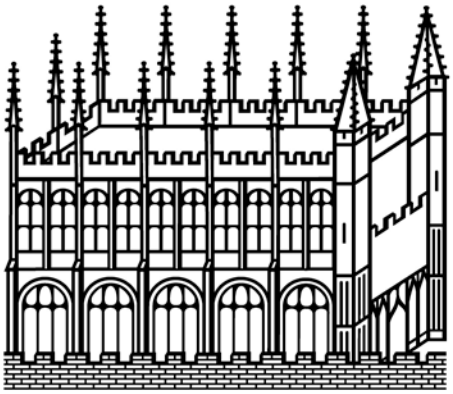

A CANNY COUNTRYSIDE

BY JOHN HORNE

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JOHN HORNE

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THIS

RUSTIC BOUQUET

IS

RESPECTFULLY LAID ON THE GRAVE

OF

JOHN MACKIE,

FOUNDER AND FIRST EDITOR OF THE

Northern Ensign.

CONTENTS.

Knockdry and its Public.

ON a rocky rise of the ferocious Caithness coast stays Knockdry—a hamlet of lounging houses, sprinkled between a jagged sea-border and hillsides clad in heath.

The rock scenery is lifted and impressive. Harrowed precipices, rent and wounded by innumerable "goes," challenge the sea with indifference. Into their front the vicious waves have gnawed many dripping caverns. The dull, moaning throb of the tide in those lone caves, far down, is weird and sobering. It sounds like the pulse-beat of some undescribed and unuttered Life. In the breeding season, the plunging sides of the rockway are plastered with thousands of sea fowl, whose calling voices, as they swim victoriously in the shuddering spaces, seem other than earthly. Adown the slouching

side of the main "goe"—which serves as a harbour—twists a stone stairway of over three hundred steps, laid into the shelving wall. The North Sea, magnificent in ease, lies limitlessly beyond, like mystery girding life.

Hillward the landscape is embossed into gentle, wavey lifts. It is only uncommon for a flutey echo and the ruins of Pictish dwellings which stand lonesome amid the heather. The immediate plot of Knockdry is a featureless sheet of earth, unrefined by any trees. It is laid out in small crofts, between which and herring boats the industry of the hamlet swings. When the corn heaves in the summer sun, and the hillsides are warm with heather bloom, the prospect is homely and restful; but in winter its desolateness is unmatched. The unclothed and uneventful survey, with the wet and windy dyke-sides, the black hills, and the cold rock-line—all are intrusive in the strength of their mystic melancholy. In the outing, furious waves fight and plunge and stagger—roaring madly like chained

giants. Wild Fancy moves reveried and curious amid the pale scene.

Everything in Knockdry is deliberate: matters seem timed. Its life, like its native heather, is unconcerned and solitary. A sunny languidity lies on all things. Haste is a foreigner and unheard of. The mail-gig is still an instrument of importance; its greatness has not departed, though its splendour has. The weekly newspaper strays from one house to another, and finally brings its mission to a wind-up by serving as a tablecloth; but its contents do not alter the pulse of Knockdry.

Every Friday—market-day—a varying number of its public enter the town of Wick to manœuvre such business as stirs them. Some step it out bare-footed, their boots linked together by the laces and dangled from the neck. Within a knowing distance of the town the boots are again restored to their duty. The majority, however, yoke their garron or sheltie to the peat-cart, and do themselves the glory of a lift. The rider sits on straw in the bottom

of the cart, with his back to one wing and his feet up against the other, and allows the horse to select its own pace. The ease which marks the motion of these carts is delightful, inexpressible. It is Knockdry on wheels.

The only other weekly demonstration is the church service on Sabbath. It begins at twelve and endures till three. Adam Craig, our ruling elder, has created for himself an imperishable name by setting a pail of water and a tin jug at the end of his house—which adjoins the church—for the refreshment of those who come to the sitting. Before it opens, the folks stand in bunches around Adam's pail. The scene looks like a market after a quiet fashion. The news of the countryside is manipulated (for even saints are human), but countenances are controlled to the Sabbath standard. No one would think of gossiping in Knockdry on Sabbath—no, never!

The folks in Knockdry are the animate part of itself. They translate to motion the ruggedness of their rocks and the artlessness

of their landscape, with a semblance of the sea's privacy manifest enough for identification. They are "fit," though not cunning, and they can tell the ring of a bad sixpence. A born ill-will to posing or straddling in other people's manners distinguishes them. Their habits are negligently independent and scornful of correction, and they are incorruptibly, frankly human. Life suggests no concern, and it is taken as it comes. To them Nature says, "Stand at ease!" The salutation of generation after generation is, "Weel, hoo goes it?" and the standard response is, "Any way 'e win' blows it!" This is the catechism; any deviation, to the measure of its deflection, is an announcement of trouble. A death is no more than an unavoidable incident, and, though gravely entered into by everybody, promotes less wonder than the passing of the mail-gig. The habit of their speech is familiar and mixed, and betrays them; they say *'e* (soft) for *the*, *'at* for *that*, and *'is* for *this*; and *fa* is *who*, *far* is *where*, *fat* is *what*, and *fan* is *when*. The old folks speak broadly, but the

younger people are beginning to air some English accents.

Sentiment gets few outings in Knockdry ; the man who is ready with a lump in his throat is looked on as having a weakness. Its inhabitants are unconscious of the poetry of life, but I always think they look effective when on summer days they walk leisurely within their low-walled gardens, or saunter up the hill-road in the evening, with the sunset sheen slanting around them on the heather. And as they move through the fields to the church on a bonnie Sabbath morning their figures gather a certain gentle picturesqueness that approaches the suggestion of a Higher Life and affects the heart strangely.

The Old Schoolhouse.

DOUCE Jamie Bremner and his wife Nellie lived in the old Schoolhouse. I lodged with them when a boy. They were observable only for the undisturbed, I may say beautiful, evenness of their lives. Their daily experience was as simple and as great as the sliding burn that crooned serenely by the end of the house.

The old Schoolhouse is a whitewashed building which (as its name affirms) did duty as a school in earlier times. It is an average Knockdry house, and on this account I will venture to show a photograph of it.

To the left, on entering, was what visitors

would expect me to call the dairy. On a flagstone table stood one or two basins of milk, calm and peaceful-like. The spaces around were relieved by grouping implements—a scythe, rake, pick, spade, and other instruments necessary to the wellbeing of the croft. A pair of rusty tin scales for weighing butter bulged largely in the window. On the whitewashed walls, onions (tied up in pieces of herring net) depended, side by side with mole traps and rabbit skins. Spiders grew fat and lazy in undisturbed possession of their corners. No dreams of eviction ever tempered their daring. Ah, the cosey sunshine that leaked in at that cobwebbed window!

To the right was the kitchen, which was also dining-room, sitting-room, and bedroom for Jamie and Nellie. No pictures ventured to question the simplicity of the walls; no clock beat the time—the hearthstone was the only clock. By the position of the sun's shadow thereon the time was reckoned, and never falsely. A box-bed of impressive authority tenanted the corner behind the

door. On its top were accommodated the Sabbath boots, Nellie's bandbox with her scooped bonnet, parcels of wool, and a bewildering compilation of domestic concerns. On "the dresser" lay prominently the Family Bible and Fleetwood's "Life of Christ," both ripe with pictures which were my main study when the blind was lowered and the candle (cast in our own mould) was passed from the mantelpiece to the table. Coiled strings and cords hung on a nail in the chimney side, and strips of twisted paper lay ready for lighting on the mantel. In the window two or three geraniums blushed red to the sunlight. Jamie held worship night and morning here. Often I lifted my head during morning worship to look at the kneeling figures in the sunshine, and I wondered if I should ever behold a more sublime spectacle. I never have. Their youth exhausted, their children flung far afield, poor in this world's gear too, yet going bravely and uncomplainingly on to the finish of life, heartening each other by faith and prayer! The sunshine did well to fall on

them as they knelt—fair sign of that Light in which they walked.

