“ I am sorry to give you trouble,” said the preacher, addressing her, “ but I am desirous of finding my way to The Cairn, the residence of the laird.”

“ Ye keep along the hill as far as ye may, an’ then wheel to yer richt for a mile or twa. Haud on frae that till ye see a muckle square biggin’—ye canna mis-ken it—an’ that’s The Cairn.—But ye maun surely be thirsty wi’ ridin’ ; come in an’ rest ye, an’ drink a quaich o’ ale.” She spoke with a frankness that touched her visitor.

Mr. North willingly surrendered to the invitation. He slid from his pony and tied the animal to a stone beside the door. He was in need of a little refreshment, he thought ; besides, might not Providence design this

opportunity to be a means of securing further information concerning his parish? He stepped into the house.

“I dinna ken wha ye may be,” remarked the matron (the clerical dress is a modern assumption), “but this is my guidman, an’ my three sons”—with a movement of her hand towards a hale man of over fifty and three strapping youths—“an’ my twa lassies is oot-by at wark.”

The new-comer shook hands with the head of the house and his sons, but hesitated as to taking the hint to reveal his identity. Should he at once announce himself, or find out the character of the house first? He decided to declare his name and profession. “Well, kind neighbours, it was no intention of mine to tarry here, or to reveal myself, when I called to inquire my way; but since your kindness has imposed the first on me, gratitude should prompt the other. My name is Caleb North, good neighbours, and I am the new minister of Gollan.”

In undisguised astonishment the matron exclaimed, “Preserve us a’!” And the household fell silent for a moment.

The farmer first recovered use of his wits, and said quite warmly, "Weel, Maister North, ye'll aye be walcome under this roof, onyway."

The minister as warmly thanked him.

Next moment, the farmer was immersed in an explanation of his own attitude on kirk matters. "We hae aye hadden by the throne an' kirk; an' we gang by the practice o' the country, whatever it may chance to be. Episcoper or Presbyter is a' the same to us, an' we brangle (threaten) nae man. Gin there's room for a' kinds in heaven there should be room for a' kinds here. I hae nae ither creed. But I'm dootin' ye'll hae muckle skaith (harm) in this pairish, Maister North; the fowk are unco dour—aye, they're dour, dour. Och, och, things are sairly mistrusted in Gollan. I kenna what's come ower the fowk, but they're lawless an' twisted."

Mr. North admitted that the Apothecary had already informed him of the rudeness of the people.

"Indeed, sir, he didna tell ye wrang. Them that wad gang to the kirk—douce fowk lek oorsels—daurna think o't, for they wad clod us if we gied ony coontenance to the

Presbyter. Oh, Maister North, they're unco thrawn."

His visitor was gazing into the bowels of the peat fire, lost in his thoughts.

The mistress of the house approached him with a bicker of ale in her hand and touched him on the arm. "Warm yersel' wi' a drink o' ale, sir; an' dinna be skaured (scared)."

"Thank you for the ale, my good woman," answered the awakening preacher, taking the bicker from her hand, "and thank you still more for your words of comfort. I think I may depend on the goodwill of this house, anyhow," he added, looking round on them all.

"Weel, ay—in sympathy; oh, ay," the farmer hastened to reply. "But I'm tellin' ye fair an' even, that it's no canny for us to gang tae the kirk, though; na, it isna."

Mr. North hesitated, the cup still in his hand, as if disappointed with the farmer's evasive statement.

One of the sons, touched by the preacher's manifest depression, stepped out and said bluntly, "I'll come."

Instantly the preacher laid the bicker on

the ground between his feet, then stood up and laid his hand on the youth's shoulder. "You are my first recruit, young friend," he said, visibly affected, "and I thank the Most High for your proffered assistance."

The fellow looked stunned, shuffled, then giggled. "I wisna thinkin' o't that way," he explained, "but gin onybody flings a clod at ye, I'll ding his jaw for him."

Catching sight of their brother's intention in this light, the other two sons also offered their support.

Appreciating the motive behind their rude heroism, the preacher responded with "God be praised!" Turning to the father, he said, "You can surely come to the kirk now, with such a bodyguard."

"It's a lang ride, though," urged the father, "an' I'm gey féckless (weak) in the legs at times. Besides, we hae only three garrons (horses); an', of coorse, I canna tramp it. Maybe, gin ony o' my loons fail ye, I micht tak' his place, though. There, noo, I canna say ye fairer."

"Well, perhaps I should not expect more from a man past mid-life," replied the

preacher, taking up his ale and drinking it, "but I shall trust to see you in the kirk ere long. I hope to begin public worship next Sabbath, God willing; and I shall at least look for your sons to be there, Mr. ——. What's your name?"

"Isaac Jamieson."

"Well, I shall hope to see the lads there, Mr. Jamieson, and perhaps also yourself by and by. And now I must journey on my way to The Cairn and pay my respects to the laird."

As the preacher mounted at the door, his comforter cried, "Dinna be feared for The Tod, Maister North. He's a steerin' tyke, but he leks a man wi' a brave face."

Day had spun over the meridian ere the rider neared The Cairn, the residence of Gabriel Crook, laird of all the country-side. He could hardly have missed seeing it, even had it been night-time. The Cairn was a dead-square tower, backed close to a deep loch, and had been reared in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. A moat had once encircled it, but a wide, deep ditch was now its only belt; and where the drawbridge had formerly swung, a raised turf path led to the

door. The building itself leapt straight and high out of the earth in a manner next to startling, for it was—with its out-houses—the only building within eyesight in a wide expanse of land. Its walls were black, weather-beaten, and defiant. There were three stories in it, and every “window”—small eye-holes for light—was grated. Over the doorway hung a kind of stone funnel which in wilder centuries formed a screen for the inhabitants when they desired to crush with stones any attacker who succeeded in getting to the door.

The building had been erected by the laird's forbears, who were earls of the county. The family in direct line had now filtered out elsewhere, and the distinctions and much of the patrimony had gone with them. The laird was still called “The Baron” by way of courtesy, but to the common country-side he was “The Tod.” He had also a lingering vestige of the ancient hereditary sheriffdom, exercised to the power of life and death by his forefathers; and the dungeon at the base of The Cairn in which they immured felons and enemies was now the “Thieves' Hole,”

for cooling occasional disturbers of the peace.

Mr. North timidly approached the rusted iron-bound door and knocked. He tied his pony to the peg in the wall and waited, not without a perceptible palpitation of the heart. A yell of dogs answered him from within, and in a few minutes the laird himself opened the door, indolently gripping a shaggy brute by the nape of the neck. The preacher saw a bulky, cumbersome man, lazy to look at but with evident powers of activity in reserve. Only about a quarter of the man seemed to be on duty : the other three-quarters hung about waiting for the summons of some unusual occasion. There was a ponderousness about him which only a copious dash of energy could vivify. He hung slack and ungainly in his clothes, too, which created the feeling that one could not well guess what strength he had until some exigency maddened him to action. A short brow was railed over by a run of thick hair, upstanding like a fence. His dark, bushy eyebrows were intrusive even in a face not particularly clean and white ; and hiding ferret-like in the holes underneath were two searching and undisturbed dark

eyes. The upper lip was shaven in a ragged way, which gave slovenly harmony to the whole countenance. He was hatless, but was otherwise clad in a sleeved waistcoat with many horn buttons, knee breeches of hodden grey, blue hose, and shoon.

When he observed a gentleman at the door, he coolly dragged the dog to a back apartment as indifferently as if the animal had been a rat; but, on the way, motioned with his foot in the direction of a room and called to his visitor, "Gang in there!"

In a second or two the Baron returned, and strode into the room with both hands stabled in his flap pockets. He did not bluster, as this sloppy style suggested he might do. Grim-browed and taciturn, he wasted no time in ceremony, but bluntly asked the stranger his name and business.

"My name is Caleb North——"

"Oh, ye're the new gospeller! That's a richt." There was no more to say.

"I have come to pay my respects to you, laird, and to tender my thanks for your kind interest in me," continued Mr. North, holding on his way.

“ Oh, a sooth-country jo o’ mine thocht weel o’ ye, an’ I jist obleeged him. He’s ane o’ the Kirk Commissioners.”

“ I understand ; but I owe it to you to thank you in person and express the prayer that I may realize your hopes.”

“ Houps ? I hae nae houps.”

“ Still, you surely wish that I may do good in the parish,” persisted the preacher.

“ Ne’er a hair care I, gin ye but flyte (scold) weel the thrawn loons hereawa’. Cam’ ye a’ the distance frae Gollan for nocht else ? ”

“ I did, and I think your friendly interest in me deserved it.”

“ Weel, ye was sairly in need o’ a job.”

The laird lounged heavily across the room and spat into the empty fireplace, which was built in the wall after the newest fashion.

This careless buccaneering action almost quenched the visitor’s enthusiasm outright. “ And can I do nothing to serve you, in return for your recognition of me ? ” he asked despairingly.

“ Naethin’ ! Lat me alane : that’s a’.”

Every sentence struck like a bullet.

“ But, surely I may hope for your counte-

nance in the kirk sometimes—say, at the Sacrament ? ”

The Baron straightened himself as if wearied. “ Is that a’ ye hae to say ? ”

“ Well, I have much more to say, but nothing further at present, I fear,” answered Mr. North, feeling now that even this jury of one was too much for him.

The Baron hauled his legs lazily towards the door, which had remained ajar, and, wedging it open with his foot (his hands still at home in his pockets), said gruffly, “ Weel, ye can gang noo.”

Mr. North deemed it wise not to roughen his patron’s feelings at the first interview, and he obeyed the nod which motioned him outside. He would have liked to ease his conscience right away and speak to the Baron about his mode of life, but he felt that his most stirring battle-words would lead to no challenging response from that insensitive carcass. He must be content to retire from the field without even sounding the charge—at least for the present.

“ I am sorry to take my leave without some assurance that I may be of assistance

to you," he remarked, as he followed the bullock footsteps to the door, "but in justice to myself I will venture to say that I am resolved to do my duty to the Great Head of the Church and to my fellow-men. If you do not come to the kirk, I must bring the kirk to you when I begin to catechize the district."

It was a bold speech and the only word that had quickened the laird's eyelash that day; but in response to it, he merely tugged open the outer door and waited for his tormentor to walk out.

"A fair good day, laird," the preacher said, passing under the grim archway.

The Baron only muttered to himself, and clashed-to the door.

Mr. North mounted his nag dejectedly, and wheeled his head for home; but just as he slackened rein to give his pony "head," the laird came to the door again and roared, "If ye can get Macroarie's jade o' a dochter oot o' the way, it'll be the maist walcome job ye can dae me or my hoose," and with that he disappeared and by a kick closed the door.

VII

“AY, AY, LAIRDIE; AN’ THAT’S THE AIRT O’
THE WIN’, IS IT?”

THE sun was hugging the hill-tops as Mr. North turned from The Cairn. He was aching at heart. What, after all, had he come for? To be the target of buffoonery? The prospect blunted his courage.

He re-passed the Jamiesons’ house—it was a kind of hyphen between The Cairn and Gollan—but as daylight was becoming scant he rode by without calling.

As he neared home, he came upon a woman finishing her day’s work in the fields. He saluted her and introduced himself. She curtsied in the manner of humble people.

Mr. North asked her name.

“Widow Roy,” she answered simply; and then added, “Widow, noo, alas! for my

brave man is in the mools (grave). But God hasna forgotten me," she continued. "Sir Eric has been mair than a faither to my puir weans. The Lord be gey kind to him, for his kind thocht o' me an' mine! We would a' hae been in the mools, too, hed it no' been for him."

Mr. North felt himself vastly heartened by the woman's warm and artless talk. Here, at least, was one other parishioner disposed to religious sentiment, and likely to offer favourable soil for the Gospel seed. Moreover, he was gladdened to discover proof that his host's gruff abandon was, as he guessed, only Nature's counterfoil to a heart tender and generous.

Remembering his mission, the preacher intimated to his new acquaintance his intention of opening the kirk for public worship on Sabbath and expressed the hope of seeing her present.

Seldom did a minister speak so patronizingly, even to a woman, in that stern age, when a preacher's authority was backed by all the artillery of heaven. He at present was practically an impeached person, however,

and his mission little else than an enterprise. It behoved him, therefore, to be conciliatory even to the poorest. But, in truth, Caleb North would have been so in any environment. He was by temperament a flame, not a hammer; and although he must needs dare the boldest ere his work would thrive, it was the smelting quality that was his true power.

The woman did not answer immediately. She hung her head and seemed uneasy. Finally, she muttered, “Na, I canna come. I’m o’ the Episcopal an’ dinna haud tryst wi’ ony ither.” Then she turned from him and walked away.

The preacher almost reeled under this sudden stab. Heart and soul seemed to forsake him.

How tentative are some of our most precious experiences! One moment we leap into bouncing prosperity and the forces of fortune mass up to our standard; the next, some unexpected pang, a viperish letter, and all the favouring activities are for the time paralysed. Mood is the magic wizard that blackens our world or gives a sun to our sky; and, to us precipitant mortals, it is also the sensitive

plate to which circumstance is the focusing-lens.

Night was casting her frown on the landscape as Mr. North proceeded on his way. He had not travelled far till he unexpectedly met the Apothecary. He was surprised.

“What brought *you* here to-night, Sir Eric? You are not often abroad, you know.”

“True, man, true. But, ye ken, Need is a rider wha rams mettle into the laziest beastie. Weel, ye see, there’s a big clot o’ rheumatism amang the fowk hereawa’, an’ I ken but ae cure for it. The vipers in the heather yield a pungent unguent whan boiled; an’ nae poultice, clyster or phial that I ken o’ can swacken (supple) a stiff leg lek it. Sae I cam’ oot to the vipers, ’cause they wadna come in to me. An’ for the same reason, ye went to the laird; so we’re baith God’s servants, ye wad think. What say ye to that?”

The preacher was not so sure of the last sentiment, but before he could formulate his opinion, he was asked if he had seen The Tod.

“Yes, Sir Eric. The Great Head of the Church favoured me so far as to grant me an interview with the laird.”

“Ay, man,” the Apothecary responded, and his tone indicated an uneasiness with the parson’s pious phraseology. “An’ tell me, did that same obleegin’ Heid gie ye the upperhan’ o’ the Baron, eh ?—Tell me that.”

“No, not exactly.”

The Apothecary became impatient and brought his companion to a stand. “Oot wi’ it, man ! Did he deave (deafen) ye wi’ kisses an’ fling his airms about yer neck an’ cuddle ye, then—eh ?”

“My good friend, this is no subject for pleasantry. I am sorely exercised about the soul of yon poor sinner——”

“’Deed, sae am I, but in a way o’ my ain ! —But tell me hoo ye fared.”

“He received me very coolly—gruffly, indeed ; but I shall be the instrument of saving his never-dying soul yet.”

“Gin he hes ony !” muttered his listener.

“What did you say, neighbour ?”—turning inquiringly towards him.

“Oh, naethin’ ; naethin’ o’ consequence. I was jist sayin’ to mysel’ that gin ye’re to grab yon tiger ye maun be early at it.”

“Oh, Sir Eric, you speak too much like a

worldling. Forgive me if I say that you sometimes seem yourself to be a stranger to the Commonwealth of Israel.”

“Maybe, Maister North; but I’m nae stranger to The Tod an’ the camstary (contrary) loons hereawa’. Man, d’ye ken this: I’m intimately acquaint wi’ the heid, hert, liver, an’ puddin’s o’ every man, woman, an’ bairn, for miles richt an’ left o’ us. I could fin’ my way through ony o’ them without a map.”

The “mediciner’s” knowledge may have been even more searching than he had represented it, but Mr. North was not disposed to dispute it. He therefore kept silent, which gave his comrade an opportunity of again reverting to the exploits of the day.

“What said The Tod, man?”

“Well, nothing beyond a few words, and an invitation to—well, to go away.”

“Ay wad he, the uncircumcised weasel!” This was meant as an expression of sympathy with the preacher; and his henchman backed it up with the hearty advice—“I say, thraw his neck, preacher; thraw the sinner’s neck.”

“And he shouted after me that if I could

rid him of Macroarie’s daughter it would do his house a real service—a sentence which remains mysterious to me.”

The Apothecary pulled suddenly up again—a habit he had—and blew a long, trailing whistle. “Ay, ay, lairdie,” he cried, “an’ that’s the airt o’ the win’, is’t?” After a pause, he guttered out, “Oh, The Tod’s no’ an ill loon, man, whan a’ is said. He’s lek a singed cat—better than he’s bonnie.—But, oh, that’s walcome news ye hae brocht. What’ll Lexy say whan she hears o’t?” He faced Mr. North in a sudden soberness. “See here, my man, ye hae done a gran’ day’s wark. Ye hae got to the bottom o’ a clachan clashmahaver (gossip).—Ay, ay,” he continued, addressing himself now, “sae that’s what’s wrang ’tween Robin an’ his faither that the laird hes smogled the lad awa’ to Edinbro’! Ay, ay, it’s oot at last. Weel,” slapping his leg with energy, “dang me, gin I’m no’ on the lassie’s side!”

Mr. North began to detect the meaning of the discovery. “Is this the first time you have had evidence of young Crook’s intentions?” he asked.

“ It is ; I’ll warrant ye that even Macroarie himsel’ disna ken aboot it.—Robin Crook, the skelpin’ callant, hes eyed Rosey ower aften for his peace o’ mind, an’ the auld faither hes yerked (jerked) him oot o’ her track-way. But Robin’s lek himsel’—he disna blab muckle, but whan his mind is bent on onything he’ll wade through the Muckle Fire to win at it. He’ll dae that, the sodger ! ”

The preacher disturbed the Apothecary’s meditation by intimating that he had more wholesome news to communicate. “ The three brave sons of Isaac Jamieson have pledged themselves to stand by me in the kirk on the Lord’s Day.”

“ That’s heartsome news, man. Better a layin’ hen than an idle mill, ony day. But gin Macroarie tak’s a tiff at them he’ll mak’ snuff o’ them in a bleezin’ twinklin’.—H’sh ! That’s him roarin’ fou in the ale-hoose ! ”

By a hand on his shoulder the Apothecary brought Mr. North to a stand. They had walked within the outlines of Gollan, and were now near enough to hear the songs of those who hugged the ale-house.

The two stood listening. Macroarie’s voice

wedged a way through all the others. He was singing a rude bacchanalian ballad with the voice of a giant.

“ He liltis like a cherub ! ” remarked the Apothecary in sarcasm. “ Keep clear o’ Macroarie whan he’s at the bicker (ale-bowl), Maister North ; for then he’s a dour, mustard deevil, an’ he wad batter ye withoot a thocht.”

In a brief space they had approached the Apothecary’s dwelling. When they entered, they found Lexy ready with a stewed rabbit.

Mr. North was indeed hungry. He had expected at least a scone and a cup of ale at The Cairn ; and although the Jamiesons had in a measure forestalled the laird’s want of hospitality, he had an edged appetite as he entered Lexy’s “ kitchen ”—whose clean, virtuous tidiness added a tone of welcome comfort to his repast.

His appetite and senses soothed, he retired to his couch and slept rapturously till the morning.

VIII

“ I DINNA KEN WHAUR I WAS BORN ”

“ **G**EORDIE FLEA ” announced the dawn on his pipes. The Apothecary had been lying awake for some time. As his ear laid hold of Geordie’s birling in the distance, he called softly to the preacher, inquiring if he were awake. It was still too dark to see, especially in a room lit only by the window of murky brown glass.

Mr. North at that moment was just rising to the surface of consciousness, and he answered dreamily.

“ There’s Geordie’s pipes,” said the Apothecary. “ Hear ye them, Maister North ? ”

“ Yes, quite clearly, neighbour. You say he plays the lieges out of bed every morning ? ”

“ Ay. Summer an’ winter, Geordie blaws the warnin’ through his chanters. Puir snipe,

he's as thin as moonlight. Man, whan the Ill Thief gets haud o' him he'll no' be able to stick him on a spit.”

The preacher roused himself, thinking his host was handling solemn subjects too jauntily. “I wish you would speak of something else, friend.”

“Weel, spin oot a theme, then, an' we'll link at it in the dark till Lexy louns to her legs again.—I say, are ye acquaint wi' Marcus Aurelius, the brave chiel—eh?”

The preacher owned to a meagre acquaintance with the great pagan.

“An' ye ken Marcus! I'm fair owerjoyed to hear it.”

“I am afraid you can moderate your delight, my friend; for I have not such information of his teaching as to lead me to any intelligent admiration of it. Besides, to be candid, I would rather speak on some more profitable subject—the Apostle Paul, for example, and his heroic——”

This set-back speared the Apothecary. “Paul? Haivers, man!” he cried in feigned disgust. “Paul was nae doot a brainy chiel, an' micht hae made a brave sodger or a gleg

(clever) attorney ; but whan he took to writin' or preachin', his thochts ran awa' wi' him an' bedded him in moss-water—faigs did they, man."

Not wishing to make a frontal attack on his protector, the preacher gently insinuated that "Of course, only the spiritual man can discern spiritual things."

The astute mediciner saw that along that line his enjoyment might be jeopardized. He was unwilling to question a principle which he well enough understood, and he felt that he would be safer to get back to the apostle. "Paul isna practical, man. He hatches owermony whigmalorums (fancy notions) for me."

"I cannot admit that," persisted the divine. "Paul is vitally practical."

"I winna gie in. Paul disna haud fast by the facts o' life lek Marcus."

"Wrong."

"Richt!—I say, dae ye think Paul wad lat me tak' a snuff—eh?" (reaching to the window-sill for his snuff mull).

"As to that I cannot speculate, neighbour, but it is possible he might not."

“Na, catch him! He advised men no’ to tak’ wives, either, the auld monk. Man, I hae nae faith in holy glamours that dry yer mither’s milk in ye. That’s whaur Paul an’ me dinna row thegither. An’ forby, man, the auld warld hes aye hed a tune o’ its ain; an’ though this age an’ the ither hes pitched it on a key to suit itsel’, it’s aye the same tune—sung ower its cradle whan it was brocht forth by the Almichty’s wisdom. Dinna lat Paul ride ye a’thegither in Gollan—I mean, in bein’ too nippy wi’ the hairmless ploys o’ human nater. Paul wisna born on oor side o’ the moon. Tak’ my advice an’ ca’ awa’ at guid common sense, Maister Preacher.”

The advice was not lost on Mr. North, yet it rubbed the wrong way. “Doubtless, doubtless; still, sense is opposed to faith, is it not? No sense or reason ought to usurp the office or work of faith.”

“Weel, weel. Gie faith a free wing, but I’m warnin’ ye that whan Macroarie hits ye a bash lek a mountain hittin’ a hen, he’ll ding baith sense an’ faith oot o’ ye in a twinklin’.—I say” (leaping aside from his subject now that he saw his opportunity), “dae ye mind

readin' in Marcus a thocht I'll try to gie ye as best I can contrive? It winds oot this way—' He that regards his mind and reverences the divinity in his soul before everything else, need not be upset. He complains not at misfortune, and is independent of both solitude and company; and, what is still more, he will neither despise life nor flee it, but is unconcerned about the length or shortness of the time he is to spend in the body.' Noo, tell me, wad that sane philosophy no' stiffen yer backbone better than ony o' Paul's rhapsodies—eh? Paul! Man, Paul couldna write lek that though he hed a quill frae an angel's wing an' a' the Sea o' Galilee for an ink-pot."

The preacher took fright at these bold sentiments, and could only exclaim, "Oh, dear me, Sir Eric, you speak inadvisedly!"

"Deil a bit, Maister Preacher! Marcus is my apostle, an' I ken what I'm speakin' about. He tak's nae bairnish touts (depressed moods) lek Paul—he aye speaks bravely o' baith life an' death."

"But Paul was one of the inspired writers
——"

“ I DINNA KEN WHAUR I WAS BORN ” 91

“ Oh, I dinna mean to ca’ doon Paul ; I’m jist fechtin’ for Marcus.”

“ Well, Paul for me ! ”

“ An’ Marcus for me ! ”

The preacher betook himself to argument. “ Marcus was a pagan, my friend, and destitute of saving truth.”

“ He’ll be damned, then—eh ? ”

“ I fear so.”

“ Weel, preacher, there’ll be some rare chiels in Auld Nick’s Hole.”

“ It may be so, but the point is that there will be no bad people in heaven. That happy land will be occupied only by the elect.”

“ Oh, Marcus is safe, then ! He’s ane o the elect.”

The discussion tightened probably more than either of the combatants intended, and both were feeling for an honourable escape. It was Mr. North who eased off with a remark growing out of the contest and leading to more harmonious encounters. “ Your travels abroad have probably affected your religious views, Sir Eric. We must not limit unduly the mercy of Jehovah : and I am not your judge, nor the judge of Marcus, either.”

The sentiment was clumsily stated, but it pleased the Apothecary. He beamed, and answered, "Ay, that's the richt tune, noo, man. Toot that music on yer horn, an' God bless ye!"

Pursuing the fresh topic with a sense of relief, the preacher asked his companion if he had seen much of the world in his travels.

"No' muckle. Some fowk micht see mair farlies (wonders) through a chink in a dyke."

"Still, you are not the man to go about the world with your eyes shut"—a move to bring him to the humour of narration. "Were you born hereabout, Sir Eric?"

"Weel, I dinna ken whaur I was born. I think the Angel Gabriel jist lat me fa' oot o' his basket some nicht he was fuddled. I canna tell ye whether I hed faither or mither—although I ken nae ither trick o' gettin' into the warld withoot thae contrivances (savin' by Gabriel aforesaid). The first glint I hae oot o' the tangle," he proceeded, now yoking to his tale, "was seein' mysel' tumblin' on the deck o' a brig that seemed aye to be sailin' in sunlicht. I was telled efterhend (afterwards) that the captain was my faither;

but I canna say, an' I dinna ken e'en his name. We sailed on for—oh, a lang while; an' a' went weel till we cam' opposite Negropont on the Grecian coast. Some Turkish pirates fell in love wi' us there, an' invited themsel's to oor deck. They had a' pistols an' cutlasses wi' them—to carve the provender an' pick their teeth wi' !—an' they louped into us wi' nae ither ceremony than a present o' leaden bullets into the wame (belly) o' some o' oor men. There was a fecht—a slittin' o' gullets an' a knappin' o' skulls. I mind weel clappin' my wee han's whan the game set on; but whan I saw the captain fa' ower the bulwark wi' rivers o' red rinnin' doon his face, I begood (began) to greet.”

“That was just like a child,” observed his audience, to give the narrator time to breathe.

“Ay! Weel, the harpies took oor ship an' sailed her awa'—but whaur they took her to I couldna tell ye. A' I hae mind o' at the hinner-end (finish) was seein' their carcasses turlin' by the neck in the win' at Constanti-nople. They were catched, ye see—ay, man, the authorities cam' to handygrips wi' them an' hanged them. First there was ane hung

in front o' the shops in the market—I can see him yet joupin' to the win' in the rope. Weel, his corp' was left wabblin' in sicht o' a'body for three days. Then the second chiel was swung up, an' speeled in the cord for ither three days; an' then the feck (greater number) o' the pirates in turn—the hail fash o' the kittle bisness takin' three-an'-thirty days."

The preacher was silently meditating on the doom of these unprepared rascals, and only muttered, "Oh, dreadful, dreadful!"

"Twa o' oor ain crew, wha hed escaped frae the pirates, shipped on anither brig, bound for Jamaica," the narrator continued, "an' they 'treated wi' their captain to tak' me wi' them. The man wha ached (owned) the ship in Jamaica, whan he saw me an' got my story, said he wad stan' by me an' schule (school—educate) me. An' I buckled-to, sma' as I was; but he sune begood to nidder (irritate) me, an' I saw that he was a selfish carle wha intended to use me for his ain ends on the plantations. I watched my chance, an' got awa' on a brig that was sailin' for Amsterdam."

He was now speeding to the end of his tale.

“ We plied about the coasts o’ Holland for awhile, but in the lang run we cam’ to Scotia and drapped doon on Aberdeen. I took my heels in my han’, an’ ran awa’ there. I fell to orra (odd) jobs an’ pickit up some bawbees. By an’ by, I could tak’ a winter or twa at Marischal College for learnin’ medicine. An’ I’m here in Gollan noo, giein’ poison to fowk on a’ han’s, an’ sendin’ them to a brichter world whaur they’ll get kail an’ brose for naethin’; an’ d’ye ken, man, the sinners are no’ thankfu’ for’t!—I ken nae mair than I hae telled ye, guid neighbour. Gin my mither’s no’ in the kirkyaird, she maun be an auld wizened warlock lek Lexy.”

Mr. North took occasion to remark that, “ It must be unpleasant at times to reflect on your history, and think that you are friendless in the world.”

“ Na, Maister North, na! Marcus says that if ye can mend onything ye’re to set about it, an’ if ye canna, what the better are ye for grumblin’? I dinna ken what Paul says anent it,” he added mischievously, “ but I haud by Marcus there.—Whist! I hear

Lexy pechin' to her legs. Puir sowl, she hes naebody o' her ain in the warld ony mair than mysel', an' so we jist dauner (saunter) along thegither. Whan a' is said, a heart-some comrade is your next-han' (nearest) relation."

Understanding that the Apothecary had now finished, the preacher tumbled forth from his sheepskins, remarking, "It is time for me to be getting about now, Sir Eric."

"Weel, tak' guid care o' yersel', my man. Dinna flichter (wander) aboot the clachan lek a doited hen. Haud near my door for twa or three days; an' whan the coast is clear, ye maun ca' on Roger, the dominie—oor ain fushionless, feckless Roger, faither o' bairns, an' fleas, an' philosophy."

IX

“WE MUST NOT BE DAUNTED”

THE Apothecary's suggestion to his guest, that he should seek an early opportunity of interviewing Roger, at length seemed wise and appropriate. The dominie was, next to the minister, the leading religious figure in Gollan. Socially, too, he was of consequence, standing close to the Apothecary—who was of as much weight in the scales of the country-side as the laird. Besides, the preacher's presence had now become known to everybody, and doubtless all had decided how they were to receive him. A visit to the dominie, then, was commendable under every consideration. It would afford him fuller information on kirk affairs; it would give him opportunity of a more detailed knowledge of his parish; and it

might result also in further evidence of the popular mind concerning himself.

He determined, therefore, to stir the domine's stagnant life by a surprise visit during school hours. Since the kirk had been closed, Roger had attained additional distinction from the absence of his superior; but that advantage was overshadowed by the fact that he was never visited by "company" either in school or at home, and his life became like a tune played on a harmonium with only one stop out. Now, however, his eminent seminary of learning was again to command a minister's patronage, which he fondly hoped might bring assuaging satisfactions to the teacher.

The dwellings he beheld were strewn harum-scarum over the landscape, as if some giant had tumbled them off his shovel with less concern than a farmer scatters manure on a field. In front of every house bounced a hilly midden, sloping out from the very threshold of the door. At the back, a kail-yard yawned, supplying the home with cabbage, sybots, camomile, and the like. It had no sheltering dyke or tree.

The houses, as has already been chronicled, were hovels of loose stone and turf, the roof overlaid with heather or rushes. Roger's school-house, to which Mr. North directed his steps, was in keeping with the other buildings. It was an out-house of the manse, formerly used as a stable, and was lit only from the door. As the preacher wound to the entrance, he saw the soles of bare feet looking at him from the doorway. Entering, he found the scholars spun length-wise on the clay floor, which was skinned with rushes. They were in a circle, and figuring with the index-finger on small sand-boards.¹ The only seat in the school was a creepie stool on the rim of the human wheel. Here Roger sat, begirt with awesome solemnity, and attending awkwardly to any spoke in the wheel demanding attention.

He spied the preacher's approach, and stood up to receive him as Mr. North's shadow climbed the jamb of the doorway. "A guid day to ye," he said gravely, bowing to the divine.

¹ A board with a surround two or three inches deep, sprinkled with sand. The scholar traced his figures in the sand with his finger; when the lesson was complete, the board was shaken to redistribute the sand, and another lesson was laid on it.

The minister returned the salutation affably, and added briefly that he had come to consult the schoolmaster about the service in the kirk on Sabbath.

With a whisk of his hand as if he had been "h'shing" a crowd of hens, Roger cried, "Hame, lads!" In a twinkling a flock of bare feet scurried through the door, and the visitor stepped inside.

"I have resolved to begin public worship on Sabbath, Roger."

"I'm gey pleased to hear it—nearly," replied the shy one.

"Kind neighbour," proceeded the divine, anxious to stiffen his companion's courage, "God means us to do His work at whatever cost, and you and I are manifestly His instruments in Gollan. You believe that, I hope?"

"Oh yes, surely—nearly. But the fowk are unco stiff an' nizzelin' (quarrelsome); an' Macroarie is a fearsome fechter."

The minister placed his hand on Roger's shoulder. "The Lord is stronger than all men," he said warmly.

"Oh yes—surely, surely, Maister North,"

consented the willing but too-human saint.

“ Well, then, in His great name we must administer the ordinance of public worship next Sabbath day, though all Hell should unite to thwart us.”

The schoolmaster was dismayed at the possibility. “ I houp no’ ! ” he muttered.

“ I fear the state of the people is no better than I have heard, Roger ; but we must not be daunted—the Lord is on our side.”

“ No—yes ; I mean yes this time—nearly,” jerked out the dominie, caught again in the twin-thoughted sentence.

Wisely oblivious to Roger’s floundering style, Mr. North sought to comfort him by observing that they might at least depend on the friendship of Sir Eric.

The hope thus expressed delivered Roger. “ The Apothecary is a by-ordinar kind man,” he answered firmly, finding a passport to terra firma. “ He is guilty o’ mony generous acts, Maister North. He pays me weel for the schulin’ o’ Widow Roy’s bairns ;—an’ I think a hantle (good deal) of the auldest loon ; he is a gleg (clever) scholar an’ maun bring us honour—nearly.”

The mention of Widow Roy numbed the preacher for further conversation.

Roger somehow felt the silence to be uncanny, and he ended it by asking Mr. North if he would like to examine the manse.

At the dominie's touch the preacher came briskly back to a consideration of his own affairs. "I would, indeed," he answered. "I must not remain under Sir Eric's roof longer than circumstances demand. If I can secure a godly woman to serve my house, I would occupy it as soon as I could lay a bed in it and light a fire ; and afterwards, I should write for my spouse to come north and join me."

Roger waited for no further encouragement. Lifting the key from a nail, he set his clubby feet in motion and scuttled for the manse with the preacher at his side.

The manse ! What minister of to-day would accept as his manse a house of clay-mortared walls, earthen floor in the working-end and rude flagstones in the other ; and muddy-brown glass windows of one pane each ? The walls were not all of stone, either ; they were only bottomed in stone, then

finished in turf, and plastered throughout with clay and rushes.

It need not either shock or amuse the modern dandy to be told that Mr. North viewed his clay-clad home with some degree of pride. He thought the flagstone floor an improvement sufficiently important to make mention of to his wife in his next communication ; and he could not evade elation at the sight of his glazed windows, being a set-off to his position as minister of the parish. He was wakening Roger's attention to these advantages when a stone ripped through one of the windows, skailing the precious glass on the floor and striking the opposite wall with a smart dunt that left its signet in the clay.

The pair were startled, and Roger had a suggestion driven into his laggard brain. “ The scholars hae gane hame an' telled the fowk that ye are here,” he said excitedly, “ an' I jalouse that——”

A furious banging of some heavy missile on the door broke the dominie's speech. “ Jist as I thocht—nearly,” he muttered. “ I'll gang oot an' see hoo mony there is o' them.”

In a moment he re-entered the manse in agitation. "Come awa', Maister North! Come, afore mair fowk congregate. There's a score—nearly. We maun get the forehand o' them."

Minister and dominie stepped forth together; and a pell-mell of clods and stones spluttered around them on the manse wall.

Roger plucked his companion by the sleeve. "Gang ye to Sir Eric's as gleg as ye can stride, an' I'll gang oot an' speak to the mistrusted chiels."

As Roger stepped out to try and pacify the assailants, Mr. North faced them and dodged the clods that spun through the air towards him. Walking backwards, and evading the shot of the enemy, he finally reached the dwelling of his host unhurt.

The Apothecary was sitting up in bed trying to carve the figure of a cat from a root of whin. "I maun gie a ca' to Macroarie's lassie the morn to fin' oot gin she's mendin'," he explained, "an' I'm makin' a bochie (plaything) for Widow Roy's bairn, to gie him as I gang past; but I'm makin' a sair job o' it." He held the unfinished toy up to the

open window and laughed. “ I thoct it wad turn oot a cat, but deil tak’ me, it’s mair lek a cuddy or a kangaroo ! ”

“ I think I might finish it for you,” said the preacher, taking the root and knife from the artist. “ I have some craft with tools.”

Mine host eyed him at the task. “ Man, it’s heartsome to see ye at that job ! If the Great Designer made kittlins (kittens) an’ mounkies, it weel becomes a gospeller to cut a bochie for a bairn—eh ? ”

The carver was not sure of the parallel, but he replied, “ Well, yes, Sir Eric. It cannot be ill work, one would think.”

“ ‘ Ill ? ’ Dod, ye anger me wi’ yer palaver, man. I say it’s guid wark, an’ becomin’ to oor true manhood.”

“ Well, we won’t quarrel over it, my friend. Probably we think alike, although we express ourselves in differing terms.”

“ Man, I lek to hear ye on that key. The heart o’ ye is bigger than the brain o’ ye.”

Mr. North had no more to say on that topic as he was hankering to relate his encounter with the yokels at the manse ; and to the

tweet-tweet of his knife-blade he gave his story to his friend.

“ That’s jist lek the imps. Man, I tell ye, it’s a fair sin o’ ye to hae sich thumpin’ fists for fechtin’ an’ lat the rascals gang scaithless. Ye maun maul them ! ”

“ Have you tried it yourself ? ” asked the preacher curiously.

“ Tried it ? My faigs, yes—an’ weel they ken it. I dinna lek fechtin’ ; but afore I wad lat ane o’ thae ill-hadden (ill-mannered) gowks molest me, I wad tak’ lessons in fechtin’ frae the Deil himsel’. Na, na, I hae nae faith in trustin’ rumlieguffs (rattling fellows) wi’ a slack rein. Wisdom hes queer instruments at times, an’ a big fist is ane o’ them.”

X

OVER THE FIRE, IN THE SMOKE, HUNG A
BASKET WITH THE LATEST BAIRN IN IT

THE Apothecary was too firmly socketed in his bed to get out of it for an ordinary patient, but he was interested in Rosey Macroarie. She was his favourite among the maidens of Gollan ; and, besides, had he not now become possessed of a worthy secret about Robin's intentions ? He must overstep his cultivated habit, and go to see her.

As he held away for Macroarie's house, he eyed that veteran skulking-into the hills behind. " He hes seen me, the dour stot (ox) ! " whispered the Apothecary to himself, " an' he's feared I'll yoke him to spare the gospeller. What orra (odd) fits o' cowardice come ower big fechtters ! "

He tirmed the door-pin and squelched through the byre into the house.

Rosey was lying on her heather bed beside the fire.

“ Weel, Rosey, hoo’s yer heart—eh, lass ? ”

His patient blushed, apprehending the allusion ; but she made no answer.

He sat down on a stone seat by the fire and kicked off his brogues, setting up the soles of his feet to bask in the comfort of the burning peat. Almost over the fire, in the smoke, hung a basket with the latest bairn in it soundly asleep. It was suspended by a “ randle-tree,” and a horse-shoe dangled from it for luck. “ Yer bairn isna christened yet, Marion. Hoo are ye to dae wi’ him ? ” he asked, settling to his seat.

“ ’Deed, Sir Eric, I dinna ken,” answered Macroarie’s wife.

“ Will ye no’ lat the new gospeller bapteeze him ? ”

“ Na, that I winna.”

“ The bogles mauna get the bairn, onyway, lass ! I’ll bapteeze him mysel’, Marion. John the Baptist was a towsy tyke lek me,

an' no' an ordained prophet, but he bap-teezed the Lord o' Glory."

"I'm fain to tak' ony chance o' savin' the bairn's sowl, Sir Eric, but——"

"Oh, 'but' awa'!" he said, cutting her off. Striding across the floor, he stooped to the well which was sometimes enclosed in houses of that period. Dipping a wooden bowl in the water, he came again to the basket. Splattering the bairn's face with a few drops, he said, "May the Great One wrap the bairn in His plaid!" then drank the remainder as a toast. "Here's to yer guid health, my wee man; an' God gie ye sense an' siller!"

When he had emptied the bowl, he handed it back to the mother. "There's yer bicker, Marion, an'"—dropping a coin into it—"that's a bit tocher (dowry) for the bairn."

"But ye haena gi'en him his name, Sir Eric," said the mother, not ill-pleased at the Apothecary's interest in her bairn and his gift to him.

"Ye see, I'm sliddery (uncertain) at the job, Marion—no haein' hed the lek in han' afore. What's the lammie's name?"

“Duncan, Sir Eric.”

The Apothecary set his face over the basket. The child had been awakened by the water-spouts on his face, and was looking at the roof vacantly. “Hi, hinny, yer mither wants me to tell ye that yer name is Duncan. D’ye hear?” A pair of dumpy feet drummed the basket. “Ay, weel, weel; but dinna mak’ sae muckle rumpus aboot it! Ye maun be guid to yer mither, an’ cow (subdue) yer dour faither whan ye’re a man—eh?” Again the feet declared that the entertainment was being enjoyed. “An’ ye maun be eident (diligent), an’ a comfort to the auld randy o’ an Apothecary wha bapteezed ye. What say ye to that, Blue Een?” Blue Eyes winked, a smile sped over the little face, shut fists flew like drum-sticks, and the heels dunted the basket-bottom. The Apothecary’s banter furred off. Dipping his face into the basket, he kissed the little cheeks with a sudden and warm affection. “God hae ye in His kind keepin’, my wee lammie!” he said softly, “an’ mak’ ye a better man than I hae been.”

In another moment he was on his seat

again, teasing Rosey. "Ye was yer mither's first bairn, Rosey, an' ye brocht her luck, lass, for she has sax at her heels, noo."

"What think ye o' her?" asked the mother.

He looked towards the bed. "Rosey? Gin she was in love, Marion, she wad be a' richt. Eh, Rosey? Faigs, lass, I want to speir ye anent a clash (gossip) I hae heard." He tiptoed to the bedside and laid his lips to her ear. "I'm hearin' that Robin's fain tae hae ye as his ain, Rosey."

She pushed him off. Her face betrayed her confusion. "Hoo can ye ken?" she asked, purposing to mislead him, but seeing she had committed herself, she declared, "I wisna thinkin' o' it, Sir Eric: an' it's no' true, neither."

The Apothecary giggled. "Love an' licht are twa things that winna hide, Rosey!"

"He has only speired (asked) at me a time or twa, then," she admitted, "an' surely ony man may dae that."

"Oh, ay; oh, ay!" answered her tormentor provokingly. "I ken the flea that's in the Baron's hose noo, Rosey. Save us a',

lass, ye'll be a prood spunkie wi' shoon on yer feet, an' a snood an' cockernony (ribbon and top-knot) on yer heid. An' ye'll be ridin' on the Baron's powny, too, ahint his son, Robin. An' auld billies (comrades) lek me maun be booin' doon, booin' doon, to My Leddy." He made mock curtsies to her.

"It's no' lucky to reese (praise) a weel-skinned bairn, Sir Eric," remarked the mother, as if chiding his attentions to her daughter. "The fairies tak' a' bairns that think themsel's ower-bonnie."

"I wadna wonder, Marion. An' there's ae fairy wha will hae her, tak' my word; an' his name is Robin." He smiled to Rosey.

"Ah, weel, time maun tell, Sir Eric. I haena heard o't afore. But ye're giein' her nae physic, Sir Eric," she remarked demurely, bringing him back to the purpose of his visit.

"I hae been daein' naethin' else frae the time I cam' in, Marion!" the man of medicine protested. "She hes been nearly cured wi' the hameliest physic in a' my pharmacopœia—rousin', halesome lauchter an' daffin'. I gave her a dash o' physic whan her faither ca'd wi' her, jist tae gie an airin' tae my

skill; but, tak' my word for't, thae things are for silly gentrice (gentry) wi' mair siller than sense. A thumpin' haggis is the best pill, Marion. I ken naethin' mair halesome for yer lassie than a bicker o' ale an' brose, wi' a hearty lauch, gin it bena (be not) a lover tae kiss an' cuddle her."

Rosey hid her face in the sheepskin covering; and he resumed his seat to put on his brogues again. "There's naethin' wrang wi' ye noo, lassie, but what a rest in yer bed can mak' richt in twa or three days," he explained, fitting his feet to the brogues. When he had finished and stood on his legs again, he added, "Gin I'm weel, I'll gie ye a ca' back in a day or twa, Rosey; an' gin I dinna come, ye'll e'en hae to come to me."

Then he turned to leave.

"I'm awa' noo," he sang back through the byre, with his hand on the door-pin.

As he drew-to the door, he recalled his intention to visit Widow Roy. "I'll gie her a ca' as I gang hame," he muttered. He set off aslant the dripping ground for the widow's cot.

Macroarie tacked behind his house, waiting

for the Apothecary to be clear of the ground. Sir Eric saw the sly fox, and banteringly shook his locked fist at him; Macroarie answered by hoisting another. The two actors understood each other.

Stepping into Widow Roy's home, her visitor announced his errand. "I jist ca'd wi' a bochie (toy) for the bairn."

The widow looked at him in surprise, for she knew that he seldom left his couch unless some specially urgent cause compelled him. However, she made no remark, being only too proud to have her benefactor under her roof.

He drew the wooden toy from beneath his coat, and gave it to the child, who grabbed it eagerly and jailed its forefeet in his mouth straightway.

"Oh, it isna for eatin', dawtie (darling)," said the Apothecary, fearing his handiwork was to be chewed off the earth instantly; but, recalling his seeming niggardliness, he corrected himself. "Jaw (chew) awa' at it, wee man!—An' hoo's Joseph daein' at the schule, Babbie?"

"He's airtin' brawly, Sir Eric. I dinna

ken hoo to thank ye for yer guid-hertedness to my puir bairns——”

“ It’s naethin’, Babbie ; naethin’, woman ! I jist houp that they may be spared to haud by ye in yer auld age, lass. They’re a’ weel ? Nane o’ them clocherin’ (coughing)—eh ? ”

“ Na, they’re brawly, Sir Eric ; thank ye for speirin’ . ”

“ Nae disease but hunger, I daursay ! Eh, Babbie ? ”

“ There’s rowth (plenty) o’ that wrang wi’ them , ” replied the widow, in a faint pleasantry.

“ A guid disease, Babbie, as the man said wha was ower-bonnie. Weel, I’m awa’ again . ”

The Apothecary set his steps for home. On reaching his own door, he bounded in. “ Deil tak’ us baith, Lexy , ” he cried, “ gin Robin Crook isna threapin’ (threatening) to tak’ Macroarie’s bonnie dochter to his bosom ! ”

“ Haivers ! ” snapped Lexy the incredulous.

The Apothecary strengthened his voice slightly and called ben to the preacher, “ Are ye there, Maister North ? ”

After a momentary pause, the preacher answered.

“Ye wha’s a trumpeter o’ truth, canna ye testify to the story—eh?”

“I believe that it is possibly true.”

“It’s ower-true, Lexy—as sure’s the neb’s on yer face,” urged her master.

Thus confirmed, the report seemed worthy of investigation. “I’ll awa’ ower an’ speir at hersel’,”—looking round for her brogues.

The Apothecary held out his hand warningly. “Ye mauna, Lexy! I hae jist fand it oot, an’ it wadna dae for ye to gang blether-in’ about it to ilka hizzie in the country-side. I say, Lexy, dae ye ken that ye’re a scatter-wit—eh?”

Lexy signalled him to join his lodger, and have done of his banter.

He cut through into his own den. Mr. North, he found, was busy at his studies for the coming Sabbath. “Makin’ sermons—eh?” he asked. “Mak’ cudgels!” was his laconic comment.

XI

THEY SHIED STONES AT HIM THROUGH THE RAGGED WINDOW

WHEN Sabbath dawned, the preacher was harnessed for his task. He was up and out before daylight, and stole into the out-house which sheltered the ponies. There, knocking at the vestibule of heaven, he sought grace and fitness to be a faithful ambassador.

His friend the Apothecary, on wakening, had guessed where he had gone, and left him undisturbed till the hour of breakfast. Then Lexy was sent to fetch him.

She skipped to the door and peered out. Mr. North was crossing the green in front of the house. His face was solemn, and his eyes were set in the direction of the kirk.

Roger was sauntering timorously among the houses, swinging his bell and warning the

parishioners that service was to be held in the kirk "for the hearing of God's Word." It had been arranged between him and the preacher that he was not to go on his rounds at eight or ten o'clock for the first few Sabbaths ; it would be wise to begin only with the chief service of the day at eleven o'clock.

Roger's bell was little needed that day, anyhow. As soon as the preacher's figure was observed crossing the Apothecary's green, a sentinel's whistle emptied the ale-house. Spying their quarry, a band of surly fellows, headed by Macroarie, took a detour to intercept him. They struck Roger's track on the way. One of them prisoned his arms behind him, and Macroarie wrenched the bell out of his keeping. "Ye needna be feared, Roger," he said ; "we mean to jouk (outwit) the daft gospeller, but we hae nae mind to skail the dominie's brains."

The revellers hurried on, led by bell-ringing Macroarie.

The Apothecary sat up in his bed to get his face level with the window. He saw Macroarie and his crew, and guessed that their purpose was to encircle the preacher's

path and molest him ere he reached the kirk. Instantly he kicked off the sheepskins and got to his feet in the bed. Dragging back the frame of the window he packed his head through, and yelled, "Macroarie!"

Had Macroarie designed to insult the preacher with his fists, the Apothecary's shout unstrung his purpose. When he came up with Mr. North he simply strode in front, in mocking imitation of a herald, swaying his stolen bell to the accompaniment of motley cheers.

Another of the gang, however, pushed his arm through the preacher's, and, tugging clumsily after the way of half-drunken men, cried, "Come awa' an' drink a bicker o' ale wi' us, man, an' be neebour-lek!" He tugged so violently that the beaver toppled from Mr. North's head. As by common consent, the whole party plunged after it and footballed it round and round him. A dip in the ground hid them from the range of the Apothecary's watch-tower, and they drove merrily at the sport till the beaver fell apart in tatters—Macroarie ringing his bell and making sallies after the beaver as it whisked across his path.

When the kirk door was reached, Mr. North, Roger, and the three Jamiesons entered. The riotous skirmishers sang them in to the deafening notes of a rude bacchanalian chorus.

“Get your backs to the door, brethren,” said Mr. North to the Jamieson youths, “and the dominie and I will undertake the service of God’s house.”

The wretched building seemed in unison with the upbraiding gang. The previous night had soaked the earth with rivers of rain, and the water had dribbled heavily through the divot roof of the kirk. The clay floor—uneven where smoothest—sagged in pools, and its rafters still dripped peaty-coloured water. Three of the four windows gaped in holes.

The only furniture was the doorless pulpit—a rude rostrum with reader’s bench attached. Pews were then still in the growing trees. Worshippers (when they were there) lounged against each other, save as the weakest found seats of boulder stones placed along the wall.

Macroarie and his followers grouped them-

selves at the broken windows outside. Had the ground been dry, they might have dodged off to their absorbing athletics; but the slushy fields denied them the indulgence, and they were left without a time-consumer.

Roger was as solemn as Nature designed him to be, and was more laden with the awful sacredness of his office than with consideration for his hapless fellows. As he trailed on with the lugubrious verses of the fifty-sixth psalm, raxing yells, booing, and cat-calls broke in at the end of every line; but he planted his eye on the psalm-page and held to his lonesome mission.

And when Mr. North essayed afterwards to pray, his outside audience put their fingers to their teeth and whistled in many a tortuous screech. But he, too, was unmoved.

The preacher's brave manner nettled them, and when he opened his sermon in the same unruffled defiance, they shied stones at him through the ragged windows. Fortunately, the pulpit stood by the wall, between the two side windows, so that the stones could only come with harm from these by the thrower putting his arm through one of them and

flinging the missile sideways at a venture ; but one of the broken end windows offered an advantage to the assailants. From thence a rowdy drove a stone which trounced the side of the pulpit loudly, and shook Roger's immobility to the foundations. He spun round like a teetotum to see what damage had been done, and, without ceasing his momentum, landed with his back to the door beside the stalwart Jamiesons.

Mr. North noted his henchman's flight, but was unaffected by it. He continued to address his four hearers. Another stone whistled through the window and almost grazed his uplifted hand. He paused an instant, his eye on the grinning faces jammed to the window ; then addressed his persecutors. A stone leapt through the window and smote the speaker on the chin. "Close yer gab!" roared a voice, amid a rout of laughter. A brief flush of anger crimsoned Mr. North's face. He quickly cooled again, however, although the bruise was smarting cruelly.

A clamour at the end window took off the attention of his audience, and he was allowed

to finish without further contradiction. He wound calmly to a close, and then, with outstretched hand toward the window of provocation, pronounced the benediction on his unruly parishioners.

Conscious of his claim to the clachan's clemency, Roger opened the door and shuffled outside. Macroarie had propped his handbell on a hillock, and the horde were busy pelting it with stones. It was this diversion that had plucked them away from the windows. The stones pattered on the hillock or struck the bell. In a short time it was cracked. Lifting it up, Macroarie handed it back to Roger. "There, Roger," he said sulkily, "ye can hae yer bochie (toy) noo—it'll keep ye in mind o' the gospeller!"

Meanwhile, one of the youths had taken serious thought at the carry-on, and had dodged off to acquaint Sir Eric of it. Hoisting himself from his bed, the Apothecary hurried into his knee-breeches and sallied forth. He was bare of head and foot, and was encased only in his grey shirt and breeches. There was tempest in his face as he strode toward the kirk, but a snuff-box in his hand

indicated that he was in no unseemly haste.

Mr. North came out of the kirk as the Apothecary neared. Pointing to the preacher's bare head, he asked Macroarie composedly how it came about that his friend had no hat. What had become of it? he demanded.

"It fell agley on his heid, an' tumbled aff," explained the roisterer evasively.

"Ay! an' whaur is it noo?"

"There awa'"—pointing with his finger circularly to the scattered remnants of the beaver.

The Apothecary stood easily, eyeing the surly ringleader, with the open snuff-box in his left hand. "Tak' that, then!" he growled, dashing the snuff into Macroarie's face. His action was so instantaneous and masterly, and his voice bellowed with such sudden zest, that the gang was cowed.

"Come awa' hame, Maister North," he said, taking the preacher's arm. When the twain had moved a few steps, the Apothecary turned round and cried, "By the Lord wha made ye, if ane amang ye daur lay a han' on this man, I'll thrapple ye!"

“ Oh, these are terrible words, Sir Eric,”
remonstrated the preacher.

“ S’sh, man! Ye dinna ken the dour
stirks as I dae. They’re jist a when (lot
of) scunnerin’ gowks wi’ nae mair gumption
in them than rats.”

“ I am afraid you have hurt that man ”
—alluding to Macroarie.

“ Wha? Yer jo, Macroarie? Nae fear.
Ye dinna ken the randy. Afore the nicht
is by, I’ll hae him in my trap.”

XII

HURRYING LIKE AN INSANE GHOST

THE Apothecary knew his victim, and he knew better still the meaning of his own snuff-licker. "It's a fair waste o' guid snuff," he had said to himself, "but I'm sair misguided gin it disna open the brute's een as weel as shut them."

He had reasoned correctly. Ere dayset, Macroarie was at his bedside begging for relief. The worried rebel had vainly washed his eyes in the burn; much of the snuff was still beneath the eyelids, the rims of which were thickening under the inflammatory irritation.

"Weel, what's wrang noo, neebour?" the Apothecary asked innocently, as if he had known nothing of the day's events.

"Tak' this bleezin' fire oot o' my een!" howled the humbled Tartar.

“ Deil a bit, Macroarie ! I didna clash it in to tak’ it oot again. Awa’ to the ale-hoose—an’——”

“ For heaven’s sake, Sir Eric, gie in ! It’s roastin’ my een oot.”

“ Tak’ a bit jig to yersel’, an’ see gin that winna yerker (jerk) it oot,” suggested the Apothecary coolly.

Mr. North interposed, and asked that the persecutor should have relief, in the hope that it might induce him to mend his manner of life.

“ D’ye hear that, Macroarie ? The gopeller thinks mair o’ ye than I dae. If I clenge (clean) oot yer een, will ye engage that Maister North shallna be hindered—eh ? ”

“ I didna put a han’ on the hailie (holy) man,” hedged Macroarie stubbornly.

“ Weel, sae be it ; but will ye gie yer word no’ to stound (shock) him ? ”

“ I’m in a swither,” broke in the sufferer, “ but I canna thole this hellish stoor (dust). *Yea !* ”

“ Richt ! Ye’re no’ a bad sowl, Macroarie. But ye maun gang to the kirk, forby.”