Then there was "the room." It was embellished by no carpet—sheepskins only, dropped here and there about the floor with an adroitness full of significance, and which proved Nellie's managing qualities. The fireplace in summer was dressed in heather and queen of the meadow; in winter, warm peat fires beamed humanely out of it. Two plump vases on the mantelpiece encircled a selection of ripened corn and dried "everlastings." An anquished print of John Knox looming overhead hung out from the wall in a threatening way. The style gave added grimness to the hard face. Beneath it a line of seagulls' eggs was stretched. Only two other pictures—photographs of Jamie and Nellie when they were married—opposed the Knox supremacy. These were heavily framed in black, with sprigs of ivy—touches of poetry peeping out of humble lives—pushed through the ring which kept them to the nail. A square winged table in the centre of the floor took charge of the

room; and a chair with black painted bottom was pushed under either edge of it. Another occupied the uncurtained casement of the window. On this table, planted at the four corners, were Orr's Penny Almanack, a catalogue of seeds, the "History of Blue-beard," and the "Death of Cock Robin"—the latter antique and hand-coloured, which had belonged to the children. Close to the wall, by the bed, a deep chest, with "shottles," accepted the responsibility of a wardrobe. Near the door, in the corner formed by the end of the bed, was a spinning wheel. The "Flying Scotchman" never sped with such fury as did that innocent wheel—but unknown to Nellie. Honeysuckle edged the entire window on the sun side, and flowered the panes; and when Nellie lifted the sash in the summer morning the scent leavened the room. I have never seen the sunshine so bright and so bonnie as I saw it then—flaming through that little window, fluttering on the wall of the room, and mixing itself with the expectant imaginations of my youthful mind. Does not life

gather much of its sadness from the thought that we shall never again see the sunlight and the summer with childhood's eyes? I remember the night that John Bain sat in that window. Love-crossed, he had left his native place. After years of absence he received a letter, purporting to come from the young woman who had rejected his affections, calling him home and appointing an hour for his visit. He came joyously back, and went to the house. It was a hoax: some one had cruelly played with him. He put up at our house, as his father had removed to another locality. I remember how white and grand his face was that night when he came in from his visit. I never saw anything so great and overcoming. It was calm and set; but, oh, the exceeding whiteness of it! Never shall I see so august, so thrilling a sight again. It was life and death meeting, and melting into one. He was to sleep with me. Towards midnight I awoke and saw him sitting at the window, mezzotyped in the shadows of the summer night. I was afraid to speak to

him. I believe he sat there looking out at the stars all the night. At daybreak he remained in the room by himself a while. Then he came into the kitchen. Standing by the window, he looked quietly all around him, and went out. When I stepped to the room I saw marks of his elbows on the bed as if he had been praying. He walked calmly to the house formerly occupied by his father and asked a drink, then requested that he might be allowed to sit in the kitchen for a minute. The new tenant afterwards said that the look of John Bain's face that day was like an angel's. At nightfall Geordie Barnetson found his hat, with his watch and purse in it, on the braehead. Far down in its quiet depths the sleek tide hid his sorrow. The chill sea cooled his fever, and gave his heart rest. In my dreams I saw that dimmed face, undisturbed and majestic—and, oh, so deep down !—looking up through the darkening water, and veiled by the swaying tangles.

A low-dyked garden, flanked by a peat-stack fortress, warded the house in front.

Stray daisies, interlaced with sweet-william and buckiefaulis, lined the roadie which ran up the centre to the door. Other flowers there were none. Cabbage, leeks, carrots, onions, and strawberries claimed main notice, while blackberry bushes modestly hung in the shelter of the dykes. Out over, the ocean spread—its tireless waves climbing up the steep face and falling back again, like the hopes and fears of a lover's heart. Hundreds of fishing boats in the summer months freckled the vast surface ; and when eventide came down, and the boats hung out their swinging lights, the whole was fairy-like and uncanny. As I sat on the garden dyke in reverie, watching the unsteady lights swing in the darkening, they seemed to me the uncertain dreams of future days. And they swing there yet, though some of them have floated off into dimness, and eventide draws still nearer the dark.

Strange voices are heard in the old Scholhouse now. Jamie and Nellie grew sore weary. A deep sleep fell on them, and

kindly hands carried them to bed in the waiting graveyard up on the rifted rock. There they slumber restfully to the mourning of the painéd tide and the lone wail of the ranging seagull.

Kirsty Cormack's Wedding.

JESSAG SHEARER avows that Kirsty Cormack's wedding was the last in Knockdry; that anything which has occurred in that line since is not worthy the name. She affirms that marriage was never a failure in the old-fashioned times; for if a woman chanced to get a questionable husband, the thought of her wedding night was enough to keep up her spirits to the end of her life.

The feet-washing night led the way. Kirsty was sought after by the bridesmaids, and was finally discovered hiding behind her mother's clothes-press—to wit, the usual trunk, with a "shottle" in each end. She was straightway dragged forth and fitted into a chair. Her shoes and hose were plucked off, and her feet plunged into a basin of

cold water. Sometimes this ceremony was attended with a touch of romantic gravity and feeling: but all appearances of this, in Kirsty's case, were driven away when Bellag Mackay knelt down, with soot in one hand and grease in the other, and "washed" the feet of the bride! This was the preface of the fun, which sped on till midnight.

The wedding came on the next day. Matters took shape with the arrival of the minister, a staid Established Church parson from Wick. The carriage which conveyed him was ornamented with four tin cans, obeying various lengths of string, which were adjusted to the rear by a band of mirthful youngsters. As the machine swung into Knockdry the cans bumped and plunged maliciously, as if conscious of their importance. The effect on the company was disastrous to their sober-mindedness; but Kirsty's father urged his face into order, levelled his hair with a rub of his palm, coughed, jerked up the collar of his coat, stepped forward, and gracefully bowed "His Reverence" in.

In "the room"—where stood the bed, with clean linen, turned-down blankets, and pillows hidden in hand-scolloped cases—the knot was tied. Here, too, the supper was attempted, about thirty couples looking radiant in a room never intended to embrace more than half that number. But the squeeze was delightful—to the young folks.

Then the promenade, without which no marriage then-a-days was a marriage. The married women's faces were framed in white caps with frilled edges, while the young women were bare-headed, their hair braided with flowers and ribbons, overtopped by a "bandoe." Shall I ever forget that bonnie moonlight night as, headed by a piper, we took our way in pairs to the grocery shop, a mile distant, to buy "conversation sweeties" —I, on edge with rapture, strutting it out between my grandfather and granny? And the moon shines calmly and quietly still on Knockdry, mocking my imagination; for it shines on the lone grass that hides many of those radiant faces—radiant no more!

Wicked Willag Young secretly purchased

a pistol for the occasion. He fired it off from behind a hedge without warning. The procession was jerked out of joint. Half the women wanted to faint, but couldn't manage it; the other half took laughing fits, which gave back balance to the company. All went smoothly until the green in front of the house was again reached. The piper was stepping it forth handsomely to the tune of "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch," when he plunged madly ahead, caught in a cord nimbly placed for his downfall by the boys. He landed on the bagpipes, which gave out sounds indescribable and fearfully upsetting. It is not lawful for a man to utter what the piper said when he got up. Encouraged by the "Hooch!" of the men, however, and spurred by the yells of the boys, he made the pipes skirl again, and led us right loyally up to the door.

It was here that one of the bridesmaids broke a bannock of oatmeal on the bride's head, and all the women scrambled for a piece to dream on.

In Sandy Cook's barn—lent for the occasion—Peter Sandison, our fiddler, sat upon an upturned barrel at one end of the building. Bags of potatoes were heaped up at the other, and thereon clustered the boys and girls of Knockdry, let in by the generosity of an unwritten law. Aloft, on the end beam behind Peter's head, assembled the hens of the farm, looking solemnly down with first this eye and then the other. Upon the floor the dancers mirthfully wrought out their figures. Now, what does young Alickie Sinclair do but lifts a potato and jerks it too truthfully at the hens. One of them bumped fearfully down on Peter's fiddle, filling the barn with vehement cries of affright. Peter received such a "gluff" that he dropped his fiddle and sprang clear in among the dancers, bringing the fat butcher down on the top of his floundering form.

Intervals for songs were frequent. Robbie Georgeson accoutred himself in an old overcoat and battered hat, and, with crooked stick in hand, sang "Fifty Years Ago" in

antique style. The only drawback was this —He had got to the line "What would our parents say to *that?*" and had struck his stick upon the floor energetically, looking round with solemn face to emphasise the word *that*, when one of the boys deftly "took" him in the eye with a quid of tobacco. He thereupon succumbed and hurried outside, remarks and yells from the boys raining after him. The fat butcher from the town attempted "O' a' the airts the win' can blaw," but, not having enough wind himself, gave in. Maggie Taylor was clamorously applauded for singing "What can a Young Lassie dae wi' an Auld Man?" As an encore she gave the "Auld Hoose" with such pathos and natural beauty as to hush the entire company. It was enriching to see how earnestly everybody passed from gay to grave in yielding to the power of the favourite song. Jessag Shearer, though a married woman, was put up for sale. The fat butcher acted as auctioneer, and he advertised her virtues in market language— "She's 'e foal o' a pure mither," he said, "an'

no an unwillin' bit beastie hersel'." His eloquence was vain ; no one wanted her. The auctioneer was in despair and nigh out of breath, when one of the boys cried " A bag o' taties for her!" She was promptly knocked down to him, Peter Sandison observing that the buyer might have got her at half the price if he had not speculated so rashly. Meanwhile, the purchaser, taking fright at his own success, slid down behind the bag of potatoes whereon he sat and hid himself. Jessag, however, dragged him forth, and laying him across her knee spanked him. Her compliments were delivered to the tune of "Within a mile o' Edinburgh Toon," which Peter in a swirl of inspiration had struck up at the moment. She finished with steady strokes as she chimed in—

" Na, na, it winna do ;
I canna, canna, winna, winna,
Mauna buckle to."

The next item was a recitation—" The Burial of Sir John Moore"—with original illustrations. The performance was know-

ingly grave, and (in the wording of the newspaper reporter) "it baffled description." The effect was irresistible. A key to the whole will be found in the first verse:—

"Not a drum was heard,

(Here the reciter marched across the floor pounding an imaginary drum.)

Not a funeral note,

(A trumpet was raised to his lips, which he blew with rising cheeks.)

As his corpse to the ramparts we hurried;

(Sir John Moore was hastily borne to his supposed grave.)

Not a soldier discharged

(A gun was loaded, rammed home with the old-fashioned rod.)

His farewell shot

(Here the gun was adjusted to the shoulder and fired.)

O'er the grave where our hero we buried."

(The grave was filled up with an alacrity

which made Johnnie Calder, the gravedigger, sweat to contemplate.)

Sir John Moore never had such justice done to him! It is impossible to make words live with the fit humour of the reciter. His contribution was received with great gusto. But the fun became furious when Bellag Mackay entered, cased in her father's herring fishing rig, viz., oilskin jacket, trousers, and sou'-wester, with heavy sea-boots. Welcomed with deafening cheers, she sat down on a chair in the centre of the floor. In imitation of a fisherman steering his boat in a gale, she placed a stout stick under her arm and grasped it firmly. She sang out her orders to the crew in real seamanlike behaviour, her chair the while careering in billow-driven style.

Thus moved the jovial hours, laden with fun and hilarity.

The fall of the curtain came with bedding-time. Kirsty was undressed and bedded by the ladies; then the gentlemen brought her husband ben, and presented him to her. Thereafter, the ladies returned, and the

entire company drank the health of the blushing lovers. Adam Craig, as being the oldest and steadiest hand, was deputed to blow out the candle and close the door after him.

Kirsty is a widow now, and her bonnie bridegroom lies chill in his winding sheet. Her father's house is roofless and windowless. I never pass it without tears.

How "Prayin' Markie" Tricked the Gauger.

THE exploits of Mr M'Mahon are inscribed in gilded letters on the ledger leaves of the Excise Office for the Parish of Wick. He is now "where the wicked cease from troubling" him. In his day, the shadow of him unloosed the reins of smugglers. One of our county histories says that "scarce a single case escaped his detection in the whole range of the county."

But Marcus Bruce was too much for him.

Marcus—now very frail—is known among us as "Prayin' Markie," by virtue of the fact that he is very devout when drunk—and

only then. He is the most callous and hardened man in Knockdry, yet under the unmooring of liquor his soul goes forth in prayers more than Apostolic. When he comes home from Wick well "sprung," his religious bearing is so pronounced that he protests against going to bed until he has taken the Book. On the way, he may sometimes be spied sitting humbly by the ditchside and crooning over the 1st Psalm (memorized at school), the tears tumbling fast down his face the while.

Only once did Markie pray when he was sober.

Beyond Knockdry southward the coast stoops low to the shore for a short distance. There is here, between two outstanding rocks, a small rounded beach, now shingle, but which was formerly covered by sand. At that time Markie occupied a house (long since in ruins) whose end window overlooked this bow of sand. Markie advanced the beach to the full dignity of a storehouse, having within it his utensils, and the many

kegs of liquor which he afterwards smuggled into the county.

About daybreak on the memorable day, Markie had sunk several firmly-hooped kegs in his favourite spot. He levelled it with pawkie care, as was his wont, then left the tide to complete the deception. He chuckled as he ascended the brae.

Breakfast by, Markie stood in the end window eyeing the up-coming tide. It had not yet befriended him. He was disturbed by his wife crying ben to him that two gentlemen on horseback had turned down the road to the house. A steady inspection brought Markie the conviction that they were the exciseman and his attendant. Mr M'Mahon had never spoken to Markie, but the business of his visit was at once understood. Ordering his wife Jamesina to prepare another breakfast without delay, and to assist him in tricking the gauger, Markie picked up a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress" (formerly owned by his father, and which caught his eye at the minute) and hurried into the garden at the back of the house.

Mr M'Mahon advanced to the door and knocked. It was slowly opened. Jamesina peered out from behind its edge, and asked him coolly and wonderingly what his pleasure might be.

"Is Mr Bruce at home?"

"Ay. He's oot in 'e gairden. Wull I tell him ye're wantin' him, or wull ye jist gang oot an' see him yersel'?"

Thinking that to send for him might give his victim time to ask questions, and thus to fortify himself, the exciseman said he would walk out and see Mr Bruce. He dismounted, and handed the reins to his attendant.

Markie sat gravely and leisurely reading his book, on an upturned washing-tub, with spectacles astride his nose. His air was that of a man who might be a souvenir of some sacred clime, and who breathed an atmosphere calmer than did the victims of a wicked and restless world. He looked steadily over his spectacles with an amazed cast on his countenance as the stranger strode up the narrow walk.

"Nice morning, my man!"

"It is 'at, sir. I wis jist sittin' here in 'e sunshine, till ma breakfast wud be ready, readin' a bit o' godly John Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress'—a hert-searchin' book, sir. Noo,"—closing the book, taking off his spectacles, and looking up—"fat wis ye wantin' o' me, if ye please?"

Mr M'Mahon, albeit a cunning and astute officer, was unmanned. Markie's movement was so assured and natural that his suspicions received a furious shaking. But he put on a bold front. "I regret exceedingly to trouble you, my good friend, but—ah—I must request you to show me over your premises, concealing nothing."

"Show ye ower 'e premises?" repeated the astonished Markie. "If ye please, sir, fa may be ye? An' forby, fat's yer business, if it's no ill-bred till ask?"

"Well, I am Mr M'Mahon, the exciseman, and the fact is—ah—some information has been lodged with me to the effect—ah—that you occasionally manufacture or receive contraband goods. These reports may, of course, be false, but—ah—fidelity to duty

will not allow me to overlook them. Now—ah—I will thank you to accompany" ——

"Oh, certainly, certainly; nae honest man wud think less o' ye for doin' yer duty—fan ye get paid for't. Come in, sir"—rising. "Bit"—looking up at the exciseman's face—"I'm no flattered wi' yer veesit—I maun tell ye straicht."

"Markie, yer breakfast's ready!" sang out Jamesina from the backdoor.

"Fash tak' ye an' yer breakfast! I canna min' it jist noo." Then to Mr M'Mahon, "I'll obleege ye first, sir; 'at I wull." A pause. "Bit, sir, maybe ye an' yer man, puir chiel', wud tak' a moothfu' o' milk efter yer lang ride fae Wick?"

Mr M'Mahon politely declined.

"'Is porridge o' yers 'll be spoilt if ye dinna tak' it at aince! It's caul' enouch already!" roared Jamesina. The truth was that she had flung a handful or two of oatmeal into some hot water and was cooling it by floating the bowl in a pail.

"Mercy on us, Jameseena," protested Markie, "ye'll plague 'e life oot o' me wi'

yer porridge! Did I no tell ye 'at I wudna tak' it ev-e-noo (just now)?"

"Ay, bit ye wull, though, or ye'll hear aboot it on 'e deafest side o' yer head!"

Markie to the exciseman, in a low voice—"Did ye ever hear a tongue lek 'at, sir? Fat wud ye do wi' a targe lek her, sir, if ye hed her? Noo, I maun min' her, sir, or she'll no gie us peace till gang aboot wir bisness. I maun humour her, sir, wi' yer permission. I'll no hear 'e end o't for a month if I slicht *her* for onybody on earth."

"Oh, well—ah—that won't keep us long. I—ah—daresay you will more readily—give me the time and—ah—attention I require, after—you have breakfasted."

They enter. Markie favours the exciseman with a chair, slyly reserving the one in the end window for himself. The tide, he observes with a glance, is creeping up, but has not yet hidden the tragedy of the beach.

"Jameseena, bring 'is gentleman a gless o' milk till drink, wi' a bit o' cake an' cheese."

Mr M'Mahon was getting into shape to

decline again, but Markie forestalled him with—

"Hoot awa', sir! I carena if ye cam' till *hang* me; oot o' ma hoose ye'll no gang withoot some sign o' ceveelity an' goodwill on my pairt."

Markie opened with a solemn grace—a snatch of one of his prayers—slowly delivered. Notwithstanding Jamesina's acquaintance with Markie's drunken devotions, he fairly astonished her; and she could not help thinking to herself how fit and clever her man was.

Markie threw an occasional glance—done with deft carelessness—towards the beach. How tardily rose that tide!

Breakfast was spun out as ingeniously as Markie could manage, yet the tell-tale spot was barely hidden. He must prolong his stratagem. But how?

With a low and humble cough, and a mild look at the exciseman, Markie began—"If ye please, sir, it's wir habit in 'is hoose till hev femily worship efter breakfast, an' if ye dinna objeck we'll no brak 'e rule 'is

mornin'. We wudna be beginnin' 'e day weel if we missed it."

Mr M'Mahon was troubled, and muttered "Botheration!" Markie, however, was already turning over the leaves of his Bible. He gave out the 1st Psalm to be sung; but bethinking him of the exciseman's Scriptureless condition, he ordered Jamesina to bring another Bible. Mr M'Mahon declared that there was no need to trouble; but Markie insisted upon being courteous. While Jamesina searched for the Bible which had never been in the house, Markie rejoiced in spirit.