“ Kirk, Sir Eric ! Ye dinna gang yersel’.” Macroarie spoke with a pang of renewed heat,

observing that extra shackles were being forged for him.

The Apothecary ignored the hint. "Ye canna be pack (friendly) wi' baith the cat an' the mice, Macroarie; sae mak' up yer mind. Will ye gang? Yea or nay."

Driven past scruple, Macroarie answered doggedly, "I'll gang to hell blin' afore I gang to the kirk wi' sicht!"

"Sae be it! Deil roast me gin I tak' a blessed pinch oot o' yer een. Lat them burn awa'."

"I wadna gie my lug to ony heretic," ventured his victim, in defence.

The mediciner broke into a choppy laugh. "The dear sanct (saint)! I daursay that Becky Bain, the ale-wife, is nae heretic, but a pure gospeller—eh?"

"I'm an Episcopal," contended the saint dourly.

Greek met Greek. How would the tussle end? Mr. North was inclined to plead for clemency on Macroarie's behalf again; but, in spite of himself, he was too entertained with the tug of the giants to end it by interference.

The Apothecary adroitly laid a platform

for fresh artillery. "He can fling the hemmer an' the stane brawly," he said suggestively.

"Wha?" asked Macroarie testily, digging his knuckles into his uneasy eyes.

"The gopeller. Gin he owercomes ye at the hemmer an' stane, will ye gang to the kirk—eh?"

The new shot found its target. Macroarie hesitated as if he had not heard distinctly. Could it be? The possibility enthralled him. A gopeller throw the hammer and the stone! "What said ye, Sir Eric?" he asked, to gain breath.

The Apothecary repeated his statement and question.

"I wadna say but I nicht—oot-on (after awhile)," assented the sufferer, very guardedly.

Lest the preacher might plant an objection to the proposed contest, the Apothecary eagerly accepted Macroarie's indefinite consent. "Weel, an auld sparrow is ill to tame, an' we maun tak' ye at yer word, an' houp for the best.—Come awa' ower here aside me an' gang on yer knees (that's a by-usual job for ye, Macroarie!)."

The invalid edged nearer to the couch and sank on his knees beside it—leaning over to the Apothecary's reach. The "mediciner" ran his tongue under the sufferer's eyelids, sucking out all the remaining dregs of snuff.

Macroarie muttered a word of thanks and relief.

"Noo," continued his deliverer, "ye maun haud by yer word or——"

But the oily rascal had bolted. He was now uninterested in the proposal which his benefactor was to lay to his consideration. Had he not, before entering, outlined an enterprise of revenge for the day's insult? And how could he resile from it without a loss of that prestige which was now threatened? His general acceptance of unrevealed conditions proposed by the Apothecary might have been well-intentioned; but it was too soon to surrender. The project to which he stood committed must first be realized.

Although he had disappeared so unexpectedly, the Apothecary ventured the opinion to Mr. North that he would not be guilty of any further misdeeds. "He's choke-fu' o' superstition an' windy pride, Maister North,

but I wadna lek ye to think him sleekit or a skellum (rascal).”

However Macroarie’s general make-up might justify this hazy credential, he was at that very moment scheming a “gluff” (fright) for the “heathen gospeller.” The ploy was to take place at the manse on the next night.

During the previous week Mr. North and Roger had surreptitiously built a sleeping-couch in the manse and lit peat fires in it to chase the damp. “I cannot longer tread on Sir Eric’s indulgence, Roger,” the preacher explained, “and I must make shift to accommodate myself in the manse.”

When Mr. North announced his resolutions to the Apothecary, he was drenched with objections. “But hoo are ye to ettle (reckon) wi’ yer diets?” was the first problem.

“Oh, well, I must trust to my own handi-craft, Sir Eric; thank you.”

“Haivers, man!”

“I’m set on it, Sir Erie. I am too deeply in your debt already, good neighbour.”

“But, gin Macroarie kens ye’re there, he’ll clash in yer door wi’ a flail, an’ maul ye. Hoo wad ye lek that—eh?”

“ I must trust in God——”

“ An’ sneeshin (snuff) ! Eh ! ” The Apothecary fired off a rout of laughter in recollection of the snuff joke. Settling again, he solved the difficulty by saying, “ Weel, gin ye maun gang—why, gang. Sleep ower in the manse, syne ye’re mad for’t ; but veesit Lexy for yer diets. What say ye ? ”

Mr. North willingly agreed to the arrangement, as it allowed him the freedom of his own roof, in the first place, and also left his retreat open in the event of an emergency.

Next forenoon was occupied by him in beginning a letter to his wife, in the hope that he might soon find a carrier for it. He related his experiences at length, but sketched his difficulties lightly.

In the afternoon he strolled to the manse. He heaped peats on the fires, and wandered aimlessly through the rooms, wondering how soon he might settle there in peace with his wife. As he returned, the smoke was waving airily from the roof ; and it looked so peaceful that it became an emblem of the future restfulness which his faith foresaw for Gollan. But it was a sign also ; and not to him. The

smoke of the manse was not without significance to the entire clachan. It was almost a new phenomenon—so long had the smokeless ashes clustered undisturbed on the minister's hearthstone. And what might the new preacher mean by lighting the fires? Roger was willing to tell them. The manse was to be slept in by Mr. North—that very night, it had been originally arranged; but now it was not to be till the following night. “Ho, ho!” laughed the spark Macroarie, “then there maun be a bleezin' currieshang (tumult) the morn's nicht!” He had determined on retaliation for the Sabbath's disappointment, but knew not in what fashion to cast it; and here, ready-made to his hand, was a most lucky and immediate suggestion. His eyes were almost right again: by to-morrow they would be in prime condition.

Roger accompanied the preacher to his abode. He re-set the peats on the fires, chatting to his superior. “Hae ye been oot-by the day?”

“Only to the manse, here, as you know.”

“Ye did richt, Maister North. There's nane o' the wild callants aboot the door the

nicht," he said encouragingly. "They're awa' doon in the ale-hoose, I'm thinkin'."

When Roger bade Mr. North "A fair guid e'en," the good man experienced his first taste of deep peace in Gollan. The house was lonely, but how restful! It was bare and comfortless, yet it was his own, and it was his home. He had reckoned on a wakeful night, but was soon asleep.

Had he been outside an hour later he would have seen Macroarie and his gay boys jostling each other through the door of the ale-house, like a drove of cattle issuing from a byre with the lash behind them. Their faces were beaming with the joy of a new exploit.

"Ye'll dae it, Jondal," whispered Macroarie to one of the swarm, improving on a discussion which had reached a conclusion within.

"I'll no' haud back," answered the other heavily.

"Tak' ye the brand!" Macroarie then handed Jondal a fire brand of fir-root—red, and easy to blow into a flame.

"Roast the gospeller!" muttered half a dozen voices, and a stampede began in the direction of the manse.

But their leader called them back. "There maun be nae racket (noise), lads. The birkie maun be roasted unbeknown to the fowk. Twa's eneuch for the job—Jondal an' me. Cower back, lads. Come awa', Jondal."

The two incendiaries skulked craftily toward the manse, under the night's favour. Coming to the wall, Macroarie laid his side to it and bowed his broad shoulders, making a buttress by planting his hands on his knees. Blowing the brand to a flame, Jondal sprang to the waiting shoulders and thence to the roof.

"We'll gie the brute a gluff (fright)," chuckled Macroarie. "But, mind," he added cautiously, "it wisna me that fired the roof."

"I ken," answered his companion gruffly, dabbing the brand into the heather patch at several points. The roof was still damp after the recent rains, but the outer skin of the heather was drying and soon caught fire, throwing out jouping flames where it had been probed.

Lexy was coming from the stable when the first furtive tongues of light bounced out of the darkness. She gazed wonderingly at the spectacle for a moment or two, unable to

guess its meaning ; but observing a dark figure cross the flames (Jondal on his way back to Macroarie's shoulders), she darted instinctively to the right solution. " Eric, Eric ! " she cried, diving into the house, " the manse is alowe (on fire) ! "

The Apothecary was dozing, but he tumbled from his couch with as much alacrity as if he had been eagerly expecting the summons. Without thought of dressing himself, he pushed through the " licht-hole " in his woollen short and hurried toward the law-breakers. " Hi, hi, men ! What mean ye ? " he cried, surging over the uneven ground. As he moved into the radius of the leaping flames, the skulking criminals saw him hurrying toward them like an insane ghost.

He drove straight for the manse door and dashed it in with the momentum. A moment sufficed to stir the slumbering preacher ; and he was out again.

Catching sight of two fleeing figures, he gave chase. As they reached the farther darkness, their outlines became more vague ; but the maddened strides of the Apothecary brought him up on them. As his eye became focused

to the darkness, he gradually mastered one of the flyers. It was Macroarie. He had attempted concealment in the burnside, but the Apothecary stumbled on him, and at once collared him.

“Macroarie, ye contradictious fule, did ye think to win the better o’ *me* wi’ yer mad cantrips? Up, or I’ll droon ye lek a rat!”

The culprit struggled to his feet, sorely spent.

“It wisna me, Sir Eric,” he protested.

“Nae haiverin’! *Back!*” The Apothecary thrust his victim before him. “Back—or I’ll nip yer airm-bane lek a hen’s tae!”

But Macroarie’s spirit revived, and he resisted the urging process. At that moment the whistled notes of a Scots tune crept on the air, and both the combatants knew that “Wintry” the cadger was coming up the burn on one of his rounds. The Apothecary raised his voice and halloed him to hasten his steps. “Gie me a han’ wi’ this dour deil, Willie.” Willie feared Macroarie, but he feared the Apothecary much more, and he lent his aid, like all worldly wise assistants, to the heavier force.

When the trio came up to the manse, no one was to be seen but the preacher and the dominie. The dominie had rushed forth, having been warned by the flames. Both were examining the roof. Fortunately, the heavy rains had soaked well into it, as has been noted, and only parts of the thin outer covering had answered to the fire.

The Apothecary came up with his catch and almost rushed him into the preacher's face. "What are ye to dae wi' this gipsy?"

"Forgive him."

"Forgi'e him! Na, na, preacher—ye may, but I winna"—and he dashed him away with a gesture of irritation.

The Apothecary, the preacher, and the cadger reached the house together.

"Yer ba-ba is here yet, Maister North," said the Apothecary, entering his apartment. "Jist clap yer back on it aince mair, an' thank Marcus Aurelius that ye werna roasted lek a spider."

Mr. North wondered how the pagan Emperor had saved him, but regarding the observation as one of Sir Eric's jokes, he made no remarks.

XIII

“CABER, STONE, AND HAMMER,” SAID THE
PREACHER

WHEN the Apothecary and his guest were alone again they returned to the topic of Mrs. North's coming. Said the Apothecary, “Tak' the advice o' this angel, preacher, an' fecht Macroarie afore she comes. Ye're walcome to bide in this fort o' mine till she arrives, puir lass; but ye're overly much righteous gin ye dinna play the lover an' see that her nest is cowthie (cosy) an' peacefu'. An' tak' my word for't, there canna be a hint o' ane or the ither, for her or ye, till ye quell that t'wsie tyke, Macroarie. Mak' the country-side respeck ye, man. Bruise them, I tell ye; bruise the stirks!” His interpretive chuckle followed this gruff eloquence.

Although understanding well the signi-

ficance of the Apothecary's luxuriant expressions, Mr. North affirmed that he was content to try gentler methods.

"Weel, weel, try awa'!" The Apothecary spoke impatiently. "It's a fair disgrace that a sonsy chiel wi' muscles lek whalebone winna mak' use o' them for a guid end. Man, man, disna the Auld Buik tell ye that it's mair blessed to gie than to receive?"

The preacher assented, not comprehending the debater's drift in the quotation.

"Weel, then, it maun be better to gie clures than to get them! An' whan ye can do muckle guid by it, too! Na, na, Maister North, psalm-buiks an' kirky whigmalorums may tickle Edinbro', but the gospel for Gollan is a knotty cudgel an' a thumpin' fist; an' a bash on the neb may lift a yokel clean into the Kingdom o' Heaven. What say ye to that—eh?"

Mr. North did not reply at once. He was quite aware of his adviser's real meaning, and the probable wisdom which it embodied. And the Apothecary's rude arguments, compounded of force and playfulness, were beginning to modify his resistance. At first he

had regarded his host's advice as innocent banter ; but now, though still uncertain of it, he was disposed to sift it for the grains of shrewdness which he saw it contained. For the present, however, he held back, and determined to go on as he had begun, at least for two Sabbaths, and thus extend the experiment. That ended the debate.

For several Sabbaths, Mr. North, Roger, and the three faithful Jamiesons, upheld the service in the kirk ; but, although there was less naked hostility, not even a bairn joined them. The day was still devoted to undiminished athletic satisfactions.

These facts had occupied the preacher's thoughts since his arrival. Reason as he would, summon faith to his aid as he might, the glaring truth was that the kirk was utterly shelved and every soul was bent on sport. His soul was vexed, his spirit heavy ; a change *must* be introduced ! It was evident that some unusual contrivance had to be devised ; no tame policy would coax men away from a habit of religious apathy which had been fortified by frequent spells of indulgence. Perhaps—perhaps, after all—who

could say?—his bodily strength had been gifted to him on the same compact as his mental powers—that they should be used for God's glory. What if his strength was designed to open a passage for the influence of his message? And was he not a *man* as well as a saint; and why should his manhood be crippled in the totality of its usefulness? Had he not played at these sports as a youth, and again as a student; and was he not a master in them all? He was still undecided, however, till the Apothecary laid siege to him again.

And this is how the strategist pulled home his argument: "There's a market to be hauden in the kirkyaird on Sawbath, Maister North. It hes been oor wont for generations; an' a' the fowk gie heed to it. They gang clean wud (daft) on that day; an' man, gin ye dinna coost (cast) Macroarie afore then, the braggart will splutter the hail countryside wi' his rowdyism."

The preacher was silent. He could not help seeing that the redoubtable enemy must be subdued; and before next Lord's Day, too.

The Apothecary charged another piece and

fired. “Wad ye tak’ a cuddy oot o’ the ditch on the Lord’s Day—eh?” he asked hotly.

“Certainly, Sir Eric; the Word of God enjoins it.”

“That’s the mair reasonable o’ God’s Word, preacher! Weel, if ye can dae that for a cuddy, even on the Sawbath, dinna ye think that ye micht dae it for puir Macroarie—wha is o’ mair consequence than a score o’ cuddies? Fie on ye, man!”

“Fie on ye, man!”—that aroused the preacher almost as an archangel’s blast. He reddened, quivered; then whitened and sighed. He would not fight—no, never; but—but—he *might* throw the hammer, even although it must be done on the Holy Sabbath. “Fie!” stung him. To be reprovèd for lack of concern for the souls of men! To be counted a sneak, a coward! No, he was too manly to accept such a character lightly. He passed his hand over his brow, lifting away the sweat that oozed from it. “I shall attempt it, Sir Eric,” he said quietly, “in the strength of the Lord.”

“Ay, an’ yer ain,” cried the Apothecary, overjoyed to discover that he had shaken

his opponent's citadel when he had only hoped to secure his out-works. "Nae fear o' ye, man! Fine I kent, as sune as I clappit een on ye, that ye wad dae it. Gosh, when Macroarie sees ye comin' tomarrow (match) him, pride will drive the rogue oot o' his wits. But mind this, preacher—for I ken the brute—if ye ootwit him at the games, ye can coont on a rare henchman for life.—I say, what can ye dae best?" The question had relation to Mr. North's athletic accomplishments, and was meant as the first question of a helpful catechism.

"I can toss the caber, throw the hammer, and putt the stone," answered the preacher with modest hesitancy.

"Ay, but which o' the three lies cantiest to yer han'?"

"The hammer."

"Weel, whan ye meet Macroarie, keep the throw o' the hemmer for the hinmost speil (game). Draw him oot cannily wi' the caber, then hae a putt or twa wi' the stane—an' dinna welt (beat) him ower sair; but whan ye come to the hemmer, fling her ayont sicht, gin ye can! Gie Macroarie sich a fricht that

he winna cheep again for a' time an' eternity. I maun mix a faintin' draught for the puir deil, an' hae it ready for him ! ”

Mr. North was stirred even to amusement by the Apothecary's enthusiastic onrush, but the amusement was momentary. He half-resiled from his decision—not that there was any hesitancy in his mind as to the necessity of an overmastering move, but he was still doubtful of the higher sanctions favouring his worldly policy.

On Sabbath morning, however, every scruple was laid. Its early hours had been devoted to pleading for guidance and strength ; and when Roger tinkled his sorely cracked bell throughout the clachan, the preacher left the stable (which had become his holy of holies) and deliberately strolled into the field where the athletes were congregated. There was a big muster, for already numbers had arrived to attend the fair.

Macroarie saw Mr. North approach, and he concluded that the preacher was risking his head in order to administer some gruesome warning. He determined to banter him out of his intention. “ Come awa', gospeller,”

he said, making a mock obeisance. "We hae a' assembled for prayers." The joke was backed by loud laughter from the crowd.

The preacher held up his hand. "Men, I am God's messenger to this clachan——"

A storm of inharmonious jeers tore the air.

"—but I am also a man, and I desire to sympathize with you in your worldly concerns as in your spiritual. Will you share these concerns with me? I have come here this day to make that proposal."

In doubt of his meaning, the men looked at each other. Was he cunning, or only innocent? Did he really intend to join them in their games? They could not believe it: he was only trying to entrap them.

Observing their perplexity, he set the proposition before them more distinctly. "Good neighbours, if I participate in your sport, will you join me in the exercise of God's house?"

"An' will ye come to the ale-hoose, too?" quizzed Macroarie in frank scepticism.

The preacher passed by the sarcasm and repeated his proposal—"I ask you to make

a tryst with me now, that if I engage with you in your worldly diversions, and overthrow you, you will show some regard for the Day hereafter, and aid me in establishing the public worship of God in the parish.”

“And overthrow you,” he had said. Here was a direct challenge: it was not to be a mere siding with them but a contest for the supremacy. The unexpected revelation sobered every man in the company; most of all Macroarie, who stood dazed at the arrogance of the preacher. Every eye sought him, as ringleader, and looked to him to answer. He hesitated. Would he risk losing the premier position? His influence in the community, he knew, would pass to the preacher should his opponent come out the victor. Macroarie’s Highland blood beguiled him to end the debate—the blood that loves a tussle with a worthy opponent and can submit to a chief who wins his throne by prowess. “I’m yer marrow (match)!” he cried gruffly, shooting out his hand to the preacher.

Mr. North grasped the outstretched palm and shook it heartily. “The compact is sealed,” he said; and without another word

he stripped off his homespun coat and laid it on the grass, with his beaver hat a-top of it (the Apothecary's neglected head-piece, borrowed since his own had been kicked to tatters).

Expressions of delight bubbled from the onlookers. The new gospeller was to be like their former minister after all, and game with them on the Sunday—drinking them blind, too, maybe, in the ale-house. Oh, if he was to be a real man and neighbour of that stamp, it mattered little whether he was Episcopalian or Presbyterian—not a whit! The joy caused by his apparent surrender wiped out all opposition on the spot.

“A brave chiel!” ran from lip to lip as he stood out, stripped, turning up his sleeves and showing a muscular arm at the same time.

“Caber, stone, and hammer,” said the preacher to his opponent, indicating the preferred order of events.

“Sae be it. Three flings o' each,” answered the chief, thus completing the simple programme.

A disused birch coupling was the only caber their treeless district could supply.

Macroarie fitted it to his shoulder and locked his hands under its foot. Steadying himself a moment to poise it advantageously and order his breathing, he hoisted it in the air with the lurch of a giant. Round it flew—once, twice, almost thrice—before finding the ground. It was one of his best throws.

Following in his turn, the preacher lifted the unwieldy thing and tossed it. The throw was no better than Macroarie's, but neither was it any worse.

Macroarie saw, however, that his opponent was at least his equal; and in his second throw he tried to outstrip himself. He failed.

Mr. North's second cast was even inferior to his first.

The third attempt must be decisive.

Macroarie decided to whip every nerve to the pinch. He threw off his sleeved waist-coat. With bare feet and head, and stripped to the shirt, he stepped to the task of his last fling. Carefully balancing the caber, he flung it with the consent of every muscle. Better!—the *best* he had ever done. It was a splendid cast, worthy to be spoken of as the *first*

in the country-side. The championship was surely safe.

“Ye canna match that, ye braggart,” whispered Macroarie’s admirers, as the preacher shouldered the birch and went to the stance.

He set the caber to his shoulder with more care and determination this time. He planted his feet firmly in the ground ; and the caber was poised, steadied, and balanced with eager fastidiousness. A moment—coaxing each muscle into ready obedience—a sudden heave of the body—and away the caber whirled.

A prolonged “Ah !” of admiration trailed from every lip as the beam spun round almost like the spokes of a hurrying wheel. In another instant, smothered cheering greeted the victor’s ears.

“See to yer guid name, Macroarie !” the crowd cried, their loyalty already in the balance.

“Let’s hae the stane,” panted the astounded chief. Putting the stone was his favourite exercise, and he was more lithe at that than at the hammer. “Bleeze awa’,” he said to Mr. North, indicating that by the

common rules it was his turn to lead off with the stone. The invitation was uttered in a tone of bravado, to hearten himself, and also to keep a hold on the spectators.

The first throw was given standing. Mr. North did not greatly exert himself, being no skilful hand at the stone. He had the knack of it, however, and threw the boulder farther than either he or Macroarie expected.

Macroarie furred off his shirt in a passion. He now stood mother-naked, saving his knee-breeches. He was not to be cowed by the gospeller, though he should burst in the effort to redeem himself. Setting the stone in his palm, he toyed with it after the fashion of throwers feeling for a grip. Leaning slightly back, he dipped suddenly and as suddenly shot up—casting the stone as from a catapult. It landed right into the preacher's mark.

An even tussle! The crowd sobered, as a crowd always does at the closing moments of a tough contest.

Mr. North's second cast fell a foot short.

Macroarie's hopes strengthened as he set his toe to the stance-line again, but he did not

improve on his earlier performance ; indeed, he also fell short, though only by an inch or two.

The last throw was taken with the usual hop of seven feet. Again it was the preacher's turn. He lifted the stone and stepped back for the hop. He braced himself for the final throw ; but the effort was unfortunate. The stone " skited " from his hand and landed midway to his former mark. Some of the spectators were for letting him have another opportunity ; but he declined, remarking that the fault was his own and he would stand by it. His sportsman-like spirit increased his reputation.

" Dae your best, Mac ! " shouted Mac-roarie's admirers, as he lifted the stone for the last fling. They felt, as he did himself, that the chances of victory were fairly within his reach. He understood their exclamation. As he took up his position again his lips were shut firmly and his brows drawn down. His fingers felt for a safe grip while marshalling his forces for the sortie. Raising his left foot, he sprang forward like an enraged tiger. The stone rose from his hand airily, but swung

slightly to the left. It was, nevertheless, a master throw, and, measured from the starting-line, was an inch or two ahead of his former best; still, the difference was so trifling that it was not regarded as anything to be proud of.

Mr. North was glad that he was not badly beaten, and Macroarie stood statue-still at the throwing-stance and gazed at his mark in evident self-abasement. If the preacher could equal him at his best trick, how would he fare at the hammer?

The preacher was anxious to allow the advantage to his opponent, but in view of the unsatisfactory nature of the casts, it was decided to hold them equals. Mr. North then stipulated that he would take the first turn at the hammer. This arrangement gave Macroarie the benefit of the final throw in the last round. And he eagerly accepted it.

Mr. North took the hammer in his hand and went to the stance. Wetting the tips of his fingers slightly, he set a firm yet yielding grip on the shaft—the knack of which is half the athlete’s art. He raised the hammer and swung it with the ease of one who is at the

task for which Nature designed him. Once, twice, the ball at the end of the shaft circled in the air; and at the third wheel it left the thrower's hand, clean and at the right moment, with a sudden compacted momentum. It sailed out on the air with a gradual rise, till, reaching the height of its sally, it sloped off to the ground. The throw was delivered with that perfect and instantaneous agreement of the athlete's powers which comes to him in favoured moments and enables him to do his best.

“There, neighbour!” said Mr. North calmly—knowing his mastery of the hammer, and feeling that he had luckily thrown his best shot—“I will give you *six* trials to come up to that.”

He might have offered Macroarie sixty trials instead of six, for the throw was nearly two yards beyond the farthest ever reached in the experience of Gollan.

The beaten veteran glowered at his opponent's mark with widened, unwinking eyes for one tragic minute—dazed and maddened; then snatching up his garments, he took heels for the ale-house to drown his mortification.

XIV

WHEN MACROARIE RECOVERED FROM HIS SURPRISE, HIS NECK WAS IN THE IRON COLLAR OF THE "JUGGS"

AS their hero made his sudden deploy the yokels spread out in order that each might secure a better view of the panting fugitive. Every eye watched him till he sank from sight in the bosom of the friendly inn; then a general escapement of suspended breath indicated that the tension had slackened.

The preacher took them as they stood, and addressed them straightway. "Men, the great apostle of the Gentiles remarked on one occasion that he was willing to become even a fool for the sake of the Gospel. Well, I have been a fool this day in his sense of the word. As you must know in your inner thoughts, I have not come to Gollan to throw

the caber and stone, but to declare my Master's evangel; howbeit, I have deemed it expedient thus far to submit to your practice in order to reach higher ends. Men, I have come among you to be your friend and adviser, and I trust also your guide. I can say from my heart that I sincerely seek your welfare; and as the great Head of the Church shall vouchsafe me grace and strength, I shall prove it by my factions. *Do you believe me?* ”

The crowd listened stolidly to his speech, not a limb moving to disturb the rustic indifference of the grouping. When, however, he drove them to an issue by the final appeal, their figures sulked together, each fellow sliding behind his comrade and resigning to some one else the opportunity of reply.

Perceiving that his speech had fallen ineffective, the preacher took up his coat and hat, and, donning them, cried, “ Let those who regard the honour of their word, follow me to God's house ! ” He walked deliberately to the church, accompanied by Roger ringing his maimed bell.

Only the three Jamiesons awaited the arrival of the two officers of ordinances, but

ere the service opened two yokels had joined them inside. The preacher took heart at sight of the new faces and cordially thanked God for the foretoken of success granted to His servant in the appearance of these ploughmen. He prayed with uncommon fervency that the grass might yet grow green on God's Mount Zion in Gollan.

While the service proceeded, the folks were trickling down the hill-sides and forming broken lines toward the kirkyard. The stragglers were at first insignificant, and lounged about the kirk slackly, but as the lines filled up and then emptied themselves at the converging point, the arrivals drew together and kneaded to a crowd. Formerly, the market did not begin until the kirk had "skailed" and the minister or the schoolmaster-clerk had read the announcements of rousps, etc., at the kirk door, but unsettled religious conditions had weakened reverence for tradition and order, and now the market practically began when anyone arrived with his stirk or sheep. The kirk was merely a convenient rallying-point in the clachan, and its service was forgotten.

Mr. North had barely announced his text when the gathering noise from the kirkyard began to penetrate to the interior of the sanctuary. He bravely attempted to ignore the pelt of sound, but the jangle grew so mightily that he was forced to surrender to its inharmonious ruling. He was the readier to capitulate because it occurred to him that the market gave him a rare opportunity of addressing the crowd, and so fighting the Devil in bulk ; by leaving his own battery at one point he might spike the enemy's guns at another. He wound up the service and went outside without delay.

The scene that filled his eye was sorely jumbled. Little groups were parcelled off to business, some soberly arguing, and others impatiently quarrelling over the details. There was little business transacted, however, for nearly all the people of the district and neighbourhood were cottars, and dependent on the laird ; but a sprinkling of small farmers from outlying districts came to sell and buy stock, and these gave the gathering an air of commerce. But to the great majority who attended it the market was more

of a holiday—which was then only possible on the Sabbath, and which perhaps differed little from the ordinary Sabbath in that a larger concourse assembled and some business was done. A few, then, were concerning themselves about the stirks and sheep which nibbled grass among the graves, or strayed aimlessly before the eyes of would-be buyers. Beyond, the usual athletics were in full swing, the strangers laying their strength against that of the residents. Mr. North saw none of these sights very clearly, however. A group at the church door had engrossed him. He knew at a glance that a fight—a bitter tussle, too—was raging, but it was only after a closer scrutiny that he saw Macroarie, now maddened by drink, as one of the combatants.