When Jamesina went ben the house she buried her face in the pillows and laughed like to end herself at Markie's brilliant idea of holding family worship. Upon her return with the sorrowful information that she could not find another book, Markie gallantly announced that he would "read the line" for the sake of their visitor, and thus overcome the difficulty! The first Psalm was again given out, Markie observing that as it was a beautiful song it would be unbecoming to

lop off any verses in worldly haste. Then to the tune of "Martyrdom" (learnt at his father's fireside, and now selected with a meaning) Markie led off—

> "That man hath perfect blessedness
> Who walketh not astray
> In counsel of ungodly men,
> Nor stands in sinners' way."—&c.

The singing laboriously accomplished, Markie stumbled through the first chapter of Genesis, being (like his favourite 1st Psalm) most easily found. Thereafter he asked the stranger, according to our habit in Knockdry, to lead their devotions; but Mr M'Mahon did not appreciate the prospect of the undertaking. Markie, therefore, with impressive ease, addressed himself to the task, taking care, as he turned to kneel, to place himself so that he might set his eye on the tide as he prayed. It had almost covered the storehouse!

Markie's supplication was made on behalf of all mankind—the Jews coming in for the first place, then the heathen (including Chinamen, Indians, Spaniards, and a collec-

tion of others, all specially detailed), after whom followed kings, rulers, and all public servants, with soldiers, sailors, policemen, and excisemen thrown in. Every class he could think of was honoured with a place in his pleadings, while through his fingers he gaily eyed the widening rim of the ocean. With joy he saw a wavelet touch the ultimate edge of the blot on the sands. Then he gravely wound his devotions to a close.

Markie now announced himself ready to accompany the exciseman over his premises ; but that gentleman, for some reason, had lost his zest for the search, and said he would call another day. "Na, na, sir," replied Markie, with swelling dignity, "ye have suspeckit ma hoose, an' I'll see 'at ye search it afore ye gang awa', tak' my word for 'at. An honest man canna affoord till hev his name under suspeecion. Search, sir, search ; an' satisfy yersel' an' me."

Beds and presses were ransacked, but yielded nothing. The exciseman protested that he would go no further. Rejoining his

attendant (who was out of all patience), he rode off.

Markie bore him company to the end of the roadie in front of the house. As he turned to re-enter the door, he lifted his eyes unconcernedly to the clouds—first this side, then that—as if thinking only of the weather on the morrow. Once inside, he yelled out excitedly, "Jameseena, bring 'e bottle! Mak' haste!"

Jamesina drew a brick out of the back of the chimney—well up—and handed a bottle to him promptly. Standing safely within the shade of the doorway, Markie eagerly filled out a glass of genuine smuggled whisky. Holding it out at arm's length, as he peered after the dwindling figure of the exciseman, he cried—

"Here's till ye, ma man!"

A Dying Genius.

"ERICIE 's a lekable bit boyagie," was how Eric Harper's mother proclaimed her love for him.

She was a study. Commanded by an untamed, superstitious nature, her mind let loose many ghostly and lurid fancies. To her, dreams were revelations. She read significance into the shape and colour of the clouds. As she sat on her doorstep in the summer sunset, immersed in cogitating the skies, she took on an uncanny picturesqueness of figure. Her reading spread only to tales and stories—her main stand-by being Wilson's "Tales of the Borders," an old copy of which had somehow stolen into the house.

Eric was her favourite. She sanctioned him everything but education. "Fowks 'at ken ower muckle are no till be trusted; they're no canny," was her barbarous creed. She sorted out his questions as far as she could—and they were many and singular—and she read the "Tales" to him unweariedly. But here his education was suspended.

This boy was novel and unfamiliar. He loved stillness and remoteness. Often he stole into the hills, outside human ken—there to lie down on the heather and revel in the soft influences of the easy, wondrous clouds that moved so greatly overhead. Only nightfall thawed the spell.

When the days were rainy, he hung moodily at the end of the house, or stood in the barn door staring at the matted ground and trailing his eyes ponderingly over the drizzled landscape. A wet, saddened outlook had a power over him reaching almost to the miraculous. A showery day was an incident in his life. He would stand in the

shelter of some nook and watch it until disturbed by his mother calling out, "Good glory, boyagie! fat div ye mean by bidin' oot in sich rashin' rain?"

Eric's father was a dull, lumbering man, full of a logic all his own. He had little sympathy with the odd, growing lad. "His mind's aye itherwheres fan it should be here," he said. He was not without provocation, however, for some days Eric rebelled, and would not work. He set out for the rocks. Here he was wont to lengthen himself on a crag, with his face over its perpendicular edge, and peer long into the deep, tragic waters. I am sure he felt that there was a message in that mysterious sea to his unravelled nature. I met him one day returning from this indulgence. He was crying. "What ails you, Eric?" I asked. "I dinna ken, bit I feel lonesome."

I determined to grant Eric what furtherances I could. He had taught himself to read, and was deep in Wilson's "Tales." I encouraged him in reading, and also gave him writing lessons. He came forward

rapidly. I was convinced of his uncommon qualities, and gave him a volume or two of the poets. His mother stormed; but I was resolved.

Eric hesitated, and drew breath. He had entered a new clime, and "moved among surprises." New thoughts sprung upon him as he read. He frequently assured me that such unheard-of notions scrambled into his brain as no fantastic dream could outdo. His heart, he said "sobbed" as these visions surprised him. But he could not apprehend them. They were a mob, a wrestling crowd —not a regiment, drilled to march at his command. He had a soul—and, I believe, a daring, venturesome soul—but it was tied. He could not slacken the cords and give it room; but as he progressed in his reading he felt that liberty was coming. *Coming;* but never to *come.*

A serious accident overthrew my pupil. When, after a dreary illness, it came upon him that he might not recover, he bethought him of some stealthy yet effective way of revealing the secret to his mother. That

capricious creature, it was plain, was not thinking of such a termination to Eric's illness. She had dreamt, it is true, that she saw him struggling in water, but *that* she fancied to signify his illness, and not the river of Jordan.

One afternoon, as she sat on the doorstep, he called her in.

"Ye micht read a bit o' somethin' till me 'e day, mither; I'm no verra fit for it masel'."

"Fat'll I read ye, Ericie?—a story?"

"Ay, efter a wee; bit no a story first, mither. I was thinkin' ye micht read me a bit o' 'e Bible for a change."

She looked at him. Eric thought she already gripped his secret; but she procured a Bible, dusted it with her apron, and sat down close to his bed.

"Ye're fond o' readin' bits o' poetry, mither, an' so am I. Read me some o' 'e Psalms or Paraphrases. Oh, I'll tell ye fat we'll do! We'll begin at 'e end, wi' 'e hymns, an' read backward. Read me 'e hinmost hymn."

She turned over to the last of the hymns included in the psalmody attached to our Bibles in Scotland. Having "found the place," she began—

"The hour of my departure's come,
I hear the voice that calls me home;
At last, O Lord, let troubles cease,
And let Thy servant die in peace.

"Not in mine innocence I trust;
I bow before Thee in the dust,
And, through my Saviour's blood alone,
I look for mercy at Thy throne.

"I leave the world without a tear,
Save for the friends I hold so dear;
To heal their sorrows, Lord, descend,
And to the friendless prove a friend.

"I come, I come, at Thy command,
I give my spirit to Thy hand;
Stretch forth Thine everlasting arms
And shield me in"———

With a swift movement she closed the Book and flew into frenzied weeping. The terrible truth had sped into her dull, unsuspecting mind. She was clean overthrown.

Eric was stunned with the success of his

plan. "Dinna skirl (cry), mither; dinna skirl! God 'll dicht yer tears wi' His ain hankie—dinna skirl!"

She wiped her eyes and sat up, but not in obedience to the call of Eric. No; she was whirling out in the embrace of a swift torrent of rude fancy, far beyond his voice. She began to speak, her eyes fixed on the floor. "A grave! Damp—weet (wet)—caul'!" She shivered. "Eyeholes far his eyes used till be! Banes! Earth! Worms!" Again a shudder came upon her. "Broken skin—ugh!"

Eric looked at her in wonder and fear.

She started from her reverie. Turning to the bed and laying her head on the pillow beside Eric's, she said, "Ericie, my ain kind boyagie, I canna pairt wi' ye! Oh, I'll miss ye sair, sair! If ye're goin' till die, I wud lek till keep yer corp in 'e hoose aside me; I canna thole 'e thocht o' earth lyin' on' 'e kind face o' ma boyagie."

Shortly before Eric's death, I spent part of an evening with him. He spoke much,

but ever of one theme—his belief that, if he were spared, he would become famous, and draw honour to Knockdry.

"Oh, I'm sair vexed till die! It's 'e Lord's wull—maybe; but I ken it's no mine. If He wud bit spare me! I hev it in me, sir—I hev it in me! If I got ither twa-three years, I'd get it oot o' me—get it oot o' me, come time. There's aye hoverin' aroon' ma mind a big, sweemin' warld o' queer whirlin's and surgin's—a warld I wud some day enter an' tell o'; I'm sure I wud. I'm certain, sir, 'at 'e movin' an' auld-farran' fancies 'at brak ower ma mind, lek waves on 'e shore, never stirred in onybody afore. If I hed been edicated fan I wis a bairn I wud hev deen (done) somethin' by noo till prove 'at there's queer notions caged up in me, waitin' 'e openin' o' 'e door. Oh, sir, there's an' awfu' getherin' o' livin' ghosts inside ma brain, fechtin' till get oot an' tak' shape till themsel's; an' yet they seem bun (bound) an' hadden (held) doon wi' somethin', an' somehoo I canna gie them freedom. Oh, I wish I could *tell* ye fat I feel! Gin (if) I

hed mair trainin', sir, I'd gie them ootlet, come time ; bit noo"———

And poor Eric broke down.

When he felt that he was dying, he sent for me. I found him in Borderland. "I'm gled ye've come, sir. I've aye wondered fat lek dyin' wis ; an' I hev mair nor aince wished till die, jist for 'e sake o' 'e experience. An' noo I'm dyin'—in richt earnest. Tak' in 'e table till ma bedside—close up forenent (in front of) me, if ye please, sir. Noo, gie me a sheet o' paper an' a pencil, an' I'll write doon fat I see an' hear as I swing awa till Eternity."

I was strangely moved as he uttered his weird request—so coolly, too. I suppose I must have betrayed my feelings, for he said, "Ye needna be alairmed, sir. I hev nae fear. Nae ill shall befa' them 'at believe in God. He's wi' me, I dootna (doubt not) ; ay, He's wi' us a', I believe, in a sense we dinna dream o'."

The table was placed close to his bed. He lifted the pencil.

"Good-bye, everybody!" He spoke rapidly, as if eager to avoid a scene with his father and mother. "Dinna speak till me any more."

He lay for almost an hour motionless, as if asleep. I was beginning to think that his strange request was one of Nature's last freaks, and that he would not write anything, but I was mistaken.

Deliberately he wrote the solitary word "Dim"; then, in a moment or too, "Far off." I shifted the paper so as to keep a white space under the pencil. His parents were spellbound, gazing abstractedly at the young face, so solemn and commanding. After a considerable pause he added, "Sinking. Worlds. Darkness." These words were written slowly and separately. Immediately following them, in haste, came, "Floating along." *Along* was written heavily, as if for emphasis. In a moment, the one word "Dark." Quickly thereafter, with slight agitation, the pencil moved :— "Melting. Opening. Opening *out*." A pause. "Falling down"—a hesitancy—

"through light." A very long suspense intervened before the pencil moved again—feebly, and, as it proved, for the last time. Very slowly—"Stars an'"—— The pencil stopped. Within half-an-hour Eric passed into freedom. At the close he was unconscious. He raved of the hills and of the sea, and talked to the winds and the clouds.

I took the sheet of paper and put it in my pocket-book; and I was about to remove the pencil from the lifeless fingers when Eric's mother stopped me. "Dinna touch it! It was hardly ever oot o' his han' fan he wis livin'. He'll no be lek himsel' withoot a bit pencil in his han'."

And thus, carrying in his hand the instrument with which he had chronicled the openings of his lone voyage, Eric was left amid the long grass of our solitary graveyard.

He was eleven years of age.

Sannagie.

A MAN'S import in Knockdry is advertised in the pronunciation of his name. Should he, for example, be named Alexander, he will be known either as Sanny, Sannag, or Sannagie. Sanny announces the man of some standing; Sannag is the revelation of a person of ordinary popularity; while Sannagie is the signboard for a nobody. By the same gradation physical impression is recognised. A tall, burly fellow is never called Sannag, but Sanny; one of medium height is Sannag; and a diminutive person is Sannagie. Thus, Donald becomes Danie, Danag, and Danagie; Sinclair degenerates into Sink and Sinkie; George glides into Geordag and Geordagie, &c.

When, therefore, it is let out that Alex-

ander Wares is spoken of as "Sannagie Wars," the reader is at once apprised of that gentleman's value, socially or physically. In Mr Wares' case the title is doubly designative. If a fuller sketch of him is demanded it may be read in the deliverance of Jessag* Shearer—"There's no muckle o' Sannagie, but he's an awfu' combination. He min's me o' a drawer wi' treacle, boot laces, tatties, nails, cookies, paraffin ile, an' cork-screws, a' thrown 'egither withoot bein' pit up in parcels. Oh, ay, there's a heap o' odds an' ends inside Sannagie's hide, bit, ochane! they're mixed most painfu'."

Notwithstanding Jessag's picturesque delineation of him, Sannagie reckons himself an organization of dignity and influence. He is mightily offended when any one hints

* Married women, as a rule, are known by their maiden names in Knockdry. Were a stranger to ask for Mrs Sutherland, no one would at once conclude that Jessag Shearer was meant. But Jessag is a married woman, and the mother of so many bairns that she says a visitor to the house on Sabbath morning would think she was holding a soiree. Jessag is the final authority among the ladies. She does not shine singly: her value lies in association with others.

that his stature might exclude him from the police force or the army. Were we to announce that he is *little*, he would be prostrated by palpitation. It will meet the exactions of justice and truth, therefore, if we frankly admit that Sannagie is taller than *some* people, without mentioning names.

Sannagie snuffs profoundly. A full snuff-box is, to him, an infallible means of grace. When he attends the church his "mull" lies beside his Bible on the bookboard. In his own emphatic language, "a sermon isna worth a bubble (spittle)" unless seasoned with—snuff.

He entertained a furious dislike to our minister when that gentleman came here. On this ground Sannagie frequently absented himself from the church services. One day the minister met him. "Why were you not at the church last Sabbath, Mr Wares? I notice that you are not a good attender. What do you do with yourself on Sabbath?" "Oh, I walk intil Wick till hear fat lek 'e

preachers may be in 'e toon." "Ah, my good friend, that wont do! You know that 'a rolling stone gathers no moss.'" "Jist so, Maister Simpson—*an' a tethered stirk disna get fat!* See noo!"—and Sannagie stood to hear the minister's reply to that crusher. But the minister has not recovered breath yet. Sannagie's dislike of Mr Simpson continued until he discovered that his reverence was a snuffer. And the discovery came about this-wise.

The minister and Sannagie—or perhaps I should say Sannagie and the minister—exchanged a few words in returning from Jimmagie Groat's funeral. The pastor drew forth his snuff-box and took a pinch, then handed it to Sannagie.

"Div ye snuff, Maister Simpson?" queried Sannagie, in surprise.

"Sometimes, Mr Wares."

"Weel, 'at's 'e first sign o' grace I've seen aboot ye! an' it proves ye till be a man o' ooncommon pairts."

"Indeed! How do you make that out, my good friend?"

"Hoo div I mak' it oot? Bless me, are ye a minister an' disna ken 'at 'e Book says a' 'e *snuffers* in 'e aul' Temple wis pure goold!"

Whether Sannagie meant this as a joke, or uttered it in ignorance of the nature of the snuffers, has never been decided. He affirms that it was a joke, and that he fashioned it himself; but nobody believes him. Anyhow, he and the minister were fast friends from that day until the event of Sannagie's second marriage. Mr Simpson thoughtlessly appeared at that august function in a soft hat. Sannagie never got over it.

And Sannagie wears a wig. How he came to lose his hair is no business of ours to investigate. It is more to our purpose to observe that he did not appreciate the attention of Providence in ordering its removal. He showed his determination not to submit by fixing a weedy thatch on his forlorn pow. If the dispensation was sent to train him in humility, it signally failed in its mission.

It will hardly be credited that, in face of this natural rebellion and depravity, Sannagie is a skilled theologian. So strangely inconsistent are great men! He prides himself on being more than familiar with all the points of the theological compass. He is never more delighted—threatening and amusing, too—than when deriding modern theology and theologians. "Fat's *in* 'is newfangled trash—tell me? Naethin' bit win'! Till think o't turns ma verra guts!" is his vehement and classic pronouncement. "Oh, ma sang, bit I wud lek till see some o' yer new college numskulls pitched till 'e lions! They wadna hae sae muckle use for their gran' airs then, I'm tellin' ye; they wad need somethin' stooter, an' wi' grit in't. Did yer new nonsense, tell me, ever open up a Red Sea an' droon an airmy? An airmy? It couldna droon a moose! A moose?—no, nor a flea! Ach!"—spitting energetically—"modern trash isna worth a bubble!"

Some years ago Sannagie's first wife died. As he and Robbagie Oag were coming away

from the graveyard, after consigning her remains to the dust, Sannagie edged close to Robbagie, linked arms with him, and said (very confidentially), "Weel, Robbie, it wis ye 'at recommended 'at wuman till me, an' a richt good wife did she mak'. *Div ye ken o' ony ither ane ye could recommend?*"

When it leaked out that Sannagie had asked this question before he was well clear of the graveyard gate, the women held a council meeting, under the presidency of Jessag Shearer. They resolved to "*warm* him." Babbie Doull was delegated to the task.

Sannagie is a tailor by trade, and works in the front room of his house. Thither the resolute deputy stepped.

"Weel, Mistress Dool, hoo are ye 'e day? I'm gled till see ye," remarked the undreaming Sannagie, as Babbie appeared.

"Ye're gled till see me, are ye, ye grave-stane-herted moniment (a contemptible creature). We'll see whether ye're gled till see me or no!"

"Babbie!"

"Sannagie!"

"Is there onything wrang, wuman?"

"Wrang? Ye uncircumcised an' mim-moothed sinner! Ay, there's something wrang; an' by ma sang bit ye'll hear it! Oh, ye—ye—ye—I dinna ken fat till ca' ye."