The "jouugs" were hanging by the kirk door—the iron collar slung to a chain and fastened to the wall, used for offenders in those quaint times—and the preacher grasped the chain to steady himself. Could he believe his eyes? His very heart seemed to die within him; yet holy indignation coursed through his senses like a purifying, quickening

element. Could he stand nervelessly by and see the Day of God profaned in this devil-bewitched fashion? Surely not. He felt that he would be a coward, and less than man or saint, to turn childishly from such a barefaced challenge. Had he not asked Heaven for strength to play the man that day? And had not his Master whipped the Temple clear of irreverent intruders—and on the Sabbath, too? Let that Example be his now.

He undid his hold of the “jouggs.” With one or two masterful strides he forced his way through the thickly ringed group surrounding the fighters. Clapping a sudden grip on Macroarie’s throat, he had the old plague on his back in a twinkling, doubled up by the rapid and unexpected movement of one accustomed to wrestling. The next moment he jerked him to his feet again; then, planting his left hand on the disturber’s head and his right hand on his thrapple, he drove him with a rush to the wall of the kirk. When Macroarie recovered from his surprise his neck was in the iron collar of the “jouggs,” and the grip of the preacher’s left hand held

the collar shut like a clam. The instrument had been out of use for some time and the fastenings had been lost, but the clinch of a powerful athlete was padlock enough.

The preacher's right hand was uplifted for silence. It was now of some purpose for him to request a hearing. The man who could twirl the caber as if it were a torch, and charm the hammer by two yards beyond the accomplishment of generations, was one to be respected and admired; and when to these astounding performances was linked the mastery of Macroarie, the record was enough to create wonder. Here was one who, in a single forenoon, had outstripped their bravest accomplishments as if they were but fun to him! When, therefore, he held up his hand for silence, a kind of awe overtook the crowd.

His tone was stern now, with a ring of shrewd resolution in it. It is possible, however, that his boldness had birth as much from despair as from determination, for he had cast all his hopes on the chances of that day's experiment.

He opened with the remark that he had

not come among them at his own behest. "The Lord hath ordained me to the task—and that task is to make known His evangel to this parish. Oh, men, it ill befits you to frown at the Word of Him whose Eternal Son, by His braveries, went through the doorway of Paradise bleeding to death, to show you the track to yon Fair Land and win you a place in it by His pains! And it as ill befits me to threaten, who am indeed an ambassador of High Heaven, yet a preacher of the good news of peace and righteousness; but albeit I would prefer to plead, I am compelled to war with you for a time, to gain a hearing for my Master's proclamation."

Those sentences lighted on the rustic listeners in deliberate cadence—uttered by a voice clear and commanding, and tempered by intense earnestness. The rude fellows listened, silenced less by reverence than by curiosity.

"Neighbours of mine, I have no taste for speaking about myself. My joy is all to tell you of Him who hath ascended on high, leading captivity captive. He hath gone to prepare mansions—royal homes—for those

who love Him. Oh, who would not be a tenant of such a gracious landlord? Who would not have a holding where there is no rent to pay, in a land whose weather is everlasting summer, whose fruit-trees match every palate, and where every seed sown thrives into glory and ever deeper glory through eternities that know no night or storm! Fain are we all to have a comfortable sitting-down in this world, though all the fruits that grow here are salted with sin; but, oh, to be fain of heaven, where the fruits are bursten with solacious juice, where none are poor and none are sad, and the bitterness of regret is unknown! It is by His sovereign grace that I offer this Land to you, in the proclamation of His evangel. And this——"

Macroarie's fingers had been working incessantly to tire those of the preacher which imprisoned him, and at this point he gave a final twitch which relieved his neck from the iron collar. He had regained his liberty, but, soused with drink and half-dazed with fighting, he collapsed and crumbled to the ground.

Mr. North looked down pitifully at the degraded leader. Would he finish his work of

conquest over him, and add one final exhibition of his strength to cow his opponent forever, and subdue his still-hesitating audience? He gave the suggestion but a second's consideration. Stooping down, he hoisted Macroarie to his feet, sprawling and protesting. Straightening him against the wall again, Mr. North set his back to the chest of the beaten chief and took him on his shoulders like a sack of wheat. In a moment Macroarie was dangling from the preacher's back, his hands locked in his victor's grip and his bare feet sparring the air.

Amid murmurs of astonishment, which opened out into a general cheer, the preacher strode off with his burden straight for Macroarie's house. Prising the door with his foot, he passed into the interior and laid his burden on the ground. "Lie there, my good fellow, till you learn sense," the victor said sternly. "And thank the Most High that you have come home without a broken bone. When you come-to, I pray that you will repent of your sins and return to the Lord. And may He bless you this day!"

Leaving his overthrown parishioner to

recover at Nature's leisure, the preacher apologized to his wife for bringing home her husband in such a plight, and took his departure. He walked straight to the Apothecary's house, for his day's work was now over.

His host observed him. "Did ye blaud (batter) the bastard weel—eh?" he inquired gleefully; and without tarrying for an answer, he cried to an invisible Macroarie, "Oh, Macroarie, ye're a caif (tame) cock noo!"

Anxious to draw his comrade from his bantering tone, the preacher expressed a fear that he had not accomplished much good, after all.

"Guid? Ye hae filled the grandest day's wark o' yer lifetime, man. Ye'll hae peace noo. I ken Macroarie: he's a gruff tyke, an' a splartin' deil, but he isna a guddler (given to dirty work). He'll be at the kirk next Sawbath, gin he gied ye his word."

"Do you think so?"

"Ay. An' mind this, preacher: gin Macroarie tak's to ye, he'll stick lek a lobster. Only, keep a haud o' him. 'Get weel, keep weel,' an' dinna owerlook it. An' hoo far flang ye the hemmer, Maister North?"

“ I cannot say, Sir Eric,” modestly replied the hero. “ Mine was a lucky cast and overshoot Macroarie’s by two yards.”

“ Twa yairds ! ” His listener was stunned ; but recovering himself, challenged the victor to a tussle with *him* next morning.

“ On no account, good neighbour ; on no account. What I have done to-day has been under stress, as you know ; but whether ill or good comes of it, I am resolved to do no more.”

“ Weel, I’ll kick ye oot o’ my hoose, then ! ”
—in amused provocation.

The preacher took up the joke. “ Well, kick me out, if you can ! ”

His host grinned, well pleased. “ Man, ye’re a thrawn stot (young ox) ! ” he said.

XV

“DINNA BE FEARED, LASS”

IN the twilight of the following day, while the Apothecary and Mr. North were emptying a cog of sowans between them, Roger and Widow Roy's gifted boy, Joseph, appeared. The dominie was holding the laddie by the hand. “He says his mither is dowie (ill), Sir Eric—ay, gey dowie, nearly,” he announced. “I hae been ower to see her, but I dinna ken what's wrang wi' her. I am unwillin' to fash ye, Sir Eric; but she is gey ill—ay is she.”

The Apothecary plunged his fingers into his hair, as if disturbed at the prospect of having to leave his bed, but next moment he was on the floor shooting his legs into his pants. When out of action, he was as easy-osey as a rhinoceros dozing on the edge of a

quiet lake ; but when he resolved to act, his movements were alert and emphatic.

“ Ye maun come wi’ me, Roger,” he said commandingly.

The dominie looked at him. “ What guid can I dae ? ”

“ I dinna ken ; but maybe Providence may hae need o’ ye. Come awa’, Roger.”

It was dark when the Apothecary, Roger, and Joseph reached the widow’s house, and the only light within it came from the fluffing fire, beside which the children sat. While Roger searched for a fir-root to light, the Apothecary stepped over to the patient’s bed. “ What’s wrang—eh, lass ? ”

She could scarcely reply. “ I’m silly (weak), Sir Eric. I ken nae mair. I took dwams (faintings) twa or three times the yesterday, an’ I thocht to owercome it ; but I was fair beft (beaten).”

“ Hae ye ony pain, lass ? ”—laying his hand on her pulse, which was staggering badly.

“ Na, I canna say I’m sair, Sir Eric ; but I hae an awfu’ sinkin’ at the heart, an’ a queer flutterin’ forby.”

“ Ay, ay,” he sighed to himself. The

widow had a weak heart, and was not now suffering with it for the first time; but the staggering pulse told him that this was an uncommon attack on the centre of life. Taking the lighted “fluffy” from Roger’s hand, he held it over the sufferer’s face. A glance satisfied him that she was knee-deep in Jordan. He did not screen the truth from her. “I’m fearin’ I canna help ye, lass,” he said gently. “Ye maun lat Roger gang for the preacher. I’m dootin’ ye haena lang o’ this warld, puir lass.”

A spurt of earnest enlivenment wakened the drowsy patient. “Na, na,” she replied firmly. “I canna thole (bear) a heretical man, Sir Eric. Put up a word or twa yersel’; ye hae been godlier to me an’ mine than ony preacher.”

“That I canna dae, lass. I daurna middle wi’ sacred things. But dinna be feared. Gin I could gang doon the burn wi’ ye, I wad dae it; an’ God is a hantle stronger an’ kinder than me.”

“Oh, I’m no’ feared, Sir Eric—na, na; but ye—ken—— I think I wad lek a bit sleep.” Her voice fell to a whisper.

“ Ay, jist close yer een an’ rest, lass ”—stroking the damp hair back from her brow.

The breathing of the patient became more laden. In its pauses she muttered much: “ Oh, my puir bairns ! ” “ Ye hae been kind, kind to me, Sir Eric. ” “ I hear the lap o’ water. ” “ My bairnies, my bairnies ! ” “ I’ll keep ye in mind, Sir Eric, though—I’m gey tired, an’ maun sleep. A fair guid e’en, ” she sighed ; and so passed.

The Apothecary laid his finger and thumb on the eyelids of the dead woman for a few seconds, then drew his hand over her brow to smooth it. “ Puir lass ! Puir lass ! ” he murmured. Turning to the three wondering children, he lifted the youngest in his stout arms. “ Yer mammie’s awa’-wa’, pet—awa’ to meet yer faither. I dinna ken whan she may come back : will ye come hame wi’ me—eh ? I’ll mak’ bochies (toys) for ye, an’ gie ye bickers o’ milk. ”

The innocent toddler nodded assent and smiled.

“ Ye’re a guid bairn ! ”—patting the little head ; then taking up the next eldest in his untenanted arm he asked her if she would

come, too. She scarce took her finger from her lip to say “Ay.”

“Come awa’ hame wi’ me, then. Lap yer airms about my neck—ticht, ticht, for the fairies an’ warlocks may get ye in the dark. Cuddle in, noo.”

As the two frail fragments of humanity plaited their arms about his neck and hid their faces in his frowzy beard, he hugged them to his heart. “Puir mitherless lammies, ye shallna want as lang as the auld Apothecary hes kail in his hoose. Roger, tak’ Joseph hame wi’ ye to yer hoose an’ mak’ a nest for him, an’ I winna see ye the loser by’t. Blaw oot the fluffy, Roger, an’ come awa’.”

The dominie dashed the fir-root on the floor and extinguished it; and, setting his brogues on the dying embers of the fire, tramped them out.

“Lat us gang noo,” said the Apothecary, leading the way and hugging his burdens. Roger and Joseph followed; and the widow was left, still and unbreathing, in her dark home.

As the dominie fastened the tirling-pin of

the door, the Apothecary said, "Tak' it in haun', Roger"—meaning the arrangements for the funeral.

Roger, who was beadle and grave-digger as well as schoolmaster, understood the order. "Hoo muckle will I put oot on ale, Sir Eric?"

"What ye hae aye dune. I trow we canna put the puir lass aneath the grun withoot some show o' respeck. Lat us hae nae drunken collieshangie, though—jist an ilka day circumspeckt funeral, Roger."

"I ken, Sir Eric; I ken—nearly."

The dominie led the eldest boy away to his own fireside as instructed, and the Apothecary carried the other two to Lexy's keeping.

Lexy gazed in wonderment when he strode in with the burden in his arms. "Whaur got ye the bairns?" she asked bewildered.

"Ye hae heard o' a woman bringin' twins to the hearth, Lexy; but did ye ever ken o' a *man* owertakin' the trick afore—eh?"

Seeing that his housekeeper's mystification continued, he unfurled the clinging items and revealed the widow's children to her.

Her wonderment deepened at sight of them.

“Preserve us a’, what’s come ower them to coost (cast) them oot o’ doors this oor o’ nicht? Whaur’s their mither?”

And the Apothecary answered softly that she was “Awa’ to meet her man in heaven.”

The wizened face of the old housekeeper softened instantly and her eyes filled. She silently held out her arms and he passed them into her embrace.

Lexy sat down with an orphan on each knee, hugging them with tremulous arms. “I hed a bairn o’ my ain aince,” she crooned, burying her face between the fresh young cheeks.

The Apothecary was passing out for heather to make a nest for them when his ear caught the words of his housekeeper. “What’s that ye said, Lexy?” he asked, standing in the doorway.

She was only gossiping with the bairns, she replied.

“Ay, sae ye hed a bairn o’ yer ain aince, Lexy!” repeated the Apothecary, after the manner of those who do not seem to hear definitely at first and then gather sense from the sound. “I hae heard ye say that ye was

spouse to Sammy Melville—the same surname as mysel', wha'ever he was ; but I didna ken ye was a mither, Lexy. Whaur is yer bairn ? ”

“ Wi' its faither, I jalouse (guess)—sleepin' the lang sleep.” Her voice had a sob in it.

The Apothecary withdrew quietly on receiving that answer. In a few minutes he returned with a bundle of heather in his arms. Throwing it in a corner, he spread it carefully, and then went out again. Soon he came back carrying two or three sheepskins, which he tossed on the heather. Having instructed Lexy to give the bairns warm milk and then send them to bed, he went ben to his own end, where Mr. North was reading by the light of the cruisie lamp.

“ Widow Roy's awa', preacher.”

The abrupt intimation startled the reader. He looked up earnestly from his book. “ Is she *dead*, Sir Eric ? ”

“ Ay.”

“ Would that I had known of her condition ! Did she make her peace with God ? ”

“ Ye maun ask Himsel', Maister North.”

“ Sir Eric, forgive me, but I cannot speak

with your levity on such sacred subjects”—an answer spoken as a gentle reproof. “Death is death,” he added heavily, as if that were an end of the matter.

“Weel, it isna onything else that I ken o’!” retorted his comrade. Changing his tone with his wonted ease, he informed Mr. North of all the circumstances—the widow’s sudden illness, her speedy death, the fact that she would not hear of the preacher’s presence, and her approaching burial. With characteristic modesty, he kept his hand on his own generous doings, while he credited Roger with all the virtues of a Christian gentleman.

“She wadna hae ye at her bedside,” he explained, “but ye mustna shy at her beerial. Tak’ ye the service, an’ I’ll stan’ by ye. The clachan hesna settled doon yet, but if e’en a moose cheeps at ye, I’ll thrapple him.”

“When does it take place?”

“By the hinner-end o’ the week.”

“That will be convenient, Sir Eric. By that time I hope to have returned with my wife; and then I trust that you will be unburdened of me, good neighbour.”

“Whan gang ye to meet yer spouse?”

“ Two days hence—by the light of the new moon.”

“ Weel, weel. Ye can gang noo wi’ a safe skull, an’ ye couldna hae ventured that afore ye mauled Macroarie. Eh, preacher! I maun warn ye, though, to keep yer een unsteekit (open) for skirmishers. Some o’ the dour deevils may try to clure ye for spite. Keep yer fists in trim, an’ come hame again wi’ an uncracked skin.”

“ When I do return, I shall, of course, take up my abode in the manse, in company with my wife”—thus announcing his intention of putting up in the old building again.

The Apothecary readily acquiesced. “ A’ the better, man. Josie Roy can get yer bed here then, an’ puir Roger will be clear o’ him. I’ll awa’ but noo, an’ see hoo my bairns are farin’.”

He returned to the kitchen. Winking Lexy aside, he whispered to her: “ Ye micht gang ower to Macroarie’s wife an’ speir (ask) gin she can gie ye a han’ to streik (lay out) Widow Roy’s body. Dinna say no, Lexy; she was a puir weedow-woman wi’ naebody o’ her ain to dae it for her. I’ll sit wi’ the bairns till

ye come back. Gang, Lexy, for the sake o’ thae innocent lammies”—pointing to the children he had brought home with him.

Lexy did not need so much coaxing as Sir Eric’s speech indicated, but it was his way to cheapen himself when asking a favour which he urged as if it were for his own advantage. She left the house at his bidding, and he plumped on the floor beside the bairns, who were sitting on the shake-down, eating scones.

“Maybe ye wad like a wee sang—eh?”

A nod indicated their delight.

“Ah, weel, I’ll sing ye ‘The Cattie an’ the Moosie’:

“The cattie sat on the kiln-ring,
Spinnin’, spinnin’;
An’ by came a little wee moosie,
Rinnin’, rinnin’.

“‘Oh, what’s that ye’re spinnin’, my loesome,
Loesome lady?’
‘I’m spinnin’ a sark to my young son,’
Said she, said she.

“‘I soopit my hoose, my loesome,
Loesome lady.’
‘’Twas a sign ye didna sit among dirt, then,’
Said she, said she.

- “ ‘ I fand twal’ pennies, my loesome,
Loesome lady.’
‘ ’Twas a sign ye werena sillerless, then,’
Said she, said she.
- “ ‘ I stole a sheepie’s head, my loesome,
Loesome lady.’
‘ ’Twas a sign ye werena kitchenless, then,’
Said she, said she.
- “ ‘ But by came a cattie an’ ate it up, my loesome,
Loesome lady.’
‘ An’ so will I *you*—worrie, worrie, gnash, gnash!’
Said she, said she.”

When he came to “ worrie, worrie,” he dug his face in the sheepskin coverings and imitated the cat worrying the mouse. The two little lassies took to the fun heartily. They grabbed him by the hair and tried to repel his attack, leaking with lusty laughter the while. He worried them till his breath was spent and his head was like a ball of wool after a score of kittens had played with it.

Mr. North heard the skirmish ; stepped on tiptoe and peeped in on the fun ; smiled like a pleased boy, and tipped back to his book again—all unknown to the actors.

XVI

AN ARM SHOT UP FROM THE HEATHER

TWO days later, when the sun-god had driven his chariot well up the hills, Mr. North mounted his nag at the Apothecary's door. He was going to meet his wife. His plan was to leave in the darkening, travel overnight, meet her in the early morning, and return in her company the following dayset.

He re-trod the path by which he had entered Gollan so recently. Gliding obliquely to the left, down through inclining fields, he found the side of the burn. He held to its banks till he came to the crook of the stream : the pony splashed through, and, climbing the bank-face opposite, set his feet to the rise which ended on the ridge of hills beyond.

The moon's horn was now peering dreamily through the greying sky of the declining day.

It was her first quarter, and a muggy atmosphere allowed her but a small chance of showing even that limited slip of her glory. "I wish the moon had vouchsafed more of her light to me," he murmured, casting up his glance in hope of a clearing: for the foot-way was troublesome and the light was scantier than he had expected. The pony, however, was cautious and sure-footed. Yard by yard of the heathy obstacle was overcome and thrown behind them. Soon they pulled on to the open hill-side, with no token of human presence. There were only the sullen clouds and the shy moon overhead, and the great quilt of heather outspread on the earth beneath them.

As the pony ambled forward he carried his rider nearer The Cairn. Mr. North recalled his first visit to the grim tower of the storm-gouged walls, and he inwardly prayed for its sulky tenant. What, he began to wonder, would the sinful laird be doing at that moment? He proposed that question to himself, but never answered it. An arm shot up from the heather and grasped him by the ankle: a smart tweak, and he was off the

pony and on his back in the heather, with a huge figure bestriding him.

The wrestler's instinct leapt upon the preacher and he gripped his oppressor with the skill of his art. Doubling back his leg, and setting his heel in the heather, he gained enough purchase to prise his body side-wise and throw the other off. They struggled to their feet, still in grips. The match of strength was fairly equal. Both contestants were tall and powerful, the stranger being heavier and more sluggish. Not a word they spoke—the intruder intending silence and Mr. North being yet breathless with surprise. In grim stillness they set themselves to struggle as for life. Each was wrestling with a stranger, and in the dark. The very uncertainty induced the combatants to put forth supernatural strength and effort. They both knew how to wrestle.

The preacher was feeling round his antagonist's waist one moment, only to be recalled from the attempt by the stranger's equal eagerness to outwit him in another manoeuvre. After much tough straining, an unlucky jerk placed the preacher within the hold of the

other, but he was quick enough to secure a similar advantage over his opponent. Their hands were now locked around each other, and the only question left for settlement was—Which of the wrestlers shall double the back of his opposer and throw him ?

Mr. North found the stranger not only a skilled wrestler but bulky and unwieldy, with the back of a horse. Inch by inch the hold of each was creeping down the back-bone of the other, prior to the pull-in. The stranger tried it with a rush but failed—his man was all alert. Again he attempted to hug his opponent, and found himself trapped. The preacher gradually caved his back, broke in on his resistance, and with one smart, mad snig took him from his feet and flung him on the heather. As the vanquished intruder went down, his body creaked as if bones were disjointed, and he fell to the earth with a moan and an oath.

“Wha the deil are *ye* ?” he yelled.

“Caleb North the preacher, my good fellow ; and it would have been better for us both had you left me alone this——”

“The preacher ! the preacher !” panted

the fallen wrestler, in astonished anger. "Oh, what a blasted lout I am!"

"You are—you are—surely not Mr. Crook, the laird?"

"The same—deil tak' ye! Ye hae yerked (jerked) my haunch oot o' joint," answered the laird—for it was indeed he.

"But——" Mr. North hesitated to ask an explanation.

The Tod anticipated him. "I took ye for ane o' thae derf (very bold) rascals, on a borrowed garron, wha hae been reetin' (digging) up in the nicht-time the trees I hae been tryin' to plant; an' I determined to nab ane o' them an' clap him in the 'Thieves' Hole.'"

The revelation stunned Mr. North. What could he do? He had wounded his patron. "But why did you not send some of your servants to this undertaking?" he asked, not knowing what else to say.

"Them!" yelled the laird. "They're as stupid as the ill-contrivin' bummies (fools) wha hae wrocht me the mischief; besides, I'm o' the mind that the scoundrels hae been at it themsel's—plague tak' the last mither's

whalp o' them! But hoo cam' *ye* to be here this time o' nicht?" he scarcely continued, so pained was he.

Mr. North explained that he was on his way to meet his wife.

"Ah, weel, jist lat her fend for hersel'. Awa' ye to The Cairn for help tae tak' me hame; an' then rax (stretch) ye for Sir Eric, the mediciner, as hard as yer garron can skelp. Tell him to lose nae time, for my hip-joint is clean cast oot. Awa'!"

The laird's commands mercilessly mowed down the pleasant anticipations of his protégé. They permitted no arbitration. His wife must be left to look to herself. With a heavy heart he strode after his pony, and mounted.

Having reached The Cairn and delivered his message, he wearily turned back to Gollan. More than once he hesitated, debating with himself, but he finally decided that the sooner he executed the laird's orders the less time would his wife be in suspense. He thereupon threw off his dubiety and shaped his pony for a long and sustained ride. The morning was now on the verge of the thick

murky darkness and would soon whiten the clouds. On—round by hillock and hollow, down the face of swooping braes, up the shoulders of rising hills, along dreary ridges, along the levels of the burn, and thence up the slope to the Apothecary's house.

A hurried bash on the door brought up Lexy from her bed.

“Preserve us a’, what’s wrang?” she cried, gaping. “Has onybody mishandled ye? Hae ye lost yer spouse? Or——”

Mr. North brushed by her, and dived into the Apothecary's apartment. Eric had sprung to the edge of his bed when he heard the blatter at his door, and was kindling his tinder-box with flint and steel, to get light for his cruisie lamp.

“The laird requires your aid without delay,” panted the breathless preacher.

“What’s wrang?”—with professional indifference to haste. Dropping some sparks into the box, he began to blow on the tinder.

“I wrestled with him in the dark, without knowing him, and overthrew him; and by so doing wrenched his thigh out of joint.”

“Put his haunch oot o’ joint, did ye!”

ejaculated the Apothecary in a gale of surprise. He exploded so suddenly and violently that he blew the tinder out of the box and covered himself with fiery scraps.

“Come, good sir, I should have been near my spouse by this time,” pleaded the preacher.

The Apothecary, still laughing, strode to Lexy’s end for a “kinlin’” of live peat. He returned, blowing the peat to a flame, at which he lit the cruisie lamp. Casting the peat into the fireplace, he stood up to the preacher. “Ye tell me, man, that ye warstled wi’ The Tod an’ threw him ower? Guidsakes, what a boxin’ ram ye’re gettin’ to be!”

Mr. North urged him to get on his garments and make haste, promising to give him all particulars in cooler moments.

The Apothecary slid into his clothes. Taking down a block and tackle from the wall (to which were appended a mallet and huge iron staple), he hurried for the stable and had out his pony in a minute. Winding the tackle round his shoulder, he mounted to “Cloutie’s” back with the eagerness of a boy. “Awa’, Cloutie!” he urged, dunting the beastie’s

ribs with his heels ; and the two riders dashed down to the burn and held away for The Cairn.

After they had crossed the elbow of the stream and were leaning to the rising ground, the preacher's pony began to stutter in his going. The beast was wearied with the double journey, and almost spent. The Apothecary apprehended the dilemma and suggested to Mr. North that they should exchange horses. "Get ye on the back o' Clootie, Maister North—he's fresh ; an' I'll stride yer beastie for a wee while." The preacher complied. Although he did not see what advantage could be gained by the exchange, he knew his comrade too well by this time to doubt that he had some manoeuvre in view. "Gang ye forat (forward)," ordered the Apothecary when the exchange had been effected—"gang ye on as fast as Clootie can skelp : I'll tak' it canny wi' this tired beastie."

So admonished, the preacher quickened Clootie's pace, crossed the out-spanning hills, and passed the farm of the Jamiesons. It was now expanding day, and riding was easy.

Sir Eric urged the jaded pony as quickly

as he could foot it with safety. Some time after his companion had passed the Jamiesons' farm, he drew up to it. Only one of the sons was astir. Sir Eric hailed him, and announced his need of a horse, his own having given in. Without waiting for an answer, he sprang to the ground and slid back the pin of the stable door.

"It's a young colt we hae there—naebody hes been on his back yet," explained the young farmer. "Come to this next door an' I'll gie ye ane that's broken-in."

"Deil a fear! Oot wi' this youngster." He dived into the stable and emerged with the young colt.

"Ye'll brack yer neck-bane as sure's death, Sir Eric," protested the farmer in a sweat.

"Tak' ye care o' that puir beastie," was the cool reply, pointing to the tired pony, "an' I'll tak' care o' my neck-bane"—and the next moment he surprised the colt by vaulting on his back. He drew the rein tight in the halter. This was done so deftly that the colt was in hand before he had time to think. He stood stock-still in evident wonderment. His rider waited for him. Rearing

suddenly up, he flung out his fore hoofs angrily, and gyrated like a lunatic ; but his oppressor kept cool, and still waited. Up he bounced on his hind legs again—straighter and straighter till he dropped right on his back on the grass. The Apothecary was expecting this manœuvre, and peeled off his back in going down.

As the colt rose, his rider leapt on his back again, and was once more the master. He had not hitherto touched the beast, but now he hacked his ribs with a pair of stout heels. The animal winced, pawed, wheeled, cast up his head, and bolted. He pelted the broadening daylight with his forefeet as he rushed over the heathy and uneven ground.

“ Thank God, there’s jist licht eneuch noo to see whaur he’s takin’ me,” thought the grim rider, steering the maddened animal as if he were a ship in a crazy storm. He tried to quiet the racer and reduce his speed, but in vain—forward he bounded, finding his footing in a miraculous way. Would his rider be able to bring him up when he wanted ? He *must* do it.

Horse and rider were soon warm, and the

Apothecary began to fear that he might not long hold out and keep command. "I maun tak' him in time," he panted. Leaning forward with a jerk, he took the colt between the ears with the mallet—a skilful stroke in aim and weight. A bound—a stagger or two—and the beast went down with his nose in the heather. The Apothecary rolled off him as he lay down. Stretching himself on the ground, he addressed the conquered horse. "Tak' yer win' a wee while." While he waited, he wiped his face and neck; then sat up and shook his clothes open to the breeze and cooled himself. The colt was meanwhile recovering from his stun. He turned his head and looked at his conqueror. "I'm waitin' for ye," said the Apothecary, again addressing him. "Whan ye hae made up yer mind to gang as ye're tell'd, we'll mak' a start. Oh, ye maun get to yer feet—eh? Weel, up ye get!" He arose, drew the beastie's forelegs from under him and assisted him to rise; but just as he lounged to his feet, his master was on his back again. The Apothecary stooped forward to gather the rein tighter, when the animal caught his

sleeve in his teeth and ripped it clean to the shoulder.

“Deil tak’ ye! I maun hae the value o’ that oot o’ yer hide. Awa’!”

The horse stood stolidly with his forefeet set out.

“*Awa’!*”

Heels battered his sides, but he only snorted. He quivered in every muscle. Was his rage arising afresh or dying out?

The Apothecary knew that now was the crisis. Either the beast was on the verge of submitting, or gathering himself for a burst of rebellion. He waited. Another quiver pulsed through his entire frame. He was surrendering! Leaning forward, Sir Eric gave him a gentle pat of encouragement on the neck. The youngster shook his skin, played a beat with his ears, and scraped the ground. Then he started. He was unsteady at first and apt to forget himself, but firm handling restrained his gambols and appealed to his better nature; and, somewhat in front of the preacher, his rider was conveyed in splendid style to the laird’s habitation. Sir Eric did not enter, however, until Mr. North arrived.

The preacher was for hurrying forward to meet his wife, but his companion was otherwise minded. "I hae need o' ye, man."

"I cannot see what service I can render now, Sir Eric."

"Providence sees the need, though. Come awa'."

The ponies were stabled; and Apothecary and Preacher faced The Tod.

XVII

“ RICH T ! ” PANTED THE GLADDENED
OPERATOR

THE man of medicine entered The Cairn with his apparatus slung over his shoulder. He found his patient stretched on a couch, moaning. “ Haste, ye auld deil ! ” snapped the testy Baron, as Sir Eric and his preacher-assistant came through the door.

“ I hear that yer leg is sair, Baron, ” remarked the strategist in a cool and unruffled tone. “ Ay, an’ it’s stiffenin’ forby, is it ? ”

While talking so unconcernedly, however, he was busily effecting his arrangements. With his mell he drove the iron staple obliquely into the wall. Unravelling the tangle of his tackle, he looped one of the pulleys to the staple, tugging it fiercely to test its holding powers. “ Man, Baron, that

wad haud Auld Sootie himsel’,” he exclaimed, pleased with his job.

“ Pity you could not secure him ! ” observed Mr. North quietly, forced into a humorism.

“ A silly prayer, preacher : for gin it was answered there wad be nae need for gossellers—eh ! ”

The Baron was irritated by such apparent levity. “ Nae mair o’ yer gab, ye yatterin’ pullycocks. Get me oot o’ this pain, or——”

“ There isna ony need for sich haste, laird,” replied the Apothecary, searching for his snuff-box. Finding it, and gratifying himself with a pinch, he laid it on the table which stood waiting for the laird.

“ Boo doon, Maister North,” motioning with his hand to The Tod on his couch. A dexterous hoist by the two strong men, and the laird lay on the stout table, to which he was then lashed with ropes. The table was shored off from the wall by rude blocks of wood, which formed a solid resistance to the tug of the tackle. The Baron’s leg being wrapped with cloths to prevent the skin from fraying, the rope was wound compactly round it and finished in a loop. This loop was fitted

to the second pulley of the tackle. The tackle was drawn tight and the end of the rope placed in the preacher's hand. “ Haud that rope. Whan I tell ye, pu' lek a thoosand men. Haud at it till I shout ‘ Richt ! ’ an' then lat go wi' a snap, as if Sawtan hed clashed ye wi' a lump o' fire. Aff wi' yer coat an' link at it in yer duds.”

Mr. North stripped and stood ready with the rope-end in his hand.

“ We're ready noo, Baron. Are *ye* ? ” asked the Apothecary.

The laird glowered angrily at him. “ Yoke to yer wark, ye bastard, an' dinna stan' there glowerin'——”

“ Canny, Baron, canny ! ” interjected the Apothecary, lifting his snuff-box and diverting himself with another pinch. “ Whaur's yer son, Robin ? ”

“ In Edinbro', ” he answered angrily, and, turning his glance on North, ordered him to begin operations.

“ He tak's his orders frae *me* at this job, ” replied the unruffled operator. “ Man, Baron, did ye never hear the auld fowk say that haste an' anger hinder guid counsel ?—I

say, are ye to lat Robin wed Macroarie's lassie—eh ? ”

The laird fairly gaped with wrath and astonishment. “Gang on wi' yer wark an' tak' me oot o' this ply (plight).” He was blown with anger and could not lengthen out his speech.

Sir Eric deliberately took another waft of snuff and asked him plump if he would give his consent to Robin's marriage to Rosey Macroarie—“Yea or Nay.”

“An' if I winna ? ”

“Then I winna set yer leg ! ”

The Tod gazed at him. “For God's sake, Sir Eric, dinna gang daft ! Show mercy, man, an' tak' me oot o' pain.”

“Show mercy to yersel' an' gie in.—Yer leg maun be gettin' stiff noo,” he added diplomatically.

Would the Baron capitulate ? “Macroarie's dochter isna marrow (match) for my son,” he at length said, opening a loophole.

The Apothecary snapped at the advantage.

“Ay is she,” he argued. “Truth to tell, Baron, she's worth twa o' him. I ken her

weel, an’ a lassie cleaner in the bluid isna within a hunner miles. Man, gin only ye kent her, ye wad hae a notion o’ her yersel’.”

Struggling with Rosey’s enthusiastic advocate, the laird contended that such an alliance would be the downcome of his house.

“ Na faith ! It wad be the upcome, Baron. —I say, nae mair o’ this. Are ye to gie in ? Yea or Nay.”

“ Gang to the deil ! ”

The Apothecary promptly undid the tackling. Lifting his mell as if to slacken the staple, he turned again to his victim, “ Hanged a finger o’ me will supple yer leg gin ye dinna gie in to lat the twa young fowk gang thegither. Ane——twa Are ye to——”

The Baron was scared. “ Haud, haud, Sir Eric ; for God’s sake, haud ! ” he whined. “ Robin is a forritsome (froward) brute, onyway——”

“ Lek the auld chiel ! ”

“ —an’ it micht sair (serve) him richt to tether him to a tawpie (slovenly woman) lek Macroarie’s dochter ; but it maunna be in *my* time, Sir Eric. Lat it be whan I’m deid, an’ I’ll gie in.”

“ An’ will ye lay yer solemn aith (oath) to dee wi’ a’ speed—eh ? ”

“ Dinna joke, Sir Eric.”

“ I’m in bleezin’ earnest, Baron. Ye see, ye micht ootlive them ; an’ then, what wad be the guid o’ yer word ? Na, na : noo or never, as the hangman said to the thief.”

“ It’s a deil’s bargain, but I’ll gie in,” yielded the baffled laird.

The Apothecary’s manner changed instantly. “ Ye hae heard the Baron’s aith,” he said to Mr. North, appealing to him as a witness. “ Noo, summon a’ the men inside yer hide—colleger an’ preacher an’ fechter—an’ pu’ on that rope wi’ a’ yer micht. Jist think ye hae to pu’ ower the Pyramids.”

The preacher drew the tackle taut, and bent his full strength to it.

“ Pu’ ! ” cried the Apothecary, leaning over his patient and pressing hard the disjoined thigh.

Mr. North strained to his task ; but still “ Pu’, pu’ ! ” urged the operator, warming to his work. His excitement leapt up as the bone slowly drew to its socket. “ Lat at it, man ! It was ye that thrawed this hip oot

o’ joint, an’ ye maun pu’ it in again. Pu’—
pu’ lek Auld Nick ! ”

The strong man gave himself to his task with gathered energy, the sweat rushing to every pore. Nothing was heard but the creaking of the straining ropes, the panting breathing of the preacher, and the laird’s suppressed groans. The Apothecary seemed too intent even to breathe as he pressed his palm on his patient’s thigh, ready to give it the final push into its bed.

A long, steady tension-moment, and “ Richt ! ” panted the gladdened operator. Mr. North let go with the instantaneousness of one touched with a hot iron, and the bone jouped into its socket with a dull suck.

“ Weel done, gospeller ! Ye hae richted what ye wranged, lek an honest man. Gang awa’ to meet yer spouse, noo : she maun be weel on her journey. Ca’ here as ye gang by, an’ I’ll gie ye my convoy hameward.” He breathed heavily after his exertions.

When Mr. North had left, the Apothecary determined to finish his task on the laird’s leg, but still more that on his heart. He was more familiar and less stern now, but equally

resolved. "Ye see, Baron," he said in a spirit of intimacy, "some staved banes are best to be snappit—an' then daintier handlin' can set them richt. I worried ye whan I hed ye on the table 'cause it was an unco chancy (fortunate) openin'; but——Man, that lassie o' Macroarie's is a sonsie, halesome quean, an' richt prood o' her will ye be whan ye ken her as weel as I dae—faith will ye, Baron."

He would have whistled out a long tune had not the Baron plugged him. "Sir Eric—nae mair! I'm repentin' o' my aith. Dang me, I winna keep it."

"Dinna be guffie (stupid), man! Baron, hear me—she needs nae mair than a bit buskin' up, an' she wad be fit to sit on a throne. A throne? Bah—she nicht sit on a rainboo, man. Tak' an auld cronie's advice, laird, an' dinna ca' (drive) yersel' atween the twa young fowk."

The Apothecary's pleading was tunnelling the Baron's fortification. "But she disna ken onythin' anent it," he ventured.

Sir Eric winked. "Man, wha loves maist speaks least. Ilka bonnie lass kens wha glowers at her. Forby, man, *he* kens o' her ;

an' whaur's the lover that winna hae the lass his hert is set on, e'en though he hes to walk through the Muckle Fire for her? Na, na, laird, nane o' yer stinkin' pride! Ye'll scunner (sour) them baith at ye for time an' eternity gin ye dinna ca' canny. Gie in, my auld cronie, gie in, an' dinna be ower dour. Mix yer pride wi' a handfu' o' gumption, laird."

The Apothecary paced the room, throwing every consideration into his theme, as a spinner feeds the lengthening rope with hemp. The laird heard him mutely, but not without a sense of concern. Robin was his only son, though a bastard. He was a sturdy youth of masterful impulses, and a stolid way of driving at what he wanted. His father—slow-brained as he was—guessed that once Robin settled to a scent, only death could end the pursuit. He was not sure, however, that Robin had given his mind to Macroarie's daughter: if he had, the crowning of it was only a matter of time and opportunity. But if he had not—well, he might yet be tossed to another quarter. In this latter hope, his father had dispatched him to Edinburgh; but he feared now, from

the Apothecary's assurances, that the gate to that realization was barred. He began to bargain with himself as to the best way out of the dilemma.

The Tod was as dour as his son, but, like most headstrong and ignorant men, he was subject to the taming power of family pride. It was this only, indeed, that exercised an advisory influence on his coarse mind ; for aught else, his son might stand chin-deep in Tartarus if he cared. But if his son—his heir—determined to scout this family consideration in preference for his own whim, what then ? Ay, what then ? Why, the family name would be disgraced and the family die out with himself, and strangers fight for his keys : unless—unless—the father yielded and saved the family credit. He might even do that, but how could he open his hearth to the daughter of that scullion, Macroarie ? If she were only not of *his* breed !

His balancings were ended for the time by the arrival of Mr. North and his wife. The minister had met her a mile or so beyond The Cairn, riding on horseback and attended by two stout Highland guides. The guides were

recompensed and dismissed ; and husband and wife, mutually gladdened, had the intervening space to themselves.

Sir Eric noted their approach, and stood in the doorway to welcome the lady. She was rather a dumpy woman of demure carriage, whose face proclaimed her consciousness of being wife to a man of some distinction. She was stiff in her movements, too ; but a natural liveliness lay cloistered in her blinking grey eyes and unmistakably hinted that her sober habit was the result of training.

From the doorway, the Apothecary stepped out to meet her, took her hand and kissed her on the cheek. Leading her into the house, he introduced her to the Baron. “ This auld hulk is the laird,” nodding his head toward the patient’s couch. “ He has a sair haunch—yer ain fechtin’ lover nearly snappit it—an’ he canna get to his stumps to salute ye.”

The Baron was scarcely pleased with the Apothecary’s liberties, but he was glad to be relieved of talking.

The Apothecary supplied most of the conversation, scattering jokes among the com-

pany, and bringing many a sally of interest to the lady's eye, to be instantly followed by an atoning blush. The only remark ventilated by The Tod was bestowed on Mr. North at the parting: "Ye're the only man wha ever threw me at a wrastle," he muttered dourly. It was spoken without an indication of admiration or regret, and it left the victor uncertain as to whether he had lost or gained in the esteem of his surly patron.

When the Apothecary, with the minister and his wife, set out for Gollan, the lady expressed her surprise that the "mediciner" had used such familiarities with the laird of the estate, without resentment on his part. "The Tod hes muckle land, nae doot, an' an elephant has muckle beef," replied the diplomat, "but neither the ane or the ither is gentrice (gentry). An' forby, woman, nae-body need be affrontit at a jest, for saut will dae ye nae hairm unless ye hae sores on yer skin.—I say, lass," he rattled on, "hae ye ever heard o' Marcus Aurelius?—eh?"

The lady was on the border of confession when her husband observed that they would profit more by a reference to Paul.

The remark was sniffed at by Sir Eric, who proceeded : “ Weel, this same Marcus Aurelius—a great pagan Christian, lass—says that naebody (no’ even the laird, the muckle sumph !) can hinner me frae actin’ conformably to the bein’ o’ which I form a pairt. D’ye see ? ”

Mrs. North was not sure how to answer. She would like to encourage the Apothecary in his entertaining chatter, but she thought her husband might not care to discuss heathen writers ; and, guessing that the two had crossed swords on the subject, she discreetly resolved to shunt it. She therefore cast the conversation back to the laird.

“ He is a strange man, is he not ? ” she asked.

The Apothecary admitted as much.

“ But might not God change his heart yet ? ” she proceeded.

“ I hae nae doot but He micht, gin He cared, seein’ He can mak’ warlds as thrang as tee-totums ; but—— Na, na, ‘ a wild goose ne’er laid a tame egg,’ lass. An’ yet—weel, I canna misbelieve that even Macroarie may be an angel some fine day—an’ a braw bugler

he wad mak', tootin' at a horn! The Tod an' him wad mak' a pair o' kittle (lively) angels! Oh, yes, yes!"—and he gurgled to himself.

In this easy fashion, the three riders jogged into Gollan to the music of their own merry prattle.

XVIII

THEY WERE IN THE THICK DARKNESS OF THE
EARLY MORNING, SAVE FOR THE SULKY
FLAME OF THE CRUISIE LAMP

MR. NORTH and his wife held away to the manse and the Apothecary entered his house. He found the housekeeper grinding bere at the knocking-stone. "Lexy, lass," he said half-sadly, "I think ye maun gie up that job an' mak' a deid-sark (grave-clothes) for me; I'm sair forfochen (fatigued). That tussle wi' the laird an' his thigh has sooked a' the life oot o' me; I'm clean casten."

His old domestic looked up at him in the fading daylight. He never complained unless the lances were in him to the heart; and she knew that he must be feeling very tired and played out ere he allowed himself even to approach it with a joke.

“ Ye’ll hae a bite o’ a roasted chucken ? ” she asked, getting up to fetch it.

“ Na, Lexy ; but I’m obligated to ye. ‘ Wha steals an auld man’s supper does him a kindness,’ ye ken. I think I’ll gang to my ba (bed), whaur I’m maist at hame, Lexy ”— with a fillip of briskness.

Then Lexy understood. His strength was not only distilled by the hurried ride and its extraordinary labour, but also (perhaps as a consequence) by one of those deep tediums of depression that come to ardent natures, and to which he was occasionally subject. He was more stricken in spirit than in body. The Apothecary was too brave to encourage these moods, and they seldom mastered him ; but when they burst through his resistance, when he realized that victory was with the enemy, he surrendered as wholly as he had fought. It is the quickest way of recovery. All true natures, like all true paintings, are mixed with contrasting colours which bleach and yet feed each other.

It was characteristic of the Apothecary that even when this imp put him in irons, he deprecated any attention from others.

He was quickly touched with signs of sympathy, but he would not cloud another's soul with his griefs. When he felt ill or worn, or the obscuration of depression thickened over his spirit, he retired to fight it out. "I maun be alane noo, Lexy," was all he required to say, and Lexy understood. Sometimes the contest was a short one—the enemy going down before a brisk rushing of its position; at other times it was a long, strangling twist. He never became indifferent, however, but watched the mood to filch every advantage and escape from his imperilment. He surrendered in order the sooner to gain relief, and he allowed himself no contentment until the banners were flying on every rampart again.

Lexy knew how to minister to him without seeming to do it, and she stood aside to wait her opportunity.

As he turned to take the shelter of his own retreat, his eyes lighted on Widow Roy's two bairns—cradled for the night in their heather shakedown, and looking up at him with wondering glances.

He sat down on the bed and then laid himself length-wise beside them, placing his

bearded face close to the cheek of the nearest, and mooring them on his breast by an arm flung around their necks. He hugged the chubby faces closer, and lay in silence beside them. In a short time they were locked in slumber; and when Lexy came later to address him, he, too, was fast asleep, with his arm shepherding the motherless bairns.

Would she wake him? She thought not, and retired to rest. After midnight she awoke. Searching with her hands in the dark, she stole to the corner where the children lay. He was gone. Feeling her way to the door of his room, she listened. He was in his own bed, breathing heavily, but not asleep. He had not heard her bare-footed movements, she felt sure, for he sighed and spoke low to himself. She gave her ear and soul to the task of catching some hint of his mutterings. Failing, she slid through the door and crept nearer.

His breathing stopped, as if suddenly arrested. Lexy could hear him listening. Then he asked, "Is that ye, Lexy, lass?"

"Ay, Sir Eric: I missed ye frae the bairns' side."

“ Licht the cruisie an’ mix a draught for me, Lexy.”

He spoke, Lexy thought, almost as if he had been expecting her ; there was no surprise in his voice. “ I haena been sae far spent this twal-month an’ mair.”

“ What can I gie ye ? ”

“ ’Deed, lass, I hardly ken. I think I’ll jist hae a drink o’ hartshorn an’ water the noo ; an’ gin that disna cast oot this silly (ill) turn by the morn’s-mornin’, we’ll e’en try ‘ the sodger ’,¹ Lexy.”

His faithful attendant mixed the hartshorn draught, and, drawing a creepie stool to the bedside, sat down to wait on him while he sipped it. Her night’s sleep was broken, and she felt drowsy, but she urged herself to wakefulness, for it was only at such times as these that she won close to him.

“ Health is lek gear, Lexy,” he said, putting the bicker to his mouth.

“ Hoo comes that aboot, Sir Eric ? ”

“ It’s easier gotten than guided, lass ”—drying his lips on his sleeve.

¹ “ The sodger ” was the title by which the Apothecary had christened one of his favourite tonics.

They were in the thick darkness of early morning, save for the sulky flame of the cruise lamp which hung over his head. Its light rescued Lexy's features dimly from the enveloping darkness, but the body of the lamp dropped a dark shadow on the Apothecary and almost obliterated his face. The shade pleased him ; he was swamped in it and could smile or grin without detection, while Lexy's face in the light published all its programme of delights and anxieties. He looked wonderingly at the worn old countenance, and almost thought he had never seen it before. Was it that he had not looked closely at it till now, or was the effect due to the surrounding dark, the determining light, and the nearness of the object ? He grew curious and peered into her face more keenly. Years had passed over it, brushing its freshness off in their flight ; cares had cut their unwelcome monograms on its brow ; a long stretch of monotonous life had sobered every expression ; the expectancy of youth which looks to life had resigned in favour of the expectancy of old age, which looks to death.

The Apothecary gazed silently on the jagged

face, and noted all the trenches dug in its wrinkling skin ; and as he looked, the softened light fell into every wrinkle and filled it with a strange tenderness which seemed to him like nothing else than the peace of God. An unaccustomed sense of reverence stole into his spirit. He remembered the many years Lexy had ministered to him, how motherly had been her attentions, with what good humour she had suffered all his innocent swindleries, how she had flung pleasantry for pleasantry with him and matched his every whim and mood. She was the only mother he had ever known, too—a thought which, most strangely, occurred to him now for the first time.

How patiently Lexy sat, waiting for the Apothecary to speak ! She found her only home in the kindness of her master. In the wide world she had no haven but that ; and he knew it, and was proud to think that his friendship gave her shelter from the threatenings of the world's submerging tide.

“ Ye're wearin' auld, Lexy,” he exclaimed kindly.

“ Ay, Sir Eric, an' I canna greet ower that, for life hes been gey sair on me.” This she

said to awaken his sympathy and draw him off himself.

The ruse was successful. Instantly he ceased being the patient and turned consoler. "Oh, I dinna ken hoo life can be sair on ye, Lexy, gin ye dinna lat it owercome ye. My auld freend, Marcus Aurelius, says ye're free to tak' a misfortune as a misfortune or itherwise, jist as ye hae a mind—gin ye dinna tak' it as a mischance, then it canna be ane. An' it's e'en the same wi' life. Wi' some fowk it's a' a wintry day o' snaw an' sleet, an' wee glints o' sunlicht; wi' ithers it's a' a sunny day, Lexy—they may hae a pelt o' rain noo an' then, but it's soon ower; an' the sun is aye bricht, whether we see it or no'. Noo, I think life itsel' maun be the same in ilka man, woman, and bairn—but the dye we gie it is a' oor ain. What say ye to that, Lexy—eh?"

"Maybe, Sir Eric, maybe; but fash an' dool (trouble and sorrow) come mair to some fowk than to ithers."

"Oh, ay, lass! But, then, queer fowk are mair pleased wi' themsel's whan they hae skaith (harm) to complain o' than whan

they haena. Forby, [there are natures that stoughten wi' packs (blows), Lexy. It's wi' them as it's wi' me an' the win'—I canna think to get oot o' this nest o' mine wi' guid-will save whan there's a reevin', deavin' (deafening) gale blowin', an' then I lek to stan' in it wi' a' my duds lowse an' lat it whistle through my banes. An' sae there are some fowk wha are nane the waur o' a guid on-ding o' fashery, to skaur them into livelier habits, Lexy."

Lexy was ready. "Ye maun hae fared gey weel yersel' to talk in that strain o' ither fowks' dool."

He gave vent to a half-smothered chuckle. "Maybe, lass, maybe, but I dinna think that mysel'. I hae seen my faither, though I canna mind his face, but I never hed e'esicht o' my mither—in truth, I dinna ken wha she was, whaur she cam' frae, or onything anent her—an' I was flung on the warld gey early in life, to get on my shanks or lie an' rot, as I listed."

Lexy had never been able to get the early chapters of his life out of him, and her strategic instinct was resolved to make advantage

of the unexpected opportunity now presented.

“ Hae ye nae kennin’ o’ yer mither ava ? ” she asked carelessly.

“ Nane, Lexy. I kenna whether she was braw or plain, sonsie or mim-moothed, white or black. I hae some notion that she came frae aboot Aiberdeenshire. My faither was a ship captain, Lexy, an’ hied me awa’ to the sea wi’ him whan I was a bairn ; an’ I canna min’ onything farrer back o’ mysel’ than rowin’ (tumbling) aboot the deck lek a douggie.”

Lexy was listening at every pore. “ My man was a sailor, Sir Eric,” she exclaimed, almost gasping. “ Dae ye mind the colour o’ yer faither’s hair ? ”

“ Dark, Lexy, if I min’ richt ; as black as yer ain is white.”

“ Ay ; an’ was he a big man ? ”

“ Wisna sae big as he was sterk (strong), Lexy.”

“ An’ his voice, Sir Eric ? ”

“ Lek a tornado, Lexy ; I mind that weel. He was aye roarin’ at the sailors.”

A wild suggestion was maddening her breast. “ It canna be,” she thought ; and

yet, "It may be," her heart repeated. She had told those who questioned her that her husband and boy were dead; and a more than thirty years' silence justified her fears. Why should a woman tell that her husband had left her in a tiff and never returned, taking their only child with him? She had no means of tracing him; she did not even know the name of the schooner he commanded, nor the port from which he sailed, nor the fate which overtook him. She only knew that he was high-tempered, that he left her in a rage, carrying their baby boy with him, and going she knew not whither. It was not the first time he had quarrelled with her in that fashion, but his anger abated under the spell of time, and he returned to her again. But he went out at last, never to return. Oh, the long weighty years of hoping and waiting! Each day arrived like the ghost of its predecessor, to repeat its tale in ever-deepening sadness and mock her dying hopes. Then she went to the fields to work, wandering from farm to farm and clachan to clachan, till a kind Providence led her to the service of the young Apothecary of Gollan. She loved him

for his tender kindness to her ; and his hair was red, too, like that of the baby boy she had lost.

She sat in silence after his last answer—silence of words, but every nerve was crying out, and her soul and face and hands were speaking. Then she moved, and muttered something inaudible to him.

“ Ye needna speir (ask) ony mair questions, Lexy,” he said, remembering she had told him that her husband and bairn had died and were buried, and unwilling to lead the faithful creature to indulge fanciful hopes, for he saw where her thoughts were drifting. Handing her the empty bicker, he ordered her back to bed again.

As she withdrew, the Apothecary entertained himself with her “ daft notion ” ; but Lexy carried away in her innermost soul a conviction that she had approached the portals of her life’s mystery. If she only knew the name of the vessel her husband had picked up for his last voyage ; or if her bairn had not been so long absent that every singularity of the child-face must have been outgrown ; or—there was an “ if ” and an “ or ” in every

link of Lexy's argument ; but it was nevertheless complete, to her own judgment. Sir Eric was her boy ! Reckless of improbabilities, she had already concluded to live and die in that belief. Were not Sir Eric's hair and eyes of the same colour as her baby's ? Then, why argue more ? Even if it were a delusion—which it could not be—she thought it would be sweet and comforting. When the heart is pure and the imagination clean, delusion is the bright angel of ignorant lives.

Although Lexy had anchored in her decision, she was still subject to much tossing. Would Sir Eric remember the name of the vessel in which he sailed ? She could not remember the name of her husband's vessel, and thereon could not verify Sir Eric's recollection, even if it were correct. And yet—and yet—it would be a satisfaction to ask him ; not to confirm her belief—no, she did not need that—but only—— She felt her way in the dark to the doorway of his apartment again, and called timidly, “ Sir Eric, hae ye mind o' the ship's name ye sailed in ? ”

The Apothecary laughed. “ Na, na, Lexy ! I'm' no sure o' my ain name ; onyway, I

kenna whether my mither or the mariners gied it to me. I ken the mariners re-christened me something or ither, an' syne then I hae jist been 'Eric.' But whether I was that name afore then or no, the Angel Gabriel maun tell ye—for I canna. Gang awa' to yer ba-ba."

Strange, she had not thought of his Christian name. If he bore his right one, her hopes were still-born, for her boy had never been called "Eric"; but, Sir Eric himself was uncertain as to his real name, and might not her husband have changed the boy's name after he left her? In any case, there remained as much probability on one side as the other; and, then, he was a Melville, anyhow—so was her husband.

Sir Eric must be her long-lost laddie! To that belief she would cling, and in the consolation of it she trailed her tired limbs to her couch.

New delights thronged her brain and hustled sleep from her thoughts. As she lay awake, she beheld the sullen past strip off its weeds of mourning and show itself in summer colourings. The future, too, had lost its frowning face, and looked at her with welcoming eyes.

She locked her secret in her heart, and was happy ; and she did not care to ask whether the days to come would spill her hopes or confirm them.

Lexy might rest, but she could not sleep. An unexpected legacy of joy had enriched her. To others it might seem a precarious joy, but to her it was none the less real.

Would Sir Eric talk of the subject again ? She almost hoped he would not, although she wished he might. If he did, she would greedily listen for reassurances only ; but if not, her secret was safe, and she would live on it.

As soon as he heard her stirring at daybreak, he teasingly called her, " Hi, mither ! " Her heart leapt. " Mither ! " She never remembered hearing that home-word from mortal lips before. Could he mean it—or was he bantering her ? Choking with agitation, she gave attention to his demand. As she entered the room, she heard him gurgling in merriment, and when she appeared, he said, " Come an' kiss yer bairn ! " But she saw by his manner that it was only a new joke for him, and that he would fool her with it till the next incident called him off.

She made no reply, but quietly returned to her own apartment. For a moment or two she was saddened, but the sensation passed almost as quickly as it had come. Sir Eric had not rebuked her, anyhow ; and that was an encouragement to nurse her belief. As she stood gazing into the fireplace a kind of voluntary resolution stole over her. She would probe no deeper, lest discovery should play the thief on her joy and leave her heart lonely again ; and if Sir Eric joked with her—well, better sunshine than sleet. Her heart gave ready assent to this finding, and the duties of the morning were attended to in the halo of its satisfaction.