"Michty me, Babbie, dinna forget yersel'!"

"Nae fear o' me forgettin' *ye* onyway, ye bastard o' a maggad (maggot)! *Ye* wad gang an' ask for anither wife afore yer first ane wis caul' in 'e grun'! Oh, ye win'-bag! ye mushroom! ye — ye — generation o' vipers!"

The whereabouts of Babbie began to dawn upon her astounded victim, and he got into shape to defend himself.

"Preserve us a', Mistress Dool, wisna ma puir wife as dead's ever she'd be? An' wisna it 'e doin's o' Providence 'at ma aul' freen' wis ta'en awa? Shouldna we submit till 'e doin's o' Providence, an'"———

"Haud yer tongue, ye bletherin' paddag (frog). Did ye submit till 'e doin's o' Providence fan He sweept 'e hair aff yer

head, an' left ye wi' a croon as bare's a neep (turnip)? Na; ye went an' got 'at divad (divot) till patch up 'e doin's o' Providence. Bit, by ma sang, I'll"———and she deftly grabbed the wig an' flung it into the fire.

Sannagie sprang from his board like a tiger, but Babbie was out at the door before he had gathered himself up for the struggle. He hurried to the fire in hope of rescuing his wig, but he was too late; it was roasting and phizzing with provoking energy. As he stood pondering over the ruin of his head-gear the room darkened somewhat. He turned. There stood Babbie with her nose and tongue flattened against a pane of the window. Her attitude was a challenge, and Sannagie gripped a bundle of "purns" and hurled it ragefully at her. Babbie dodged the missile and laughed wickedly as it smashed through the glass. She lifted it and coolly held it in front of the broken pane. Peering in, she shouted, "I'll keep 'is threed, Sannagie, till sew yer linens (grave clothes) wi'; an' may it no be lang till I see ye in them!" She pocketed the

parcel with vexing composure, and, bidding Sannagie a hearty "By, by!" walked off in triumph. There was an afternoon tea in Jessag Shearer's house the next day, when Babbie gave in her report, and was fêted on her victorious expedition.

In spite of Babbie's onslaught, Sannagie married again. Indeed he confided to Peter Sandison, the fiddler, that he was now "mair determint on't than ever." It was at this protestant demonstration, as we have said, that the minister so grievously offended our hero. Mr Simpson is in the habit of wearing a tall silk hat alternately with a soft felt one, according to his fancy. Sannagie had a theory—unknown to the minister—that the dress hat was for high occasions, and the soft one for functions less important. And he appeared at *his* marriage in his soft hat! Putting the minister's action and Babbie's tonguing alongside of each other, Sannagie imagined that there was a dead set made against him in the congregation. Would he leave the church? *Him!* Not

for man or devil! He would show himself on his kirking-day in extra splendour, and defy anybody to "cheep."

The kirking-day was awaited with much curiosity. Babbie and Jessag planted themselves at the church gate to view Sannagie and his wife. As they passed in, Babbie observed to Jessag, "She's no ill-till please!" "Michty me, no," replied Jessag, "I wudna hev him for a claes-post!" Sannagie bit his lip and burned for revenge; but he smothered his wrath.

He was ornamented with a spang-new surtout coat, dress hat, patent leather shoes (where could he have got them?), lavender gloves, and a huge rose in his button-hole. The people stared. But they could not laugh; they thought "'e puir critter hed bidden good-bye till his wits." Unfortunately, he forgot his snuff-box in the excitement of setting out, and his uneasiness was alarming—so much so that Andrew Taylor, the beadle, got no good of the sermon through watching him lest he would go off his head. Andrew was relieved

when Sannagie was safely clear of the building.

Only on one other occasion did Sannagie resort to "full dress." As the elders at the plate saw him nearing, they instinctively concluded that something unusual had transpired. They observed, too, that he actually put a sixpence in the plate—conclusive demonstration that it was no ordinary day to Sannagie. They held a consultation. What could be the key of the mystery? "I'll tell ye fat it is, Andra," exclaimed David Georgeson, as a conviction hurried into his mind. "Sannagie's wife hesna been at 'e kirk for twa-three Sabbaths." "Ye hev it, David; ye hev it!" replied Andrew Taylor, with earnest satisfaction.

That day, Andrew propped himself in the pew at Sannagie's back. When the congregation got up to sing, he leant over and whispered, "Is't a lassagie, Sanny?" "It is!" replied Sannagie with pride. "An' is a' weel?" "A's weel!" was the prompt answer.

After the benediction had been pronounced, Sannagie turned to Andrew. "*She* prayed for a boyagie," he said, "bit *I* prayed for a lassagie; an'—an'—'e Almichty has answered prayer, ye see, Andra." "Ay; bit fat aboot 'e wife's prayer, Sanny?" Sannagie lifted his hat with energy and turned to leave, whispering forcibly in Andrew's ear as he passed, "Misguided wuman!"

Redemption of Faust: New Style.

A VISITOR to Knockdry some years ago would fall in with a dwindled man of whitened hair and face suffused by warm earnestness. The wanting figure would edge shyly up to him and whisper, "Mind, neebour, ye hev till die! We must a' die. Ye kent Davie Simpson, ma school-chum? Weel, *he's* dead. An' Danie Williamson's dead; an' I'll soon be dead—an' ye. Oh, be ready, freend, be ready! An' dinna forget till be kind, for we're no till be long here." The voice carried a musical pathos in it; the face swam in sweet feeling; the attitude was modest and rich in pleading. A kindly, benevolent soul looked out at the serious eyes. This was Sammy

Cameron. He spoke as one alive from the dead—raised out of a buried Past.

His place now knows him no more. When he died Knockdry lost a Prophet-Influence.

I do not write to sketch the man, but to tell the history of his soul and its unexampled illumination.

I.—The Unhinging.

No more untethered sin-server has saddened the good people of Knockdry than Sam Cameron. He had a genius for devilry. Founder and chief of "The Cold Iron Club"—a collection of five young spirits, banded for deeds of bravado—he recognised no fear. But his history in this character, and that of his club, came to a wind-up together.

It was resolved, as a specimen of limitless abandonment, to have rough carnival in the vault of an ancient and extinct family. The vault is situated about the centre of a

neighbouring graveyard, and is surrounded by the walls of an old church—now known as "The Dead House," by containing a shed for the reception of drowned sailors. Otherwise, the enclosure is open to the sky. No interments have taken place here this many a year. The mouth of the gloomy vault is hidden by a weighty stone, laid level with the ground. Within, skulls glare all around. Along the walls are huddled the clammy shapes of mouldering skeletons. The wet forms of coffins shrink outlined in the mud to which they have decayed. Sweaty walls and damp floor and dripping roof give added gruesomeness to these.

Thither on a howling wintry midnight Sam Cameron led his extravagants. They had with them an empty soap box, some candles, and two or three bottles of whisky. They overwent the graveyard wall in silence and searched their way through the lengthening grasses and disorderly gravestones. Only once on their way they stopped—at the entrance-door of another vault, where, loudly rapping, they called upon the

slumbering inmates to awaken and come out for a spree.

They prized the door of "The Dead House," then passed into its deeper darkness and raised the heavy stone covering of the vault entrance. Creeping down the thickly-mudded steps—headed by Sam—they arrived at the scene of rendezvous, and death.

The box is fixed as table in the centre of the floor, and on it the whisky bottles are ranged. Candles are lit, and, with a falling drip of their melted wax, stuck to skulls which are lifted on to the box. Sam lights three or four and fastens them with wet earth to the brows of as many skeletons. As he adjusts the last one, he mutters with a laugh, "There now, ma bonnie cronies, we'll pit licht in yer aul' brain-boxes yet!"

The light steals up the dripping stairway, as if escaping from the scene. It oozes out into the neighbouring darkness and spreads drearily on "The Dead House" wall. Loud howls the wind, weirdly and in wailing. Now it cries madly around the lonesome

walls, and then drifts off sulkily in the distance—like an attacking army thundering at the gates of a city, then falling back to summon new vigour for another assault. "The Dead House" door swings screechingly in the wind currents—at one moment, banged wrathfully back against the wall; at another, sucked-to with a jerk which throws a booming echo round the doleful enclosure.

Now jests and songs go free and quick. Bottles are opened, and the health of each solemn skeleton is drunk in hilarious mockery. Sam Cameron picks up a gaping skull. Pouring some whisky into the yawning cavity of its mouth, he starts singing—

> "And surely ye'll be your pint-stoup,
> And surely I'll be mine;
> And we'll tak' a richt good willy-waucht,
> For the days o' auld langsyne,"

then drops the skull, and kicks it rattling against the wall.

The programme has run out—and the whisky. See, then, the revellers—Sam excepted—crawling up the mud-mantled steps,

and staggering, with many a bruise, amid the varying gravestones. Assisted by the darkness, they forget their leader.

Sam sits deeply dozing on a stone in the vault. The candles are sputtering out, jerking gaunt shadows on wall and stairway. Darkness moves again into its disturbed supremacy. Deeper and deeper comes on the slumber of the living occupant —deeper, deeper still, until he crumbles from his seat and falls beside a mouldy skeleton.