XIX

“ A PACKET FOR YE,” HE SAID ABRUPTLY

WITHIN a fortnight, Joy rapped at the Apothecary’s door again, in the person of “ Wintry Willie.” While Sir Eric’s schemes at home were labouring to maturity, those farther afield were also ripening.

Hearing the cadger’s voice clavering with Lexy, he hailed him to his apartment ; and as Wintry’s face revealed itself in the doorway, he asked the rambler what wind had blown him to Gollan so soon again.

“ I hae a message, Sir Eric.”

The Apothecary’s interest quickened. “ Ay, man ! Is’t for me ? ”

“ Na ; for Rosey.”

“ Frae Robin ? ”

“ Ay.”

The Apothecary gave in to a hearty laugh.

“Whaur the heid gangs, the tail maun follow, Willie!”—indulging in one of his proverbial enigmas. “Whaur saw ye Robin?”

“In Edinbro’, Sir Eric. An’ he’s the same loon yet. Lord, the Edinbro’ spunkies strut in their turkey brows on the street, lek—Ach! But Robin’s the same auld saxpence.”

“I lek him a’ the better for that, Willie,” responded the Apothecary, hoisting himself up in his bed (the preface to a speech). “Man, Willie, d’ye ken, I canna thole (endure) thae laird-loons that gang sooth for a day or twa, an’ then come back to their auld hame yatterin’ boiled English, an’ wi’ a’ the cantrips o’ a continent aboot them. Their gumption is as big as this”—indicating with his finger on the wall, a space which a farthing might cover—“an’ their daftness wad hide *that*”—a circling sweep of his outstretched arm showed how amply he endowed them with foolishness. Having made some imaginary sketch with his finger, he ceased from the laird-loons, to ask if the message Willie bore was by word of mouth or packet.

“Packet, Sir Eric,” replied Willie, pulling the missive from his bosom.

The Apothecary turned it over in his fingers. It was fastened with wafers and double-sealed with wax. “ An offer o’ mairriage, I’ll warrant ye, Willie—eh ? ” He handed it back.

“ I wadna say,” rejoined the cadger. “ He paid me weel for it.”

“ He did, Willie ? That ends it ! ”

While he spoke, he was searching among his books on the window-sill. Finding a sheet of paper and quill, he unslung his inkhorn from a nail and prepared to write. Laying the sheet of paper on his beloved “ Marcus Aurelius,” he penned the following :

In nomine Patris up and down X
Spiritus Sanctus here and there X
L.I.D. 4224 in three or 66062197
Zedoary with mucinaginous plaister
Tetragnammatendie X.—

To be sifted in a tar-barrel and worn in the neck-cloth.¹

“ Here, Willie,” he said, handing him the sheet, “ tak’ that to The Tod as ye gang back, and say naethin’. Fules (fools) an’ fleas

¹ Witches’ “ charms ” were made out much in this style for the ignorant ; but the Apothecary adds to the absurdity.

should get their heids chappit," he added mysteriously.

Willie took the packet and the hint, placing the former in his pocket and grinning knowingly at the other. He was one with the Apothecary in any enterprise, and a wink was all he needed.

Their present business concluded, the cadger returned to Lexy's end to test the quality of her scones and ale. While he was glorifying himself with these, the Apothecary cried, "Hi, Willie! Tell Macroarie that I hae need o' him. D'ye hear?"

"Ay, ay, Sir Eric; I'll dae that same."

The messenger fulfilled his double errand at Macroarie's house. He was, however, hungrier there than at the Apothecary's! It was needful to wind from Rosey the secret of her packet, and time was essential for the manœuvre.

"A packet for ye, Rosey," he announced cheerily, handing it to her.

She feigned surprise. "For *me*, Willie! Whaur got ye it?"

"In Edinbro', frae Robin"—with artful directness.

The blood scampered to her cheek. (“ Ay, I thocht as muckle,” said Willie to himself.) “ Maybe ye canna read, Rosey,” he observed ; and gallantly offered to extract her out of the difficulty.

She laughed. “ I’m no’ gleg (smart) at it, Wintry ; but I can birze (squeeze) the meanin’ oot o’t mysel’. I’m frichted for ye men-fowk, ye ken,” she added archly.

Rosey slipped to the byre-end to read her epistle.

“ The jaude ! ” snapped the cadger to himself. “ Whatfor is she trudgin’ ben there wi’ her packet ? ” His eye followed her—then rested on that part of the wall which could be seen from his seat, for here her shadow stayed. She had stepped just outside the “ kitchen ” into the byre-end of the house and stood, side-on in the main door, so as to get light ; and Willie saw with rapture that her shadow was thus outlined on the back wall. He observed that she read the letter quite calmly, only placing her hand on her bosom, where it remained. The cadger set greedy eyes on the shadow-outline for signs to justify a definite opinion. He was baffled. She stood

unmoving, reading right on to the end without the slightest gesticulation. Had it been a special love-packet, he reasoned, she would have exhibited some agitation; but she betrayed none. On that point, therefore, he was puzzled; but he was clear on another—to have the secret out before he left the house.

When Rosey re-entered, the cadger was innocently sitting with his back to the door and his eyes among the red peat of the fire. He turned as if he had sat so on his stone seat all the time.

“H’mph, hae ye traivelled ower it already? Ye maun be weel acquaint—ay, weel acquaint—wi’ the han’-write.”

“I may hae seen it afore, Willie,” she admitted.

“It didna come by me, then—na, no’ by me.”

“Ay did it, Willie.”

The cadger was surprised. “I hae nae mind o’ that.”

“Oh, ye didna ken o’t, man!”

He pulled his chin and said, “Ay! I wunner hoo ye contrived that.”

“I canna tell tales, Willie. But, ye maun

be forjesket (jaded) wi' yer journey ; lat me gie ye some scones an' whey.”

The cadger was shunted, but he did not show that he was conscious of it. He took the wooden bowl from her hand with a blithe air and a merry word of thanks. His manner meant that the subject was abandoned ; but, in reality, he had only stepped aside to gather breath and try to find the trail. He had carried parcels to the clachan for years, and always contrived to arrive at their contents by thumb or tongue ; but he could not remember having carried a “ packet ” to Rosey on any other occasion. It may, however, have been enclosed in a parcel of other things. How provoked he was to think of having missed it !

The possibility fired his zeal. “ I'll no' hae stamach-room for a' this whey an' scones, Rosey,” he exclaimed jokingly.

She pressed him to do her baking credit. “ Tak' it a', Willie, for ye'll hae a lang traill (wander) afore ye. Whaur gang ye next ? ” It was a natural but an incautious question.

Willie sprang at the opening. “ To the Baron's,” he replied, with his eye full on her.

The answer startled her like a fairy dart. Willie noticed the effect. He saw, too, that she was eager to ask him what his errand there might be, but that she hesitated to commit herself. He tore ragged gulfs in his scone, and drank his whey; and waited. The silence undid her.

“Whatfor can ye be gangin’ to The Cairn?” she inquired at length, in a tone of half-reverie.

The cadger laughed. “I’ll tell ye, gin ye tell me the news o’ yer packet—ay, the news o’ yer packet, Rosey.”

“I canna dae that, tho’, Willie. Na, Willie, no’ the noo.”

“No’ the noo?” he repeated with a ring of interrogation, and glancing sharply at her with meaning in his eyes. She understood him; and, to his joy, he saw that he had found the scent. Slowly finishing his meal, he determined to make certain of it, for this was news of more import to Gollan than all the exploits of almighty Cæsar. Handing her the empty bowl with a tide of wordy thanks, he rose to his feet, dragging his sleeve across his mouth lazily. Almost ere the action was

finished, he wheeled suddenly, planted his hands on her shoulders, and looked bolt into her face.

“ *Are ye to hae him, Rosey?* ” he asked, with a knowing smile.

The gusto of familiarity caught her in surprise, and, involuntarily forgetting her former reserve, she answered simply, “ Gin I could, Willie ! ”

The cadger giggled at the success of his stratagem ; but, quickly recovering himself, to her he said earnestly, “ Dinna fash yersel’, Rosey ! Sir Eric is to quell the Baron ; an’ I’ll be at The Cairn in a day or twa—in a day or twa ; an’ by my faigs but I’ll deave (deafen) him wi’ reesin’ (praising) ye. I will that, Rosey, as sure as I hae a back-bane !—Weel, I’ll awa’ noo. There’s less mist in my een than whan I cam’ in, Rosey,” he laughed. “ Weel, weel, mind the auld cadger on yer waddin’ day—ay, on yer waddin’ day, Rosey.”

Left in her own company, Rosey read and re-read her packet again. It was the third she had received from Robin, but the others had been conveyed stealthily. In his last,

he declared his determination to return to The Cairn—or at any rate, to Gollan—and make her his wife. The enchantments of Edinburgh were withered flowers, and festering, apart from her; and all its gay ladies were ghosts. When he thought of home, it was to spell her name; and as his imagination saw its heather burning—a fluff of smoke idling up and broadening away on the streaming wind—it was Rosey combing out her pretty tresses. What woman's heart would not tarry long over such tidings, unmindful of time?

Her reverie was squashed by the incoming of her father from the fields at dayset. She informed him of the Apothecary's request. He asked heavily what Sir Eric wanted now; but she was unable to gratify his curiosity. He must needs go over, therefore, if only to find out.

After nightfall, he gave the Apothecary his presence. The salutation that greeted him was, "Come awa', Macroarie. Plant yer auld carcass on that creepie stool by the fire."

The visitor had barely settled to his seat

till his host announced, blunt as the stroke of a club, “ Macroarie, my jo, ye maun be tentie (careful) ! ”

Macroarie was staggered, expecting compliment rather than rebuke. “ What hae I dune wrang, noo ? ”

“ Ye hae been daein’ richt, an’ nae wrang, my brither pilgrim ; but ye maun be daein’ a hantle better. Dae ye no’ ken that yer dochter is to be mistress o’ The Cairn sune—eh ? ”

His listener felt like one jilted. Was that what Sir Eric wanted to talk to him about ? He was fain to rise and leave him ; but he replied, “ Ay, maybe ; but it maun be whan I’m in the mools (grave), Sir Eric ! ” It was a frank declaration of unbelief.

The Apothecary accepted the answer in the light of its serviceableness. “ Weel, deil cares—noo or then. An’ maybe the suner ye’re in the mools the better, for ye micht be o’ mair guid as manure than fechtin’ wi’ preachers on the Lord’s Day—eh ? ” The speaker helped his joke with a laugh ; and then the mood changed again. “ But—hear me, auld neebour—ye maun be sober, an’ gie ower

yer daft cantrips for the sake o' yer lassie. Are ye hearin' ? ”

“ I dinna ken,” grunted his listener stubbornly.

The Apothecary leaned over his couch and whispered, “ *Robin wad lek to hae Rosey, man !* ” Macroarie drew himself back with a jerk. “ Haud awa' wi' yer haivers ! ”

“ Speir (ask) at hersel',” urged the warm advocate. “ Speir at hersel'. I hae seen this verra day a packet he sent her ; an' what wad he convoy packets to her for—eh ? Man, Macroarie, ye're as dull in the up-tak' as a doittered (stupid) goat. Her faither should hae kent it, lang syne.”

This speech riled Macroarie into a confession. “ I kent it, Sir Eric ; I kent it,” he broke out wrathfully, “ but what care I ? No' a curse ! An', forby, I dinna lek gentrice (gentry). ”

Sir Eric was too intent on his mission to be diverted.

“ Noo, hear me. Ye maun gang to the kirk, to begin wi'——”

“ I hae attended.”

“ Oh ! Whan ? ”

“ A Sawbath syne.”

The Apothecary relaxed at the news. “Sure’s death, Macroarie, I didna ken ye was sich a sanct (saint)! Gie me yer loof (open hand) on that!” He grasped his visitor’s hand and wrung it. “We maun hae a stoup o’ ale ower that guid news.—(Hi, Lexy! Bring a waft o’ ale.)—Macroarie, we’ll mak’ an angel o’ ye yet, an’ set ye up wi’ a white goon langer than a sark!”

While his housekeeper attended to his commands, he drew home his bands about his victim. Well he knew the tough nature of the animal he had in hand, and he skilfully softened him by familiar jollity and bandying threats. The preparatory work accomplished he must now apply the burnisher.

He sat up to quaff the ale, and Macroarie retained his stool by the fireside. “Here’s tae ye, auld cronie!”—and he drank to the health of his turbulent neighbour. Smacking his lips, he offered some couthie advice, in a confiding voice. “It isna ilka day that a lass lek Rosey is born,” he began. “An’ I’m gey prood o’ Robin that he hes waled (selected) the sonsiest quean in a’ the north-country. He micht hae ta’en up wi’ some waspish

hizzie in the sooth wha couldna mak' brose for a deid hen or tell a bannock frae a girdle. Na, na, Macroarie, gie Robin his richts—he kens a fair bargain in womanhood, believe me; an', what's mair, he kens his ain mind aboot Rosey. Noo, ye mauna be thrawn, auld neebour. Whan I had The Tod on the table, he gied his aith (oath) that *he* wadna mistryst the young fowk; an' ye maun dae the same."

At mention of the disjointed leg, Macroarie smiled, and the Apothecary saw with delight that his patient was progressing to his mind. The ale was seconding his words and keeping Macroarie to a more jovial spirit. He must improve the opportunity. Leaning forward, he laid his hand confidingly on his listener's shoulder. "Ye maun lat the young fowk alane, Macroarie," he said in a pleading way.

"Oh, I wadna be contradictious, Sir Eric; they can dae as they list——"

"Bravo, brither pilgrim!"

"—but I carena for the gentrice, as I hae tauld ye," he repeated, his brow darkening, "an' I winna loup (leap) at The Tod's heels tho' my dochter wadna get a man 'tween this

an’ twal’ o’clock in Eternity! Ach, I’ll awa’.”

As Macroarie uttered the last exclamation, he shot up from his seat and strode out of the house before his astonished inquisitor could summon wind to recall him.

Gazing in amazement through the doorway by which his neighbour had vanished, the Apothecary asked himself, “I wunner what ploy hes banged into the auld spunkie’s noddle?” Then, slapping his leg soundly, he muttered, “Dang me, if I dinna cleik (hook) the wily salmon yet!”

XX

“DINNA DARKEN THE YOUNG FOWK, BARON”

THE Baron was derailed by the packet Wintry Willie delivered to him from the Apothecary. It was worse than Hebrew to him. For two days he glowered at it vacantly, wheeling it round from left to right in the hope that a hint of its meaning might thus leap out on him by chance. It was scribbled in such a fashion that some of the words seemed a masquerade of outcast Chinese. Such words as were readable only added to his mystification by their meaningless connections.

In the end, he flung the epistle aside and tried to forget it. As the days passed, however, his curiosity remained unallayed. Again, and yet again, he returned to the quest. He had convinced himself that he could not

read the strange missive, but he was still hopeful of piercing the Apothecary's intent in sending it to him. But two weeks of ill-natured cogitation left the problem unsplit, and (as the Apothecary had foreseen) his temper and curiosity both gained strength as the mystery continued to elude him.

He must send to the Apothecary for an explanation. Or would he go himself? He might go: yes, he would. He had recovered from the effects of his disjointure almost immediately after it was reset, and suffered no serious hindrance. Besides, he had not been in the vicinity of Gollan for some time. Would it not be wise of him to take a survey of his affairs in that quarter, without ceremony or published intention? And, on his round, he could drop in on the Apothecary, as if he were just passing, and ask him for an explanation of his mysterious message.

Settled.

A day or two after committing himself to this decision, the Baron mounted his mare and laid her steps for Gollan. He was upholstered in blue overcoat, knee-breeches, three-cornered beaver, and shoon. His ponderous

figure sat ill in such decent array. He was easiest in slouching apparel, troking about The Cairn, his hands loosely in his pockets. Even as he rode, his hands often stole into their holes; and he passed many miles in this slack manner, with his arm through the loop of the rein.

This was a remarkable journey for the Baron. He was never the man to pay heed to other folks' business, unless it had a profitable relation to his own; and even then it had to bite deeply before he stirred. In general he was hugely content, and spurned to disturb himself about what did not inconvenience him.

Yet this very indifference to trifling affairs caused the Baron sometimes to amuse himself with them. Most men make toys of what only tickles them. With him, the mood was everything; and if a freakish mood assailed him—which was seldom—he followed his prank to the finish. It may have been such a mood that coaxed him to hunt the mystery of the Apothecary's missive, or, it may have been a suspicion that something serious was intended by it. A secret message is always

authoritative because it indicates knowingness on both sides, and is significant of some sacred import. In any case—whatever the missive portended, and whatever the Baron’s motives were—he respected the Apothecary, as every one in the parish did, and, even for *him*, it would seem cool not to show interest in Sir Eric’s message.

It was midday when his mare brought him to the confines of the clachan. He had been travelling over his own estate since he mounted at the louping-stone beside the door of The Cairn, but the pride of proprietorship was not a conscious sensation in his breast until his eyes got possession of Gollan. He looked over all the cultivated fields (redeemed from the encircling heath), and his gaze rested leisurely on the scattered cots, the kirk, and the manse. He thought of the minister in his manse, of Roger in his “skule,” and of the Apothecary in his bed; he thought of all the tenants, crofters and labourers, and pictured them all at their various employments; and as these congregated before his imagination, they created an impression of headship on the Baron’s turgid mind. He

had never contemplated the people with any sense of active kindness—they ate, worked and slept like himself, and what more did they want?—but he somehow felt nearer to them in spirit now than he remembered having ever before experienced. When, therefore, he drew up at the Apothecary's door he was in a drift of sentiment gentle for him, although, perhaps, ordinary enough for the general type of laird.

Lexy caught the rein from his hand as he threw it to her, and led off his mare to the stable.

The Baron walked in unannounced, as was the habit with the guests who knew themselves welcome, or whose position gave them a right to the freedom—a familiarity, indeed, which was assumed by almost every one at that time.

Sir Eric was fathoms deep in his beloved *Meditations*. He had, of course, been acquainted by Lexy of the laird's approach; but he had not yet decided how to open negotiations, and he took to Marcus Aurelius as an apology for any awkwardness in his manner which engrossment might extenuate.

The move suggested his first position. He would ask the Baron about Marcus.

“Come awa’ ben, Baron,” he said genially, as his visitor strode into the room. “An’ hoo’s a’ wi’ ye? Spanky (sprightly)? I’m prood o’t!”—shaking him by the hand. He must drive his stake at once: “Ken ye onything o’ Marcus Aurelius, the noble chiel—eh?”

The Baron glared at him. “Marcus wha?”

“Marcus Aurelius, Baron; a richt braw chiel.—Sit doon, man, an’ rest yer auld carcass.”

The Baron deposited his trunk on a seat. “Na, Sir Eric, I ne’er heard o’ him. Lived he hereawa’?”

The Apothecary’s heart thumped with delight, for the Baron’s wandered answer struck him suggestively and showed a track-way. “That’s jist what I’m wearyin’ to ken, man, an’ I thocht ye wad hae knowledge o’ him, Baron, gin onybody hed.”

The laird seemed pleased that he was regarded as an authority, and he solemnly inquired again as to the stranger’s name. “What ca’ ye him?”

“ Aurelius—Markie Aurelius.”

“ Na, I ne'er heard o' sich a name in Gollan, Sir Eric. Feint a bit o' him, or onybody linked wi' him, dwelt hereawa'. Markie Bruce, we had, an' Markie Georgeson, but nae Markie what-ye-ca'-him.”

“ Man, Baron, that's a fair grief,” sorrowed his host pathetically. “ He was a clever, weel-leared (learned) chiel, an' I wad lek unco weel to hear ocht (anything) o' him.”

“ Kent ye his fowk ? ” queried the laird, anxious to suggest solutions, but piling an unexpected barricade in Sir Eric's way.

The Apothecary hesitated, tugging at his beard in meditation. “ Weel, I didna ken them mysel', Baron, but I hae heard aboot them.”

“ Ay ! Whaur lived his faither ? ”

“ I dinna ken that he hed ony ; some man wi' nae bairns o' his ain took him in han', I'm thinking.”

Sir Eric began to surmise that his visitor was now in fair humour, and he wondered how he would announce his aim without ruffling his superior. He felt that he had ridden Marcus as far as he required him, and

determined to dismount at the first opportunity. It unexpectedly came from the Baron. He dug into his pocket and produced Sir Eric's communication, thinking now that probably it had relation to this Markie of whom he had been questioned. Gazing intently at it for a few seconds, he muttered, “I dinna catch his name here, Sir Eric.”

“Na, ye canna spy it thereawa’, Baron.”

“Ay? Weel, rax me the meanin’ o’ this reel-rall packet, onygate. I haena the up-tak’ for it.”

“Na, Baron, ye haena; nor ony ither birkie,” answered the Apothecary coolly.

“An’ whatfor did ye send it to me?”

“Weel, to lat ye hae the truth an’ shame Auld Nick, I was keen to hae ye ower for a confab about the kirk; an’ I kent ye wadna come gin ye jaloused the ploy.”

“The kirk! Bleezes!” The Baron was staggered.

“Ay, we maun set things tae richt. Maister North an’ Roger are ower-by in the ale-hoose: lat’s gang to them for a wee.”

The Baron sat stolidly looking at his feet for a spell; then clumsily rose and accom-

panied his guide. "A useless job, this," he snarled, entering the inn.

"We couldna gang on withoot ye, laird, as the hangman said to the sheep-stealer," argued the Apothecary.

The Baron looked square at him and held up his open palm in warning. "Noo, Sir Eric !"

The hint was taken. "Hoot, awa', man—a festerin' maun brak oot, ye ken," apologized the wag. "But drink a stoup o' ale wi' an' auld cronie."

As the preacher sat down with the laird, Sir Eric and Roger, he ventured the pleasantry that they were holding the first meeting of heritors since his advent.

"Ay, an' the last, sae far as I'm concerned," replied the laird. "Ye can dae as ye hae a mind wi' the kirk, my man, if ye dinna fash me wi' the expense o't."

"That's gey generous o' ye," remarked the Apothecary, with his face in an ale-stoup, "an' we can a' cry, Amen !"

Mr. North was itching to be at business. Although he did not lack faith in Sir Eric's power of stratagem, he dreaded lest their

visitor should take umbrage at any turn in the proceedings and impatiently withdraw himself. He determined, therefore, to avoid that possibility by bringing on the business at once. It was almost abruptly that he said, “The licht-holes of the kirk are much in need of attention, and the roof must be thecked. What say you to these, brethren?”

The Baron answered in a manner characteristic of him. He dismissed the business in one sentence: “Oh, hae it done,” he rattled, taking the pint stoup from the Apothecary’s hand.

“Make a note of the laird’s orders, Roger, as session-clerk,” said the preacher.

“Tak’ it doon as grave-digger, Roger,” suggested the Apothecary, “an’ if the Baron disna pay, clap him in the kirkyaird.—Eh, Baron!”

“No’ jist yet, Sir Eric; tho’ ye an’ Roger may contrive it suner than I want.” This was a ponderous stroke of wit for the Baron.

The Apothecary bubbled over at the joke. “I’ll e’en keep ye here as lang as I can, to spite the Deil!”

“Nae mair!” warned the Baron sulkily.

“Is that a’ the bisness? It wisna worth a bodle (copper coin) to——”

The preacher broke in with a theme which he had secretly nursed. “Would it not be advisable for you, Baron, to urge the parishioners to attend the kirk? I think that——”

“Na, na,” remonstrated the laird. “Ye hae been set here for that job; an’ if ye canna cow the brats, ye maun e’en niffer (exchange) wi’ some abler man. Forby, I wadna observe my ain law.”

The Apothecary laid his hand on Mr. North’s arm. “Ye maun ca’ canny, my man. Twa guid things seldom come thegither; what’s guid for the plant is bad for the peat, ye ken. Sae, be content wi’ ae guid step at a time. Dinna ca’ sae fast! Ye maun reckon wi’ human nature, for God made that afore He made kirks.”

“Doubtless, doubtless, Sir Eric,” assented the preacher, “but we must try to guide nature by God’s grace, and raise it.”

“Wad ye feed a bairn on turnips an’ banes?”

Mr. North said, “No.”

“Weel, then, dinna come wi’ yer whig-

maleeries afore the fowk can stomach them ; wait a wee.”

The preacher agreed, yet was not silenced. “It is true what you say, Sir Eric, but we must look for some growth.”

“Growth !” snapped his warm antagonist. “Man, a’ growth isna skyward. Some things grow doon, lek a coo’s tail.”

“I say wi’ ye, Sir Eric,” added the laird, rising impatiently.

As The Tod rose to his feet, Mr. North arrested him with a touch of his hand. “There is another matter of concern I wished to mention to you. Your son has asked me to marry him to Mr. Macroarie’s daughter, and I understand that you do not approve of the step.” He hung out his best English in addressing the laird.

“Yer guess is richt—I dinna approve o’t.”

“Na, ye come o’ guid blood, Baron !” the Apothecary interjected, addressing him in mock admiration. “Ay, ye come o’ guid blood—an’ sae does a black puddin’ !”

He thought the laird was still obstinate, and he purposed riling him into a sweeter mood ; but he was wrong.

The Baron was simply indifferent. "Ye can wed him twenty times ower, gin ye list," he said, taking no notice of the Apothecary's sarcasm. It was on his tongue to add, "He'll be nae son o' mine by that time," but he did not commit himself. He was, however, calculating on the successful ripening of secret plans, which he had just laid, and hence his last utterance was delivered with a careless unconcern which impressed his audience as generosity.

Sir Eric sprang to his feet, excited with delight. "Weel done, laird! I'm prood that ye hae gi'en the young pair a slack rein!"

"Ay, 'A bonnie pair,' as the corbie said o' his legs," muttered the Baron, striding away to escape from the unwelcome environment. "Awa' for my mare, dominie."

Mr. North expressed his satisfaction that, at least, no impediment was to be placed in the way of the wedding.

"Dinna fash *me* wi' it—that's a'," snarled the laird.

"Is it not to be solemnized at The Cairn, then?"

"The Cairn! No' gin I'm aboon the grun'."

Mr. North met the objection; he was, indeed, glad of it, for it revealed an unexpected advantage. “Well, then, I would suggest that it be solemnized in the kirk. It was aforetime a genteel practice, although fallen into decay of late sad years; and I think we might well revive a habit so commendable.”

“I dinna care a hair; wed him whaur ye hae a mind,” bellowed The Tod.

“Weel done, laird! I kent ye wad be a brave sodger in the hinder-end!” This, from the Apothecary.

But the Baron departed, and rode off without reply or farewell. He fell into deep cogitation.

The Apothecary convoyed him some distance, and ultimately overcame his taciturnity. When he had sufficiently lured his victim into fair humour again, he set artfully to work. “I say, Baron, are ye to lat Robin hae Macroarie’s bonnie dochter?”

“Macroarie’s dochter?” he repeated, shaking off his mood with a jerk. “Deil tak’ her, Sir Eric!”

“Na, faigs! She’s ower buirdly (hand-

some) for the auld scamp. I'll tak' her mysel', suner."

The Baron smiled at his comrade's warmth. "Weel, I dinna care a dockan, Sir Eric. Robin can wed wha he leks for me." He spoke on the subject with more alacrity than the Apothecary had dared to expect. "To lat ye hae it bluntly, yon numbskull bastard o' mine isna to be ony uplift to me. He's a silly kennawhat (nondescript), Sir Eric, wi' nae mair in his bunnet than a goat."

"Jist that! Ye're his faither, ye ken!" —with a chuckle in his throat.

"She may be guid eneuch for him—wha kens," he concluded, not observing the pleasantry.

"Ay, Baron, ye speak lek a parent noo. Weel dune!"

But the Baron interposed. "Na, na, dinna loup to conclusions, my hempie. Gie in? Na, na! But the fule is scant o' gumption, an' I'm fain to lat him hae her lest he dae waur. Lat him hae his ain will an' then he winna dee in the pet!"

"Hear me, Baron, the lassie only needs a silk goon to mak' her an empress, man!"

What maitters it though siller be tied up in a rag—it’s aye siller, man! An’ forby, Baron, dinna forget the auld sayin’, ‘Better to wed ower the midden than ower the muir.’”¹

“Faith, that’s weel said, Sir Eric, but I’m no’ to gie in.”

“Gin ye dinna, I’ll set the gopeller on ye!” poked the Apothecary. “He’ll thraw yer haunch for ye again, Baron!”

“I maun gie him a hearin’ some day sune,” muttered his listener dourly, glad of the loop-hole.

His companion laughed. “Macroarie is to gang, too.”