Dreams frequent the sleeper's sleep. At last, he is in Hell. Skeleton-devils spurt up all around him. They point blazing fingers at him and laugh. Passing from daze to understanding, he flings himself at them. The tomby figures let him hit them, and then his hands fall a-bleeding against the hard bones. Enraged, he is about to shriek, when the devil appears. He comes *to* him—oh, so close! "I've come for you at last, sir," he says, coolly, whereupon countless skeletons float about their victim and clutch him terribly. How their fingers burn into the

bone! They carry him down, down—he, struggling, praying, cursing, shrieking, and———.

Morning comes on calmly. Weak touches of light venture down the darksome vault and show the sleeper, cold and sodden, in the act of opening his eyes. He sees first, glimmeringly, as if in the same bed with him, a chill and grim skeleton lying with its cheek bone up against his face. A wild feeling bursts within him and wakens him further. For a moment only he takes his gaze off that hideous thing beside him; but in that flash he sees other skeletons and skulls lying duskily in the dying darkness. Is his dream a reality, then? Is he still in the body? Must this be the kingdom of spirits? Sweaty dews break throughout his skin. Realization comes like an inspiration; then, with one mad spring, he mounts to his feet and shoots upward through the opening as an arrow.

Breathless, trembling, the colour of earth, Sam Cameron reaches his father's house. Hurriedly rapping, he hastens in. Not a

word speaks he, but straightway goes to bed.

For many days Sam flung about in fever. When he overcame that, his hair was whitened and his reason was disturbed. From that time until the darkie appeared to him in the bay—some years after—Sam was a strange, harmless half-wit. And the neighbours softened "Sam" into "Sammy."

II.—Devil Cut Devil.

Out in front of Knockdry harbour—his face to the North Sea, and his back to the land—Sammy sat in a small boat, fishing.

In the harbour lay a schooner, newly arrived with a cargo of salt. A darkie was among the crew—a young, lithe fellow, with hair and skin as dark as ink, and eyes shiney with tropical suns. He was a rare swimmer, and often dived from the vessel's bowsprit or dropped off her yard-arm.

Observing Sammy lost in fishing, the darkie thought of playing him a trick—a

trick he had played on others in several ports. Slipping over the schooner's side, he floated cautiously towards Sammy's boat. Nearing, he dived and glided to the other side. Seizing Sammy's bait deep under water, he agitated the line by a few vigorous tugs. Sammy hauled-in with wary haste and hot anxiety. He had, it was clear, hooked a fish which would enable him to polish off the wonderful fishing stories told in Mansie the joiner's. He peered anxiously into the water as he hurried in the line. Then up shot a black dripping face, and black hands laid hold of the boat's gunwale. "I've come for ye at last!" roared the would-be devil, with a chuckle, then slid into the water again and went down to his home. Sammy fell heavily in the bottom of the boat as one cleft by a club. When he came-to, no black face was to be seen—only an unruffled stretch of water. But he recalled his dream in the vault years ago, and his brain flamed.

I do not attempt to explain the fact—I only state it. That fright almost undid the effects of the vault scare. Sammy was

greatly righted; and more, he took on a serious cast of thought, with this abiding peculiarity—he conceived it his mission to speak kindly to all about the approach of death. And so, when he entered the smiddy, or looked in on the group in Mansie the joiner's, he did not leave before saying, "Weel, chaps, mind 'at ye hev till die. We must a' die. Davie Simpson's dead, an' Danie Williamson's dead, an' I'll soon be dead, an' ye. Oh, be ready, chaps, be ready! An' dinna forget till be kind, for we're no till be lang here."

Jean.

JEAN is the village saint.

She is indescribable. No art could reproduce her. The sense of depth and far-offness in her eye—keeping you distant from her and making you feel in the presence of mystery—was never seen on canvas. Within, a lustrous fire moves. There is no escape from her look—floating out there so calmly and consciously from behind those white, milky lashes, like a sun-caught streamlet coming from out its girding rushes.

Her face is faded and unattractive, save for its ease and the grace of giving out every inward impression. Nothing fine heightens it, yet everybody thinks Jean's face bonnie. Something not to be caught in language hovers over it, giving it an indefinable but

conscious sweetness, as a ruffled hillside, softened by the sloping sunset, sometimes takes on an air of tenderness.

Jean's movements are pretty. When she walks about the house her figure throws off soft influences, and her step makes the listener think of restfulness. A sore heart finds soothing in her presence. The mind moves willingly towards sweet thoughts at her bidding. No sadness or false sentimentalism dims her—she is sunshine translated into life. Goodness never had a kindlier dwelling-place. She is Knockdry's heart.

Nearly all the lads and lasses, when the time comes to leave Knockdry behind, visit Jean to say "Good-bye." It is felt that she has weight with Heaven. Reckless young fellows have been known to steal shyly to her house in the darkening; and knees have bent there that never bent before. She prays with such callers, and gives each a trinket to keep them in mind of Knockdry. When young Geordie Forbes 'listed and had to join his regiment, Jean

took a little piece of rounded silk from the back of her dead father's watch-cases and gave it to him. On it was printed this :—

MY WISH.

May the
blessing of thy
God wait upon thee ;
may the Sun of Glory shine
around thy head ; and may
the gates of plenty, honour and
happiness, be always open to thee and
thine. May no sin disturb thy days ; may
no sorrow distress thy nights ; and may the
pillow of peace kiss thy cheek, and the sweets of
imagination attend thy dreams ; and when length of
years makes thee tired of earthly joys, and the curtains
of death gently close around the last scene of thy
existence, may the angels of God attend thy
bed, and take care that the expiring lamp
of life shall not receive one rude blast
to hasten its extinction ; and at
last, may the Saviour's blood
wash thee from all wrong-
doing, and usher thee
into yon Land
of everlasting
felicity.

Everybody sighed when Geordie's name was found among the killed at Afghanistan, for he was a wayward lad ; but a comrade

forwarded details, and mentioned that a bit of silk, with some words printed on it, was stitched to the right sleeve of his flannel. Then his worn father fell to crying, and said, "God bless wir ain Jean! She hes reached poor Geordie's hert, an' maybe he thocht o' Jesus at last, for her sake." The reading of the letter in the smiddy, that winter night, gave the most affecting scene ever brought about inside its door. Tears oozed to long-dry cheeks, and Tom Georgeson was felt to have spoken for all when he said, "Chaps, Heaven's worth goin' till fan Jean's till be in it."

One of our climbing youths has reached a pulpit. Before leaving for college he saw Jean. She prayed with him. As they rose up she said softly, "Boo doon." He, wonderingly, drooped his head. She placed her hands on it, crossed, and prayed, "May the blessing of God the Father, the love of Christ the Son, and the indwelling of the Spirit the Comforter, be with you for ever. Amen." Shaking hands at the door she said, with a quiver on her lip, "Never say

a dampenin' word till wanderin' prodigals, nor keep in yer mind a suspeecion o' yer fellow-men; an', abeen a', tell 'e people muckle o' wir kind-herted Saviour." He is a settled minister now, but no other hands have been placed on his head. For any Presbytery to give him the "laying on of hands" *now* would be mockery. Jean's laying on of hands and ordination address possess him with an influence and authority too sacred to be disputed by any earthly court or assembly.

Jean's history has been unruffled. Its stages have been silent as sunrises. Her heart has caught the secret of calm suns; and serene stars swim around her. She understands the still depth of a bonnie summer day. The quiet of high hillsides has gathered in her thoughts. She does not waken to sound of storms or the clatter of rainy days. But she meditates on falling snow.

Only one tragedy pierces Jean's history, and it came to her through her dog.

"Colin" was her father's collie—be-

queathed to her as his only possession. She was attached to the dog with the fine affection of her nature. He was her only companion—and lonesome did she feel that night when "Colin" disappeared. No sleep came to her. She chided herself with being disturbed at the loss of *a dog*, but still her unrest remained. She felt lonely, and her heart went after her wandering friend. And when he came back, and lay again in front of the fire, Jean looked out on him from her bed, and her heart filled as she thought that the house looked its warm and cosey self once more.

But "Colin" had laid aside his good manners in that tour. Charges of sheep-worrying were laid against him. Jean could not believe it, for "Colin" had ever been a law-abiding dog. But she was mistaken.

Jean was confused and exercised. She loved "Colin," but her neighbours' rights must be reverenced. Affection and duty struggled for her favour. Her heart was a battlefield. She read the Ten Command-ments with a purpose. The problem was

weighed as she sat at her back window, looking into the kailyard. For a whole day she fasted, nor did she open her door. "Colin" lay coiled on the hearthrug.

At evening Jean determined that "Colin" must die—and by her own hand. No one shall witness the act; it shall be done in sight of God alone. To a pure soul an insignificant deed becomes great when it touches a high principle. She could not give "Colin" away; for might he not fall into unkind hands? and besides, might he not repeat his wrong-doing, and disturb her neighbours? No; there was but one straight line—"Colin" must die. Love for her companion; her tender nature; and, above all, her father's memory, blurred her view. But she did not doubt her duty.

Very early next morning Jean arose. She tied the clothes-rope to a rafter in the roof. Then she put it, with much trembling and agitation, around the neck of her lone, wondering companion. He licked her hand and looked up into her eyes, whereat she hesitated and sighed.