“Wha telled ye that?”

“Heardna ye hoo the preacher a’maist snappit his neck-bane at the kirk door?”

No, the Baron had heard nothing of that Sabbath Day’s exploit. He was too far away, and too little interested in what was taking place at the kirk; but he was all ears now. The preacher must be a hero if he overthrew Macroarie and himself! He was glad to hear

¹ “Better to marry among those you know than among strangers.”

that the clachan terror had been mastered, for if Macroarie was to be Robin's father-in-law, the tamer the minister made him, the better. (Macroarie, it may be explained, had succumbed to attending the church service once—"I jist keeked in an' cam' awa'," he explained.)

The Baron's personal attitude was hardly one of respect or admiration, however; it was merely a natural curiosity to hear the man preach who had muscle and art enough to cast the two strongest men in the countryside, and he wished the Apothecary to understand it on that footing alone.

Mr. North's deeds with the caber and hammer, and his worsting of Macroarie by the kirk door on that brave Sabbath, were radiantly reported by his henchman; and the telling was embroidered by all the droll and enhancing frivolities of which his humorous nature was master. The Baron listened, agape, as if he were a child entranced in the *Arabian Nights*. He was so charmed that, when the narrator finished his shining recitation, he sat dumbly gazing at his garron's ears for several minutes.

Without breaking the silence, he then motioned to take his leave. He seemed anxious to go, yet was somehow unwilling to start. He appeared absorbed in his own thoughts. His host waited for him to speak, but when he did so, it was only to announce that he must now take his departure. He slapped his mare on the neck and rode off. He was at no time very social; this taciturn mood, however, surprised the Apothecary and set him wondering if his manœuvre had miscarried. He stood in rapt surprise, gazing after the horseman. As he looked, the mare slackened her pace, stood, and wheeled round. In a few moments the Baron returned to his now-doubly-astonished comrade.

“It may be as weel to tell ye, Sir Eric, that Robin’s at hame,” he intimated abruptly.

The Apothecary was surprised at the news, and saw in it the explanation of the laird’s behaviour. “Dae ye tell me that!” he exclaimed uncommittingly.

“Ay, an’ the braggart says he’ll wed the wench in spite o’ me.”

This announcement captured the Apothecary’s reserve. “Lek faither, lek son, Baron

—eh! As the auld cock craws, the young cock learns, ye ken.”

“An’ what think ye,” continued the laird, unheeding the listener’s raillery, “he has ca’d on her, forby.”

“Ay wad he! An’ I wad dae the same mysel’, Baron. Love an’ licht winna hide.”

The Baron meditated. “Gin Macroarie was only in the mools!” he muttered, indicating his chief stumbling-block.

It seemed to the enthusiast that he now saw the gate he thought he had missed; he drove firmly through it. Laying his hand on the bridle, he spoke earnestly to the dour father. “Hear me, Baron. A’ that’ll be left ahint o’ ye or me in a handfu’ o’ years can be blawn aff a horn-spoon by a bairn. We canna aye be here; in a wee while we maun gang awa’ lek ither fowk an’ be planted in the Almichty’s field for His lang hairst (harvest). An’ whan we’re baith dust, Baron, the young fowk we leave ahint us will lauch in oor hooses an’ dauner by oor footpads an’ hillocks. My auld neebour, we mauna jink them o’ happiness by onything we may sae or dae, for o’ a’ the pangs that rive the heart,

there's nane lek an ill memory o' the deid. Dinna darken the young fowk, Baron ; leave them alane wi' their Maker. An' dinna write ocht (anything) wi' yer quill that can vex them whan ye're awa' ; for mony a gowkish man plays thae mean tricks—whan he's deid. Nae doot, Macroarie is but a harum-skarum brute, but his lassie will dae ye honour yet, Baron. 'Mony a black bird lays a white egg.' Guid day to ye, laird !”

XXI

IF ONLY SHE WERE NOT MACROARIE'S DAUGHTER !

THESSE thoughts were scrambling in the laird's dull brain as he jogged homeward. He made a semicircular detour to the right, in order to inspect those fields and houses which his advent by the banks of the burn had compelled him to omit. The fresh route drew him toward Macroarie's house. As he looked on it from a distance, a new thought stormed his brain. Why not turn out Macroarie, and send the imp adrift? He was there as occupant at the laird's pleasure, and only a word was needed to rid the estate of the disturber. How strange that he had not thought of that ere now!

The laird's lethargic nature stirred at the suggestion. Why should he not put it into

force right off? Nothing seemed more desirable, and nothing more easy. Setting his mare's head slightly to the right, he wore round to the hero's house.

Macroarie eyed his visitor approaching, and hid himself. A call from The Tod meant business, and generally unpleasant business—he was sheriff as well as laird. Rosey's father, therefore, skulked out, crept to the back of his house, and, getting it between him and the laird (to hide his figure), he took heels for the heather and lay down in a peat-bank.

Rosey also observed the laird, and instinctively concluded that his business was to ruffle her joy. Would she brave him? Her natural shyness counselled concealment; her love pled for bravery. He was at the door before the debate was ended; but she had felt ashamed of the suggestion to hide, and so stood still without being conscious of having decided on that policy. The thump of his whip-end on the door (struck from horseback) startled her.

“Are ye within, Macroarie?” he inquired hotly.

Rosey answered the summons in person, trembling and blushing.

The Baron clamped his jaws and drew down his eyebrows when she suddenly appeared in the doorway. "Is yer faither within, lassie?"

"Na, laird."

It was on the Baron's lip to say, "Weel, tell him he can shift his banes as sune as he likes," but his eye was in thrall to the figure in the doorway, and for the present he restrained himself. He had, of course, seen Rosey more than once in bygone days, but he had given no heed to her. She was only one of the many bairns on his estate, and no fairy had whispered aught to him about her. Not till now had he eyed her closely, and she was, indeed, of more consequence to-day to him than any lady in the land.

She stood in the frame of the doorway like an Eve freshly painted. Her feet were bare as usual, and also her head. Her short petticoat fell just below her knees. A slip of "bandeau" fettered her plentitude of hair. The neck of her coarse, homespun bodice was open, and disclosed a skin con-

scious of the tint of health. She was not the conventional beauty usually described; but the full blue eyes, laden with womanly modesty, and her teeth that showed like a selection of pearls, were perfect.

The Baron was no dilettante connoisseur or artist with school fads. Naked feet and arms, and rustic garb, and robust limbs, were no drawbacks in a prospective daughter-in-law; and a stout hand that could graip manure or swing a scythe, was an acquisition of high market value. These, Rosey presented to his eye, with a recommendation of maidenly coyness. Here were healthy cheeks, too, and honest eyes, and a bearing in accordance with both. The Baron's slumbering intelligence became slowly sensitive to all those appealing advantages.

If only . . . if only she were not Macroarie's daughter!

Rosey was aware that the laird was examining her, and she shyly waited his pleasure. If his cogitations worked to a finding, he gave her no indication of it. He was never prone to blab his mind to others, and perhaps there were weighty reasons why he should

keep his tongue in his teeth on the present occasion. He wheeled to ride away. He had only gone a few yards, however, when he stopped the mare and turned to look again at Rosey. "Come oot on the girse (grass) here till I see ye"—signing to the spot with a nod of his head. She blushed more deeply, but obeyed. "Stan' there," he commanded, when she had reached advantageous ground. Then he walked his mare around her, surveying her as he would a horse at the market. Once, twice, he completed the circle. She blushed painfully, and blushed again, shading her eyes with her hands; but the Baron gave no heed to her uneasiness. He pursued his inspection till he was satisfied, and then, with a cool "That'll dae," trotted off.

His first intentions had been curbed by the interview, and, as he set out for home, he had to confess to himself that his mind was less clear as to his action than it had been earlier in the day. He had ridden up to Mac-roarie's house with the full purpose of warning him out on the spot, but now he asked himself if he could really effect his end by

expelling Macroarie. He could get rid of him, of course; but would he therefore be relieved of his own vexation? Even if Macroarie were in Jericho, Robin could still marry his daughter. "Love an' licht winna hide," the Apothecary had said—and there sat his dilemma! The more he pondered, the more perplexing grew the vexation; ay, and the clearer he saw that he was helpless to cure it. The contemplation of his inability maddened him, so accustomed was he to dictate and to be obeyed.

A stupid brain is sometimes a gift of the gods to a man. He may miss the azure which fine minds see around life's entertainments and enlightenments, but he will also miss the trivial worries which loiter ever in the track of sensitive natures. His paintings are in white and black, and without shade; and everything is shaped on his anvil with the forehammer. His mind has no twilight; it knows only dark and light, and it comprehends these in a stubborn and effective fashion. The only facts of which the Baron may be said to have been conscious were that Robin — *his* son! — was to marry Mac-

roarie's daughter, and he himself was averse to it.

As the Baron drew up to The Cairn, he spied Robin at work in a field beyond, clearing a ditch. The sight pleased him. He liked to think that everybody was at work. He laid his own hand to a task only when it was urgent, or the impulse spurred him ; but he expected all those who were about him to be ever in the active mood. " Robin isna a sloven, onyway ! " he muttered, therein stating the truth, and also perhaps paying an indirect tribute to himself. He was not aware that Robin's activity acted upon him as an argument, but, so it did act, strengthening the Apothecary's advocacy and Rosey's womanly impression.

Stabling his mare, he strode heavily to Robin's side. " Are ye still to tak' Mac-roarie's dochter ? " he asked bluntly.

Robin answered " Ay," with a taciturnity more matchless than his father's.

" Weel, ye'll hae to labour for her." This was a threat that if he took Rosey, he must look for no assistance of a financial kind.

Robin understood and answered " Ay "

again—and the reply had more meaning in it than penetrated the Baron's intelligence.

Neither ever spun needless words into their speech, but the son was more sparing than even his father, although he was also more genial in his nature. The Baron's only temptation to loquaciousness came when he meddled with Robin, and then a measure of recklessness overcame him at his offspring's inherited and improved reserve. It is seldom that men like to see themselves outstripped.

The Tod was slightly staggered by his son's unbending speech, and still more by his manner. Robin went on with his work in the ditch, in complete indifference to his father's presence, and did not call an eyelash off its duty. The laird was nettled, and in a degree cowed. "Ye maun hae a hoose," he suggested half-pleasantly.

"I hae ane."

The Baron started. "Whaur?" Was it possible that the son that he despised as a dullard was to outwit him?

"Ye'll hae knowledge o' that come-time (in course of time)."

“ Is it Macroarie’s hoose ? ” gasped his father.

“ Ay.”

This was news, indeed. The fellow was not only to marry Macroarie’s lassie ; he was to live under Macroarie’s roof ! A double humiliation, truly. Was he expecting to drive his father to surrender by disgracing him into it ? It seemed so ; but the Baron could protect himself—ay, and he would ! He would send Macroarie and his crew about their business, he thought at first ; but, if he should thus punish his own son, too, what would the country-side say of him, or how would his “ wife ” behave, or would it really satisfy himself in the end ? He must leave these points meantime and try saner measures. “ Maggie Kennedy’s croft is to be vacant at the term ; will ye gang to it ? ”

Robin objected that it was twelve miles distant.

“ I wish it was mair.”

“ I dinna.”

“ Weel, there isna onything else for ye ! ” cried the Baron irritably. He drove his hands deep into his pockets and turned away.

When he had gone a few paces he wheeled about and shouted, "I'll gie ye that hoose an' croft in yer ain name, gin ye'll tak' yersel' an' yer cushie-doo oot o' my sicht. Will ye hae it?"

Robin knew that this was his father's way of being generous, and, hardly knowing how much it might stand for, he replied evasively, "Maybe."

"Hae it or lea' it," snarled the Baron, and pulled himself off the field. Feeling foiled, he was enraged.

While the laird had been engaged in this wordy joust with his son, Macroarie had returned to his fireside and interviewed Rosey as to the intent of his visit. She was unable to say.

Macroarie pondered. What could The Tod want of him? Surely it was a matter of some concern when he had called in person. The Baron had not been in Gollan for a long time, too—it must be something serious. "I winna gang!" he exclaimed finally.

His daughter asked him for his reason.

"It canna be guid news, Rosey," he explained in his unlettered logic. "Gin it's

his maitter mair than mine, he can ca' again ; gin it's mair mine than his, I'll e'en risk it. I winna gang !” His untutored nature took refuge in uncertainty, after the trick of his kind.

XXII

“AULD SPARROWS ARE ILL TO TAME”

TO a certain type of mind, mystery is more serviceable than information, and fear may create a heroism which enlightenment would kill. Macroarie could not guess the meaning of the laird's visit, but he thought it probable that the preacher and Sir Eric had complained to him anent his ongoings. The Baron, he knew, was little disturbed by any man's behaviour, good or bad ; but if the Apothecary and the preacher made any representation to him, he might stoop to humour them. Macroarie's suspicions ran in this direction because he could divine no other drift in the circumstances. He would fly the flag of truce, and wait.

Macroarie's father and grandfather had lived and died on the croft, and probably

also two or three generations prior (for the only removals known in those staid days were effected by the laird and death); and, as already chronicled, he hoped to repeat the tale of his forefathers under its roof. He clung to his holding with the attachment of an animal to its hole. He never thought of analysing the sentiment; all that he knew was that the hole had been his shelter, as it had been that of his fathers. Its grip of him was one of the chief controlling influences on his rude nature; and it suggested to him now that he might save his shelter by behaving himself better, which meant a slacker attendance at the ale-house, and an occasional call at the kirk.

Next Sabbath, he made another visit to the sanctuary; but this time he waited throughout the service.

Mr. North became distinctly hopeful.

The Apothecary was not so sanguine. "Auld sparrows are ill to tame," he had said.

"But you would not mis-doubt the Divine power?"

"Na, but I mis-doot Macroarie's."

Mr. North looked at him. "Man has

nothing to do with it, good neighbour; if Macroarie is effectually called, he *must* come to God.”

The jovial sceptic smiled. “Oh, gin that’s hoo it gangs, there’s maybe houp for him!”

“Paul was a blasphemmer, and the very chief of sinners, and yet he was regenerated.”

“Ay, ay, I didna ken Paul, though; an’ I ken Macroarie,” answered the Apothecary; and then added, “Ye can tak’ my aith (oath), onyway, that ye winna cow Macroarie an’ his sparks if ye dinna fleg (frighten) them wi’ big doses o’ hell.”

The preacher started back, and, regarding his antagonist, said earnestly, “You mean well, Sir Eric; but I fear you trifle with a very solemn doctrine.”

“Listen, preacher!” retorted the heretic. “The doctrine o’ a scaldin’ hell hae been ane o’ the maist serviceable doctrines o’ a’ the ages. Mony an auld, greedy baron hes gi’en claes to the faitherless, an’ alms to the husbandless, an’ fields to the kirk (forby settin’ puir scamps o’ prisoners free, an’ the lek)—an’ a’ in the houp o’ savin’ their sowls frae a brisk roastin’ in Auld Hornie’s bonfire. Ye

see, man, it's lek this—braggarts winna dae richt, or keep a calm sough, gin bigger braggarts dinna gar them. Nae confections, preacher! Tak' thumpin' handfu's o' brimstane an' splatter them wi' it till they yowl (yell) wi' fricht, an' then drive them into the straucht road wi' the Deil's pitchfork—eften (afterwards), ye may mak' sancts o' them, but nae suner. Ye maun pound iron gin ye're to mak' onything o't. Man, man, ony guid that ye see in yer jo Macroarie was banged into him whan ye mauled him on the Lord's Day. What say ye to that—eh?" He nickered.

Mr. North was now too well acquainted with the Apothecary to reckon him seriously rough or unthinking, and he laid no further criticism on him.

By next Sabbath he was to have conviction that Sir Eric was a skilled pilot on his own coast.

The Baron had sent orders to Roger that he was to have his place in the kirk marked off for him by the following Sabbath, as he intended being present. Formerly, the earthen floor of the kirk had been measured

off into squares and numbered (as pews are now), and the “seatholder” could stand on his square, or place a seat within it; but unsettling times had left the order of no effect, and for some years those who attended did so pell-mell. The news of the Baron’s intention spread through the clachan and created a wondrous excitement.

The originator of it all, however, was unconscious of having made any sensational move on the social chessboard. True, he had determined to go to the kirk, and that was unusual; but his determination was the issue of a mere whim, namely, to hear the man who had cast him in a tussle—and it affected him no more deeply than a resolution to attend the market. It never occurred to him that his purpose would augment the attendance. He looked to see Roger and some of his scholars there, with two or three odd folks. Nevertheless, when The Tod lounged into the kirk on Sabbath it was wellnigh full. He was dumbfounded. The preacher was a rare fellow, truly, if he had worked such a change in a few months! Mr. North must be a giant, an angel, to tame such wild corbies

as aired their feathers in Gollan ! The laird gave him a place in his apocrypha instantly, as a being overflowing natural moulds.

As if to mock this apparent revival of decorum, however, Macroarie was absent. It may have been that he was developing into a good man too quickly, and that nature was feeling the strain, or that he was bent on holding away from the laird ; but, whatever the reason, he despised the advantages of good behaviour on that Sabbath and gave himself again to the witchery of recklessness. Probably, he might have attended the kirk that day if the figure of the laird had not been so unpleasantly near, for he dreaded a repeat visit from The Tod even on Sabbath.

He thought that he had better keep well out of the way, and so hid himself in the ale-house. He and a few cronies forgathered for a round of shinty in the forenoon ; and then he retired with them to the shade of Becky Bain's roof. They sat down just before Roger took the tour of the clachan with his warning bell. At first they were only jovial, but, as round after round was imbibed, the joviality became deafening jargon.

Becky had devised a speech to influence their behaviour and twice tried to modify their roistering by delivering it; but a butterfly might as easily have stayed a runaway horse. Macroarie re-aired some of his favourite ballads, which seemed to ring with greater reverberance after their few weeks' confinement. The choruses were heaved about in swelling volleys by his chums.

The concert lasted much longer than the kirk service (a whole day in the ale-house was then a light prank). When the congregation skailed, Macroarie and his drouthies were still assaulting the stuffy ale-house atmosphere with jesting music. The jest gradually died out of the music, however, and gave place to shouting, which was again ousted by clamour, disturbed tempers, and quarrelling. Becky knew her customers, and feared them. Although she had tried to restrain them, they had overborne her; and she was helpless. Late in the afternoon she flew to that unauthorized but working judge and magistrate of Gollan—Sir Eric—and stated her perplexity. “They’ll ding doon my hoose, I’m fearin’,” she gasped in trepidation.

The Apothecary was sitting up in bed with Widow Roy's bairns beside him. Earlier in the day, they had begged him to let them share his bed. They were now sitting between him and the wall. While he hummed snatches of psalms to them, he sketched invisible figures on the wall with his finger, and asked them to guess what he was drawing. He was in the thick of his entertainment when Becky entered.

“What's agley (wrong) noo, Becky?” he asked—the emphasis on “noo” proclaiming the fact that recourse to him was usual enough with the ale-house wife.

Becky could scarce speak with the effects of her excitement and haste, and she delivered her story in a manner that set the Apothecary a-laughing. When he got sense of it, however, he sobered. “Deil tak' Mac-roarie!” he exclaimed earnestly. Lifting his voice, he hailed Lexy. “Gang ower to the manse for the gospeller, Lexy; an' lift yer auld heels lek a rabbit in a fricht. Tell him I maun hae his presence wi' a' speed.—Awa' hame an' read yer Buik, guid woman,” he added to Becky, which was wisely translated

into, Take it easy and don't disturb yourself. He instructed her to see that a cog or two were set at the well-mouth behind the house, and then to trust in Providence.

When Mr. North appeared, he found the Apothecary on his legs. He was in his breeks and a woollen shirt ; but he was bare-headed, and bare-footed, and minus coat and vest. “Come awa' doon wi' me to the ale-hoose, ye wha can fecht wi' sinners on the Lord's Day !” he said familiarly.

The preacher was somewhat surprised. Was Sir Eric to indulge in a bout of drinking with *his* connivance ? He certainly looked reckless, judging by his appearance ; but he was not given to drinking. What could it be, then ? Mr. North asked him what was wrong.

“Oh, that godly monk, Macroarie !” was the Apothecary's only reply. He strode off with his hands jailed in the waistband of his breeks, leaving the minister to interpret his reply and follow him. He seemed in no great haste, but yet was resolute in his manner. Mr. North, gaining some hint of the business on hand, but ignorant of the Apothecary's

intentions, accompanied him. Leading straight for the ale-house in silence, the Apothecary planted two boulders at the back of it, atop of each other. "Could ye loup frae that to the roof, preacher?" he asked, pointing to the primitive stone stairway.

Mr. North looked at him and inquired as to his intention.

"Up ye gang, man!" his commander ordered, gripping him by the shoulder and urging him on to the stones. "We maun skail thae splairtin' (squabbling) deils. *Up!*"—and he gave the minister a shove that landed him on the roof.

Stepping back a few yards, he filled one of the cogs with water at the well and handed it to his confederate with this instruction—"Noo, whan I yell to ye, dash that cowg o' water doon the smoke-hole wi' a' yer pith! D'ye tak' me up?"

The preacher smiled, to indicate that he was beginning to understand.

Filling the second cog for himself, the Apothecary cried, "Noo, gie the randies the thunder-plump!"—and skirted to the front,

taking his stand full before the door, with the second bucket in his hand.

Mr. North now clearly comprehended the manœuvre, and acted. He would like to have argued, but Sir Eric's swift movement cut off the chance. He must play his part now, or offend his kindly neighbour for life: to leave him in the lurch in such an emergency would probably be to forfeit his friendship. Besides, was it not really necessary to break up that ring of devilry?

The revellers were too entangled in wordy rapture to hear or see any sign of their entrapment. The first intimation they had was the ring of Sir Eric's voice to his comrade on the roof; the next moment a river leapt through the “smoke-hole” and plunged into the stone-circled fireplace with frightsome splutter. Instantly the peat-ash flew up in reeking clouds, firing eyes and nostrils and mouths with sudden discomfort. Macroarie rushed for the door, his subjects pell-mell after him. The Apothecary stood in ready attitude; and, as Macroarie's head broke through the peaty mist, he cried airily, “Tak' a moothfu' o' caul' water, neebour!”

and dashed the contents of the cog into the hero's face. So surprising and forceful was the onset that Macroarie canted over on his back ; and his satellites, tripped up by his prostrate form, tumbled helter-skelter about the threshold. The Apothecary broke into provocative laughter at the comical spectacle, and remarked that " The rat that has but æ hole is soon caught."

Sir Eric's taunt, and the effects of cold water, restored Macroarie to his whereabouts ; he saw in a glint the meaning of the assault. Plucking his legs to him, he surged to his feet ; and with a furtive glance at his tormentor, plied his heels for safety. His Nemesis hurled the cog after him, aiming to chastise him on the shins ; but he missed, and the cog bumped harmlessly past the flying Macroarie. When he saw it, he stopped and picked it up. Finding himself now the armed fighter, he turned to face his weaponless enemy. As he did so, he beheld the figure of the preacher over the smoke-hole with the other cog in his uplifted hand. He stood there against the sky like an avenging angel, ready to smite any who dared harm the Apothecary. The apparition

checked the threatening fighter. He gaped at it, then at Sir Eric, hesitated—flung the cog from him as if in disgust—and broke away at a trot like a startled bullock.

“Man, what a rare row-tow (noisy tussle)!” Thus cried the Apothecary to Mr. North, as Macroarie’s figure disappeared. “Ye canna tame thae deevils without a dash o’ brimstane, I tell ye!”

The preacher was still erect on the roof, grasping the wooden cog. He gave no answer to his adviser’s observations, but he thought that unregenerate human nature had reached a stubborn stretch in Gollan. “Maul them weel!” the Apothecary had said to him; and, all against his own intention, he had illustrated the advice more than once—and on the Lord’s Day, too!—and he was forced to admit that the experiment had been attended with some manifestations of success.

“Tak’ my aith (oath), ye’ll hae nae mair fash wi’ Macroarie,” said his commander to him when he descended. “I’m muckle mista’en gin that isna the end o’ his pliskies (exploits).” The prophecy, let me here say,

was nearly correct ; for, although the old chief was often enough at the ale-house again, the fear of *two* masters was ever on him as a restraint.

XXIII

THE ELEMENT OF THE INCALCULABLE HAUNTS ALL HUMAN AFFAIRS

IN a spirit of animal generosity such as visits even the most Machiavellian natures, the Baron had "adopted" his bastard son; nay, more, he had "legitimized" him by the law's magic assistance. There was a sullen satisfaction in the act at the time of its accomplishment, and perhaps for a brief period thereafter; but any warmth of feeling so created soon sank to indifference. It changed to steady regret.

The momentary softening which had impregnated his thoughts under the Apothecary's advocacy, failed of its influence again, and his hard way of handling matters took command of the passes once more. He determined not to yield. His early promise

to Sir Eric was twined out of him when pain had unhinged him, and no sane man would think that he was obliged to regard it. Phew!—let the Apothecary and all Gollan whistle! Living or dead, he would not consent to Robin's marriage with the daughter of that scatter-wit, Macroarie.

The Baron's thoughts hardened again; but how would he give expression to them? The first suggestion which clove his lumpy brain was to denaturalize his son. Could it be done, though? He did not know; and, in any case, it would probably be a rather expensive undertaking. Providing it could be managed, however, it would end all debate—and for ever.

The arrival of Wintry Willie in the neighbourhood had driven the Baron's cogitations to a hurried decision. He indited a letter to his lawyer in Edinburgh and requested the cadger to see it delivered with his own hand. It was as the man—heavy, but practical:

“THE CAIRN,
August the Ninth.

SIR,—Yow will recal that I imploy'd yow to have my bastard son made legitimate,

and also the origine of my desire thereanent. As much as in me lyeth, I now wish I had never toucht that condescension, for I am plagued with him. And I desire to misregard and revoke it. And I request, Sir, yowr unbyass'd opinione, which I trust may concurr with my resolve. I shall be obliged to yow, to know that yow have reply'd imediately by vertue of my anxiety to be informed. The charges importeth little, if in the hinder-end I redd me of one who is now not so mickle as a servitor in my esteem. I desire that yow will subscribe a speedy return by the hand of William Cochran, the bearer.

“ Sic subscribitur,

“ GABRIEL CROOK.

“ To RUSSELL TODRIG,

“ Writer in Edinbro'.”

The Baron grued over his son's dourness. His mind frequently hesitated, but always went back to its original severity. “ Weel, weel, lat the bastard haud on,” he muttered, addressing himself. “ By my faith, but I'll stagger him yet ! ” The Baron sniffed with savage satisfaction at the prospect of his

son's discomfiture when the club of his father fell on his unsuspecting head. "Lat him bide till I get the scrivener's packet frae Edinbro', an' I'll twine his bastard neck!" Revenge tastes sweet to an embittered soul, and the hope of being able to bruise his obstinate offspring seemed to the thwarted laird at times the sweetest of contemplations. It filled his thoughts with a welcome intoxication.

He determined to face Robin again. Plunging into the obscurity of The Cairn, he clamoured for his son. "Robin! Hi, Robin!" he belched in his rasping voice, till roof and rafter thrummed.

His son heard him and gave him his presence.

The Baron gaped at him a moment in silence, and then snapped, "Ye bastard!" Before Robin could reply, his father asked him if he was still of a mind to wed Mac-roarie's daughter.

"Ay; I hae said it," answered Robin doggedly.

"Did I no' threap (threaten) ye that ye mustna dae it?"

“ Ay, I daursay.”

“ An’ why are ye set on’t, then ? ”

“ Jist.”

The Baron could find no fitting answer. Robin was too like himself, and more immovable. He softened a degree, and asked him where he was to live after his marriage.

“ Whaur ye promised,” was Robin’s undaunted reply.

“ Widow Kennedy’s croft ? ”

“ Ay.”

“ Weel, yer walcome to gang there—the farrer awa’ the better ; but, hear me, *ye’re my son nae langer !* ”

“ An’ wha’s son am I ? ”

The Tod was nettled. “ The Deil’s, for a’ I care ! ”

Robin was unshaken. “ He canna be a waur faither than the ane I hae ! ”

“ What ! Ye bastard rat ! ”

“ A bastard rat maun be the son o’ a rat,” retorted Robin, not to be cowed.

“ Nae mair ! ” howled the Baron, mauling a table with his fist.

“ Sae be it,” agreed Robin, walking away.

His father called out, “ See, I winna argy-

bargy wi' ye. Ye can gang to Maggie Kennedy's hoose; but I maun tell ye straucht, that I hae disinherited ye for this daft prank; an' whan ye lea' The Cairn, I dinna want to see yer face again!"

"If ye dinna see *my* face, I winna see *yer* face," Robin answered back, and left the room.

The laird looked glumly at the doorway through which his son passed out, and scraped his lip with his teeth. "I'll cool the gowk yet!" he muttered; but, in truth, he felt quite checkmated by the unblanched manner in which Robin had received the announcement of his disinheritance. The Baron had expected some signs of perturbation; instead, the young scamp had actually struck a joke out of it, and left his irate father fangless. And Robin's humour was a truer prophecy than the wrath of the Baron.

The element of the incalculable haunts all human affairs like a ghost. Only two weeks had spun out till The Tod realized that the warship he had launched with so much vengeful hope had burst up and gone to the bottom. His plot had miscarried. Wintry Willie brought him the tale of thwarted endeavour.

After Willie had left The Cairn a few days, and before he had travelled south to Inverness, he had encountered that rarity of the time—a gentleman's carriage.

There were no roads in the north; and, indeed, anything pretending to be such in the south, would now be called a hill-track. When, therefore, any nobleman or gentleman of position resolved to travel by carriage, he ventured on a dignity which was (after the manner of most dignities) exceedingly incommodious, but which was suffered in meek humility for the sake of the distinction it conferred. In addition to the driver and two carriage-lifters, a man went in front to search out the most comfortable track. He walked more swiftly than the carriage could be drawn, and often had to tarry until it came up with him.

Willie's tale said that the forerunner of the carriage which he met, had halted to await its coming up, and was leaning on his staff. With a sudden dive, the wheels on one side slid down to the bushes into an unperceived bog. The outrunner gave little heed to the event, save that he hung more heavily on

his staff until the driver and his assistants should relieve the carriage. After the initial plunge, the wheels birsed down through the mossy paste till bush and axle were immersed. Stirred by the predicament, the gentleman let down the window and hailed the out-runner, requesting him to lend a hand in freeing the vehicle. At that moment, Wintry Willie swung up the brae in front, trudging with a creel on his back and a wallet by his side.

“ I gaed ower to gie them my help,” Willie explained to the laird. “ It was a sair tussle to rive the wheels oot o’ the bog-hole—ay, was it!—sae I laid doon my craisie (creel) an’ wallet, to gie them a han’ wi’ the job—to gie them a han’. ‘ Come an’ set yer weicht on this post here, my man,’ says ane o’ them, plankin’ his stave aneath the coach an’ restin’ it on a boulder-stane. Sae I e’en did as he bade me—ay did I. I fell on the stave-end wi’ a’ my micht, alang wi’ him, pechin’ an’ jumpin’ to lift the coach, when—what think ye?—awa’ the rotten stave gaed wi’ a joup, an’ clashed us baith on oor faces in the mire—baith in the mire, Baron! The daft lout

got up and cursed *me* for the mishap—ay, he did that, the whalp! I telled him that it was himsel' that ca'd me to the job an' set me to dae it. A' the answer I gat was a bubble (spittle) in the face, an' 'Awa', wasp!' Wi' that he kicked my wallet wi' his brogue, scatterin' my packets, an' a' things—ay, scatterin' them a'. Seein' ae packet flichin' (flying) his way, he grabbed it an' rave it into pirlins (shreds), whiskin' them aboon his heid an' cryin', 'Hey, tak' a hairst (harvest) aff that gran' sowin' gin ye can.' I was angered—ay, angered—an' fain was I to cudgel the braggart wi' the snapped stave—an' I wad hae done it gin the ither coofs werena by him. I lat them howk oot their maister ony way they listed, an' I gethered up as mony bits o' yer packet as I micht, an' rowed them fu' carefu' in my wallet—carefu' in my wallet, Baron."

The Baron interrupted him by asking excitedly if it was *his* packet that had been torn.

"Ay," answered the cadger. "I kent wha it was for tho'—kent wha it was for; an' I thocht gin I gethered a' the pirlins, he micht set them thegither an' read yer message—

read yer message. But na ; some o' the bits was missin', an'——”

“ Sae my message hasna reached the scriv'ner ? ”

“ E'en that same, Baron—e'en that same,” answered Willie undisturbed.

“ Bleezes ! ” And he left the cadger dumb in the hall.

“ Gin ye write anither packet, I'll gang back to Edinbro', ” shouted the cadger after the retreating figure.

The Baron gave no heed, only muttering to himself, “ I'll hae nae mair o't ! ” He was glad now that he hadn't let himself out of hand in the ale-house and revealed his plot. He comforted himself as he remembered that even the Apothecary was so beguiled as to think that he—even he, the Baron !—was more than commonly generous in allowing Mr. North a free hand in the marriage arrangements ! “ It is a rare joke,” thought The Tod, with a grunt ; and his next impression was that it was less a joke than a narrow shave. But, in any case, seeing that he had been credited with generous sentiments, why should he not keep up the show of goodwill ? It

would now be the easiest way out of the maze, and would redound to his credit. His plot had been unseamed. Robin would be married before he could now have an answer from Edinburgh, even if he determined to write another letter, and, besides, something else might arise to thwart him a second time.

These considerations were rapidly storming the Baron's fortress, and already he felt it beginning to topple. It would, perhaps, be untrue to say that he was softening; he was only irritated, and irritation leads a man to many an unexpected finding. "Dang it! Robin, whaur are ye?" he shouted. His son answered him from the kitchen. He lounged thither and shoved open the door with his shoulder. Robin was in conversation with his mother. (She was mother and "wife" only by accident; her counsel was never sought by the Baron, and therefore never offered. She was a woman in the house—no more.)

"Robin"—(in a changed tone)—"hae ye set yer mind on Rosey?"

Robin was at first disposed to be angry at being again questioned on a subject which

he and his father had already discussed several times ; but he was quick to notice that the Baron said " Rosey " instead of " Macroarie's dochter." He thought that the change might have a meaning, and he simply answered, " Ay, I hae telled ye."

" An' ye hae agreed to be wed in the kirk ? "

This point was only under consideration, but as it seemed very probable that the ceremony would take place there, Robin assented.

" Weel, fetch the lassie hame to The Cairn," said his father abruptly, but without disturbing a muscle. " I winna gang to the waddin' mysel', an' that bleezin' gowk, Macroarie, maunna show his nose aneath my roof ; but tak' the lassie hame wi' ye to The Cairn—we'll fin' a bit neuk for her, I daursay, an' Widow Kennedy's croft can gang to anither. Ye hae nae objections, Jean ? " he concluded, turning to Robin's mother.

She was so thunderstruck by his appeal to her that she scarce found breath to say, " Na, na." How could she dare to say otherwise ? Besides, a second woman in the house

might tend to strengthen her own position somewhat.

The Baron muttered his satisfaction at her reply. "Lat us hear nae mair o't, then," he said, slouching out of the room.

XXIV

GEORDIE FLEA'S PIPES SUMMONED THEM THROUGH ALL ITS THROATS

IN arranging that the marriage of Robin and Rosey should be celebrated in the kirk, Mr. North was only repeating a long-prevalent custom of the people of these realms. Even in irreligious periods, marriages took place, if possible, in the kirk. Mr. North was sanguine, too, that the event would indirectly aid his aims and strengthen his position. He discussed the subject with his privy councillor, the Apothecary, who agreed with him and urged him to lose no advantage. "But ye maun gang into the ploy lek a man, an' no' lek a gospeller," he added. "An' as soon as ye hae tied them thegither in the kirk, ye maun come oot an' weise (lead) the sports."

“ I had not considered that,” replied Mr. North.

“ Think o’t noo, then.”

The preacher was doubtful if he could entertain the suggestion ; it would not consort with dignity, he feared.

Sir Eric sat up in bed with his characteristic jerk. “ Deegnity ! Deegnity ! What’s deegnity ? Naethin’ but a cock’s stride, man ! ”

The speech was sarcastic, and serious. Mr. North was not unaffected by it, but he answered, “ True, Sir Eric ; very true. Yet, it doth advantage a preacher not to be too familiar with his flock, lest his words have no effect. I may be of your mind, personally, but I speak as a preacher.”

“ An’ I speak as a mediciner,” retorted his adviser briskly. “ An’ what I hae to say is, that the fowk hereawa’ are clean bursten wi’ devilry, an’ the only physic to cure them is for ye to fling aside yer deegnity an’ wallop into the waddin’ games lek a *man* ! What say ye to that ? ”

Mr. North allowed the physician’s advice was kindly meant, and had been of service

on a former occasion ; but he was doubtful if it was wise to continue its execution.

The Apothecary was nettled somewhat. “ Weel, weel, gin ye winna dae what’s richt, jist dae what’s wrang, an’ then thank yersel’,” he snapped testily. “ Lat me see what Marcus says,” he added, reaching to the window-sill for his guide. “ I’ll shut my een an’ open the buik at random, an’ we’ll see what comes upperhan’.” He held the volume in front of him, closing his eyes and saying, “ Ane, twa, three ! ” The book flew open wide. Planting his finger on the page, he opened his eyes and read : “ What use do I put my soul to ? It is a helpful question this, and should frequently be put to oneself. How does my ruling part stand affected ? And whose soul have I now ?—That of a child, or a young man, or a feeble woman, or of a tyrant, of cattle or wild beasts ? ” The quotation pleased him. He held up the book to Mr. North and told him to take a copy of the quotation away with him. “ Ask yersel’, ‘ Hae I the sowl o’ a man, preacher, auld woman, bairn, coo, hen, flea ? ’ An’ God help ye to fin’ oot that ye hae a *man’s*

sowl in ye! I hae nae mair to say.—Tell me,” he concluded, brightening again—“tell me, whan is the splore to mak’ a start?”

The preacher replied that the marriage was timed for twelve o’clock. “Of course, you will be present, Sir Eric?”

The Apothecary drew a deep breath. “I maun be, I’m dootin’. Ye see, Robin has nae faither for the occasion, an’ I hae gi’en my word to be a faither to him for a day—me that’s a faither o’ naethin’ in the heavens aboon or in the earth aneath, gin it bena (be not) a getherin’ o’ silly thochts. I’m unco snod in my ba-ba here. Ah, weel, my shanks winna be ony waur o’ a guid shakin’—sae ye can expeck me whan the dancin’ comes on. Faigs, I maun hae a reel wi’ Rosey! An’ I wad advise ye to gie her a whisk, too, Maister North; an’ whan ye’re at it, I’ll put yer spouse thro’ a fling or twa—eh? Ach, man, ye an’ me against the Deil, ony day!”

Mr. North humoured his friend with a genial handshake.

“Gin the wather (weather) is but kindly, an’ we hae nae stint o’ sunshine, we’ll hae a thrang day o’t, preacher.”

When the day at length stole from the arms of the dark, it came in abundant fulfilment of their wishes. The sun romped on the heather; the hills blushed at his coming, threw off the misty mantles of the night, and flamed his approach to the yet-sleeping valleys. Then all the landscape awoke and put on its newly-woven garment of light.

Shepherds and herds from outlying districts came over the hills with their lasses, and dribbled into the clachan. They were bare-footed and bare-headed. The men were dressed in rough homespun, knee-breeches, and broad bonnet—the bonnets having the horn-spoon of everyday use stuck in the rosette, in anticipation of the feast; and snatches of ribbon nickered at their knees. The women wore a greater show of ribbons, and their hair was smoothed prettily under a coloured “bandeau.” The company was almost all alike, only that the better-to-do tenants had foot-gear, ranging from the rough bauchle of untanned skin with the hair inward, to the sturdy brogue which was soon to be the common cover for bare feet. A certain pride there was even in the possession of these

distinctions, but all were alike animated by that instinctive gracefulness which characterizes a humble people before the disease of "doing it" attacks them. How sweet and peace-giving, in such circumstances, are even the little formalities of life! How jocund, too, are its bursts of natural hilarity!

The younger spirits set to games as soon as they arrived, and practised for the sports which lengthened the marriage programme in that free time; so that when the wedding-parties were ready to leave their respective starting-points, one knot was interested in wrestling, another in throwing the hammer, a third was putting the stone, some were at hop-step-and-leap, and so on.

Geordie Flea's pipes, however, summoned them through all its throats to the opening display of the marriage ceremony. When he had warned all by a circling sweep of the clachan, he took his stand at Macroarie's door, while another piper stood ready at the door of the Apothecary. As soon as Macroarie appeared with Rosey on his arm, Geordie set the glorious bag to his oxter again, and took the lead. Macroarie stepped awkwardly down

the green with Rosey, followed by the women in pairs. She walked unprettily—Sir Eric having insisted on her wearing brogues. Her step was clumsy and robbed of all the free lilt of the bare-footed walker. Otherwise, however, the natural cadence of her figure was unmolested and she bore herself with becoming decorum. She was plainly dressed, and her bare head was decked with ribbons and flowers. Although shy by nature, she had that strain of chivalrous pride which we associate with Highland blood, and which gave her carriage a gentle dignity, notwithstanding her halting step.

At the moment of her setting forth under the generous benediction of Geordie Flea's music, the party of the bridegroom left the Apothecary's to that of the second minstrel. Both parties converged near the church and then broke, the men singling out their favourite lasses and kissing them. Then the two streams amalgamated and entered the church.

The preacher was at first undecided as to the spirit in which to conduct the ceremony. He was jarred by the frivolity of the

rustics, who cut jokes at each other in a bucolic voice. He was overjoyed at their presence, notwithstanding, and most of all at the presence of Sir Eric. He wisely determined to tune his strings to the humour of the occasion, and to keep the company indoors as short as was consistent with his own conception of fitness.

After reaching the open air again, the Apothecary's bubbling pleasantries were like an extra dram to the crowd; they laughed so readily that the preacher himself was infected. The wizard had ventured on this additional sortie with a purpose. He had determined to amuse the preacher. He had now succeeded; and he promptly followed it up with the manoeuvre he had hatched in his versatile brain.

Wheeling suddenly to the crowd, he beckoned for silence. "Lads," he said, "Maister North is to play ye a spring on the pipes, an' I'll sprauchle (sprawl) at the Hielan' Fling."

The preacher sobered as suddenly as if a douche of water had been squirted on him. Then he blushed. He was, indeed, thinking of anything save what his benefactor had pro-

posed. True, he had filled the bag with a musician's pride when a young man, and occasionally since then. But what he could not guess was how the Apothecary knew that he could play. Had he let it slip out during a conversation? While he wondered and hesitated, rolling cheers rang around him. It was past doubt that he would swim in popularity if he yielded; but would he?

The Apothecary closed the question by an adroit move. Plucking the pipes from Geordie Flea's hold, he set the bag to his oxters lovingly, filled it, and strode up and down as he tuned the chanters on his shoulders. When harmony came into their throbbing throats, he stepped behind Mr. North, clapped the chanters on his shoulders, set the bag in his oxters, and let go. The preacher instinctively pressed the bag to save it from falling. As naturally, he set the chanter to his lips at the moment he took the bag to his embrace, and fell to the tune begun by his tutor.

Sir Eric threw off his brogues and hat. Standing up in bare feet, knee-pants and shirt, and tossing back his fiery hair, he gave feet, hands, and body to the familiar Fling.

His example was infectious. Every dancer set to, and the Fling was worked out amid boisterous glee. When the player, caught in the fit of enthusiasm, slid into a reel, sets formed as if by magical consent, and the dancing sped briskly till all breath was spent.

Panting, Macroarie gripped the preacher's hand in his rough fashion. "Deil tak' me gin I dinna gie ye a hearin' on Sawbath!" he gasped.

"An' me," "An' me," cried a second and a third.

"And what shall we say of you, Sir Eric?" asked the preacher, stealing a march on his guide.

What could he say? He cared not a windlestraw for kirks; yet he had prompted the gospeller in winning the people, and they were now the audience. "I'll be at Rosey's kirkin' on Sawbath, Maister North," he answered with some command of gravity; "an' efterhen (afterwards)—weel, ilka Lord's Day I'm no' in my ba-ba I'll be in the kirk!"

XXV

“AMEN.—I’M AWA’!”

THE rite of healths and toasts was fervently observed, and the newly linked pair made ready for their home-going.

Robin mounted his garron, and the Apothecary lifted Rosey in his arms and set her up behind her husband. The entire company was their escort for two or three miles—the pipers leading, while snatches of songs and ringing jokes broke ever from the merry company. At the parting, a ring was formed around them and a final reel danced amid all the enthusiasms of a country wedding. The partings were concluded in lusty expressions of goodwill, and the air was thronged with waving hands and bonnets.

The revellers returned, more drunk with mirth than at the setting out, to follow the

programme of sports ; and Robin and his wife rode to The Cairn.

The Baron gave the young couple a greeting which may be pronounced generous. He was shaping a shearing-hook handle with a huge knife when they returned. Although he heard them at the door he did not stir from his seat ; but when they entered he observed, “ Ye hae got hame, Robin ! ”—without lifting an eyelid.

This was their home-coming. It was enough, too, for it meant that the Baron’s resistance was at an end.

Robin reported their reception to the Apothecary on the following Sabbath—when Sir Eric entertained the young pair at his house—and he added that his father seemed already to have forgotten that such an event as a marriage had taken place in the family. He had subsided into his ancient indifference, and gave no more thought to the presence of Rosey than if she had never been anywhere else than in The Cairn. She was left to do as she listed ; and Robin’s mother was giving her every opportunity of becoming mistress of the house.

The Apothecary indicated no surprise. "I kent it, I kent it. Yer faither's a thrawn tup, Robin, but whan it comes to the pinch he lats the horns gang wi' the hide. He's a barren piece o' earth, an' there's a queer lump o' untented human soil in him; but I flang my spade through it—eh? Man, man, there's naething lek settin' a bauld face to a thrawart (perverse) job. A drumlie Spring may turn oot a ripe Autumn, Robin."

Rosey interrupted his philosophic display by asking him if he was to accompany them to the kirk. It was their "kirkin'" Sabbath, and he had invited them to his house for the purpose of accompanying them: but he was still in bed, and Rosey feared he might have forgotten his promise. "Ye'll be convoyin' us, Sir Eric?"

His eyes keeked out mischievously at her. "Is ae man no eneuch for ye?"

She blushed through a smile she could scarcely restrain.

He laughed gaily at the pleasantry, and began sketching with his finger on the wall.

"Can ye mak' that oot?"

No, she could not; neither could Robin.

“Come awa’ ower here an’ I’ll whisper it in yer lug”—and when Rosey bent over him to get the secret, he kissed her tenderly on the cheek. “There! That’s my answer, lass. Rosey, whan ye’re an auld bauchle (shoe), an’ naebody else wants ye, jist come to me: I’ll gie ye ‘Hush-a-ba’ in my auld wede (withered) bosom.”

“Ah, ye winna need, I’m fearin’—ye hae Lexy,” retorted Rosey.

The Apothecary held up his hands in mock horror. “Lexy’s my *mither*, Rosey! The Tod wad pack me in the thieves’ hole if I made a wife o’ her. No’ that he’s ower-nice in that maitter himsel’,” he added, winking meaningly.

Lexy urged him to put an end to his pranks and accompany the young folks without more ado.

He didn’t hear the admonition, however, as he had stooped to speak to Widow Roy’s bairns, and was engrossed in telling them to be good till he came back.

While he was addressing them, Roger arrived to say that Mr. North expected Sir Eric to accompany Robin and his wife. He

also informed them that Macroarie would leave his house as soon as he saw the kirking party leave Sir Eric's. Roger carried his cracked bell in his hand and was ready to go out for the third ringing.

The Apothecary asked him how his scholar was getting on—alluding to the widow's eldest boy, Joseph.

A rush of enthusiasm filled the fragile figure and straightened it with an upleap of pride. "Thrang, Sir Eric; he's winnin' through thrang! He can spell maist michtily, Sir Eric; an' as for his writin', he can erf (near to) beat mysel'."

With that the beadle-dominie took his way and applied his bell to its task of summoning the people to the kirk. It was the third ringing: as yet, the first and second were still purely formal and fruitless, and response only followed the third call. Even that was a miracle.

It was only a handful of months earlier that Mr. North had ridden into the clachan a stranger—and these had been months of much anxiety, of stratagem, and also of singular advance. The people were still

unconquered, but their recklessness had thawed. By the surrender of Macroarie, malignant hostility had received its death-wound and limped snarling to its dying in the thicket. Athletics were still the popular pastime of the Sabbath; they were, however, suspended during the time of the service, unless some bravado spirits became reckless under the ale-house inspiration—an event yet common enough to menace the permanency of the preacher’s success. Nevertheless, it was clear to his own mind that earnestness and patience would complete the work which necessity and worldly wisdom had begun. Nor (let us say here) was his faith vain. The future days justified his prayerful hope. Psalms again became commoner in Gollan than bacchanalian songs, and the men who had despised him carried him regretfully to his bed in the turf.

As yet, however, the folks gave no heed to Roger’s first bell at eight o’clock, nor did anyone stir to attend the reading to which the second bell invited them; but when the preaching service was announced in the third ringing they emerged half-shamedly from

their huts and loitered to the kirk in encouraging numbers.

Robin's wedding opportunely buttressed the growing sentiment. The "kirking" was an event to brag of. Everybody seemed to be present. Rosey was as proud of her ribboned hair as any lady now would be of the latest flourish from Paris; and it is hardly possible that even a motor-car would create higher notions in a lady to-day than the shoon which ennobled her aching feet. And, in addition to these elevations, she occupied the Baron's "reserved seat"—to wit, his square on the floor; nay, more, she and her husband were accommodated with creepie stools (an unheard-of innovation) by the Apothecary's initiative. Stools had been used by gentry in the south: why not in Gollan? He fought for the luxury because he saw that the stools would carry more than the young couple. As he anticipated, their introduction smuggled a new element of Society into the district—which first did its work for Rosey and then gradually lent itself to granden others.

When the service had closed, Mr. North

congratulated himself. The behaviour of the people had been trying ; they had whispered and giggled throughout. Nevertheless, they were there, and that was enough to lift his heart with thanksgiving for the present.

Mrs. North embraced the youthful wife as she left the kirk ; and by so doing she embraced the congregation, upon whom the action had a sweetening effect.

At the after-refreshment in the Apothecary’s house, Mr. and Mrs. North, Macroarie, and Roger were the only guests who accompanied Robin and his bride. Sir Eric was keen to show respect to the young couple, of course ; but he also meant to still further subdue Macroarie. As they all sat within the house, the Apothecary drew the cords more tightly around the wily rebel and compelled him to promise that he would remember Rosey’s credit in the country-side, and do nothing to dim it. Robin, in response, promised a kindly interest in his father-in-law when the keys of The Cairn came to his keeping.

Macroarie was not comfortable in the company, however, and he strode away to his

own house as soon as the feast was over. His exit left the honours of escort to the Apothecary, who mounted "Cloutie" with ready goodwill. He accompanied his favourites a considerable way to The Cairn, chatting briskly and unpacking choice bits of his airy philosophy as they wound through the heather.

"I hae never coorted, youngsters, an' I hae never girmed (mourned) wi' cancer; but I ken that crabs' taes an' rose water cure the cancer; an' coortin' is the up-keep o' wadded joys. Coort, youngsters, coort—gin ye wadna be dyvours (bankrupts) in love. Fondle her weel, Robin, gin ye wad hae her to be aye young an' bonnie."

Robin little needed the advice at that moment.

"I hae never been a woman, either—that I ken o'!—but I ken that a woman leks to be weel thocht o'. Gie her rowth (plenty) o' daffin' an' fun, Robin, an' aye be tellin' her that she's the sweetest lass on the planet.—Ye're that, onyway, Rosey, an' he may as weel tell the truth as a lee. I ken ilka bane in yer body; ay, an' ilka thocht in yer bosom, lass."

Rosey laughed, well pleased. “Ye ken mair than I dae mysel’, then, Sir Eric.”

“Maybe ay, Rosey, an’ maybe no,” answered her chieftain, “but ye ken hoo to get a man, an’ I dinna ken hoo to get a wife—eh?” He rippled with his hearty laugh for a moment or two, but speedily became subdued again. He could not forget that he was soon to bid them good-bye, and that they were setting out on a new life together. “D’ye ken, it’s gran’ to be young an’ thochtless—to skelp through life lek a douggie on the ootlook for fun,” he broke out. “But I trow it’s better to be middle-aged—to feel that ye hae pith an’ gumption for the day’s battles, an’ ken that ye’re o’ some guid to the warld: ay, that’s a hantle better. But I’m thinkin’ it maun be best o’ a’ to be auld an’ corky—to poke fun wi’ the bairns, to keek slyly at the lovers workin’ oot their fancies, to hae yer heid fu’ o’ sense an’ yer mind lichted by experience, an’ to ken a’ that’s to be kent. ’Deed, I was clean daft wi’ delicht when I was a loon, an’ I was gey prood to be a strong young man, but there’s mair provender for mirth in life to me noo,

although I'll sune be gettin'-on to be an auld cadger. I can lauch noo at things I wad aince greet ower ; I ken the twist o' a' human ploys ; an' I'm fair rinnin' ower wi' the guid jokes I hae heard since I was a loon."

Robin observed that if Sir Eric held on in his display of good spirits, he would make a gleesome patriarch.

"An' why no' ?—eh ? There's a wise Maker aboon us wha watches ower the warld ; an' things hae a knack o' richtin' themsel's, gin gowks wad jist lea' them alane. God kens what He's aboot better than we dae. 'God'—that's my creed, an' it's eneuch." He took breath, and started again. "I thank the Great One that I'm nane o' yer mim-moothed wailers, wha thraw an' girn gin a' the sparrows an' laverocks dinna sing the same tune as themsel's. Forby, ye can see a' the warld as weel on a hillock as frae the porch o' a mansion—gin ye ken what to look for. Tak' the fowk an' the warld as Providence hands them on to ye, an' think ill o' naebody. The cuddy wha's shoe clatters may want a nail, but there's nae need to hang him. An' dinna be prood, youngsters,

dinna be prood. The burn has nae storms lek the sea; an’ the wee lochs on the moor are aye serener than the big anes. Tak’ my advice, Robin, for I wadna hae ye to be a bubbly-jock, an’ wander roond doddered (crazy): wad *ye*, Rosey?”

Rosey’s eyes were moist. “I wad hae him to be jist lek *ye*, Sir Eric,” she replied with feeling.

The Apothecary drew up “Clootie” abruptly. “I canna stan’ that!” he said. “I’ll gang back.”

Robin spoke. “It’s ye that hes gi’en us to ane anither, an’——”

“Nae mair, Robin!” The Apothecary was touched, and a sunrise of emotion warmed his face. “Noo, afore I gang awa’, lat me say that gin ye’re to win real happiness in life, ye maun muse on merry thochts; an’ lat the ill thochts gang by. Thunner only comes at orra (odd) times, but sunlicht is aye here. That’s God’s parable: He wants us to think aftener o’ the sunshine. A mirthsome spirit, I think, is ane wi’ His smile, wi’ the sunlicht an’ the starlicht, wi’ the lilt o’ the laverocks (larks) an’ the lauchter

o' bairns. It mak's life halesome, an' its stramach (worry) licht; a pain is nae mair than a jag, an' black death itsel' is jist a change o' air. Sae I'm awa'. I'm nae pope, priest, or gospeller, but here's my blessin':—God gie ye honest an' contented minds; an' may He keep yer bosoms warm an' happy wi' kind thochts o' the puir an' needy! May ye win awa' in happy auld age to the lowly Maister wha kings us a'! An' may ye hae a safe an' smooth passage ower the River.—Amen.—I'm awa'."

NOTES

“The late Mr. Pope of Reay was in some respects a remarkable man. On the 5th September 1734, he was ordained minister of Reay. The new incumbent was admirably fitted for his charge. He was possessed of great bodily strength as well as vigour of intellect; and strange though it may sound, he was not a little indebted to the former quality for his success as a moral and religious teacher.”—Calder’s *History of Caithness*.

“When Episcopacy was displaced after the Revolution of 1688, a Presbyterian minister, much to the disgust of the people, was presented to the parish. Knowing that opposition awaited him, he came up to the Kirk of Cabrach in disguise. When he appeared on the green in front of the church, he entered the lists as a competitor in those athletic sports, which, as history tells us, the Episcopalian clergy had not discountenanced. . . . In throwing the stone, wrestling, and other games, Mr. Strong (for that was his name) proved himself to be the best man on the field, and succeeded in winning the respect of all who were present to resist the entrance of the obnoxious minister. Having asked permission to view the inside of the church, he, to the amazement of all, mounted the pulpit and said: ‘My friends, I have joined in your sports, will you now join

with me in public worship? I am your minister.'
He proved himself to be one of the best ministers who
ever laboured in the parish."—From the *Life of John
Murker, of Banff*.