"'Colin,' puir man, ye maun die." She stroked his head with a shaky hand. "I'm ca'd on till sacrifice ye, as Abraham wis ca'd on till gie up his only bairn Isaac. It's a testin' o' me, 'Colin,' an' I canna be disobedient. It braks ma hert till pairt wi' ye, puir man, bit I canna get past it."

She laid her cheek on his forehead, and he licked her face. Then calling herself back, and facing her duty, she suddenly swung "Colin" to the beam. She closed her eyes and held her head away, but never did the staunch Covenanter within her surrender until the quieting rope told her that "Colin's" struggling was by. Then a feeling of terror came upon her. Her heart started as she saw "Colin" now lying so still on the floor—dead. Her own hand, too, had brought death to the house! She fell into a cold sweat, and a choking mounted to her throat.

But love came to its power again. Duty was satisfied, and fear was overcome. "Colin" must be kindly carried to some quiet spot. She bore the dead, warm body

to the kailyard, carrying with her the shovel from the hearth. There, in the chill dawn, before her neighbours were astir, Jean dug "Colin" a rude grave beneath a rose-bush. God only witnessed her sacrifice, and He alone could estimate it.

She went indoors slowly. Kneeling, she thanked God for guidance and courage in her hour of testing. Then she lit a cheery fire and put on the kettle. The floor was swept, and the door was opened wide to let in the sunshine—outward acts which published the inner feeling.

I called that day in passing. Jean's face was stately, albeit a cast of sadness flashed sometimes into it. Triumph glinted through it. The deepened gleam of her conscious eyes isolated me from her: I was aware of a superior presence. She told me what had become of "Colin." Her story touched me, then led me into reverie. It blossomed before me in beauty. I went home quickened —a purer man.

A Coffin in White.

THE fire was setting drowsily on the hearth as Benjamin Kirk and his wife, Lizzie, with a fixed and distant stare, looked into its red breast. Sorrow, that Unapproached Magician, had first made them as one—now he drew them far apart. On either bank of the Abyss of Silence they each followed the calling of their reverie. Beside them, in his little trundle bed, lay their only bairn, a fine boy of seven years —dead. Consumption had enchanted him to death. His mother laid him out in spotless linen—linen which, after the manner of Knockdry women, she had long kept by her in view of her own death-day.

The boy's eyes remained open with an upward, far-off look. Benjie had attempted to close them, but Liz interposed. "Dinna shut them, Benjie! Let him look at me; it'll help me till think 'at he's no awa' fae me yet." And there the wee man lay in his humble crib, dressed in white, with a manful gleam on his young face. No covering lay on it. Liz would not have it. "He's done nae ill, puir mannie, 'at we need till hide his face. Besides, it'll no be lang aside me; I want to see it as lang's I hev it."

The fireside reverie is broken by Liz.

"Fat are ye thinkin' o', Benjie?"

"I dinna jist ken, Liz. Fat are ye thinkin' o' yersel'?"

"Weel, I wis thinkin' we'd hev a *white coffin*, Benjie."

"Kirsty! A *white* coffin?"

"A white coffin, Benjie. I've set ma mind on't."

"Dear me, wuman, sich a thing wis never heerd o'. 'E fowks 'll clash (gossip) terribly aboot sich on-goin's."

"Clash or no clash ('at's their ain bisness), bit I'll hev *ma* way in fat concerns masel'."

"Bit hear me, Liz"——

"I'll no hear ye, Benjie. Ye canna alter ma min'. I've thocht it ower a' 'e time we've been glowerin' in 'e fire."

"But fat in a' 'e world pat sich a unheerd o' notion in yer head?"

"Look oot an' see."

The snow was falling thickly and softly.

"Ye dinna mean till say 'at it wis 'e snaw 'at pat it in yer head?" queried Benjie in amazement.

"Ay, bit it wis jist 'at same, though," responded Liz deliberately.

"Oh, ma aul' freen', hev we no winter enouch in wir sorrowfu' hoosie withoot"——

"It's no 'e winter I'm thinkin' o', Benjie; it's 'e snaw. Div ye no see hoo saftly an' bonnily it's fa'in' on 'e dirty roads, an' makin' them white an' clean? It's hidin' up fat's unpleasant in wir puir world wi' 'e colour o' heaven. An' fan my dear boyagie is hidden fae ma sicht in a coffin, it'll no be wi' black, gravesome claith, bit by 'e colour o' 'e snaw

—white an' heavenly, Benjie, lek fat 'e angels wear. 'They shall walk wi' Me in white,' says 'e Word o' Truth ; an' as I'm sure ma Johnnie's walkin' wi' Jesus in white noo, so I'll hev him dressed an' kisted (coffined) in white here."

"Weel, weel, Liz, 'at's gey thochtfu' o' ye ; bit fat'll 'e fowks say? We mauna mak' feels (fools) o' wirsel's."

"I carena fat fowks say. A coffin in white I've set my hert on, an' a coffin in white I'll hev, Benjie. Ye'll no cross me, Benjie, will ye?"

"No, Liz, I'll no cross ye." And Benjie was silent again.

And thus it came to pass that a coffin in pure bonnie linen was ordered for Johnnie, Liz Kirk's only bairn. When the news travelled into the houses of the neighbours it caused a wondrous excitement. Magnus Reiach, the joiner, swiftly moved into a position of unheard-of importance and popularity. Everyone claimed a special friendship with him. After work hours, a group of men gathered about the door of

his shed to see him finishing the rarity. All felt that the occasion was not of the ordinary. A new value hung about the joiner and his shed. Those who could assert any standing of peculiar acquaintance went inside, and saluted the joiner with "Ay, 'at's a fine nicht, Mansie!" then introduced the burning topic.

When the funeral day arrived—arrived at last—everybody came out to get a glimpse of the uncommon thing. It was carried out of the house and placed upon two chairs before the door. When it was lifted, the chairs were thrown over, in token of grief and disorder, there to lie until the bell ceased tolling. The coffin was borne on a hand-bier, and it was observed that every man who stepped in to take his turn at the shafts contrived some excuse for laying his hand on the white coffin, with the intent of being able to say, in days to come, when the curio was alluded to, that he had *touched* it.

The women assembled at the foot of the hill road, and discussed the rare object in

hushed conversation. They generally agreed that it was "rale bonnie." "For ma pairt," observed Betsy Manson, "I think it's jist bit fittin' 'at an innocent bairn should be beeried in white. If it wis an aul' gran'-father, bent and boo'd wi' lang years o' wrang-doin', 'e case wud be itherwise, nae doot."

"Fat a pity till pit sich a bonnie thing in 'e grun'!" soliloquised unsentimental Jessag Shearer. "It'll no be lang white. It wis hardly worth hevin' it white, in ma opinion, for a' 'e time it's till be clean."

"Ah! Jessie lass," replied the saintly Jean, "in 'at it's a fit emblem o' a' things worldly —an', indeed, o' life itsel', too. Hooever bricht worldly things may be, or hooever bonnie fowks may be, 'e grave's waitin' for them—*it* feenishes a' things. A croon o' goold an' an iron spade are a' 'e same fan they lie in 'e earth."

"It seems till me," edged in the police-man's wife, who was waitin' a chance for ventilation, "'at Liz Kirk's verra prood an' foolish till show off in 'is fashion at sichna

time. Death's no a thing till work pranks wi'—it's no a weddin'."

Jean was meditating an answer to this criticism. In a minute it came. "Bellag, ma freen', if a wuman's God-fearin' fan she dies death *is* a weddin', for isna wir Saviour ca'd 'e Bridegroom? an' isna Heaven describit as a Merriage Supper?" She paused. The women felt that Jean had spoken well. "Besides," she continued, "'e Great Throne is ca'd 'white,' an' 'e sun abeen wir heads is white, an' 'e bonnie summer cloods is white. Indeed, fan ye come till think o't, 'e Almichty seems unco fond o' 'at colour. An' fan He saved me an' took awa' ma sins"—her voice fell—"He washed me white in 'e blood o' 'e Lamb." She could go no further, for her eyes filled.

The coffin was gently lowered into a deep-dug grave—gently, lest it should be soiled by rubbing against the earthy sides. There was not a man at the funeral who did not look long and thoughtfully into the dark receptacle to see how the white marvel lay

in its solemn setting. The inscription on the plate was read for the last time—the fiftieth time:—

JOHN KIRK,
only and beloved son of
BENJAMIN AND ELIZABETH KIRK,
aged 7 years.

"His raiment was white and glistering."—Luke ix. 29.

Johnnie Calder, the gravedigger, was nervous and excited, but very reverent. He was loath to begin his work. With conscious delicacy he spread new-mown hay over the coffin—instead of the usual straw—before filling in the earth. His hand shook as he gently slid the first shovelful into the grave, and he proceeded slowly to the finish. Every eye was on him, and he knew it—now had come his turn to be the principal figure in the historic exhibition. When, in token of having finished his work, he took off his bonnet and bowed, he sighed. The old man's heart was touched, and so was that of every one, who now turned un-

willingly away and left the innocent child in his white coffin to the authority of the darksome grave.

The minister was expected to allude to the famed event, and a full attendance faced him in the church on Sabbath. But in his prayer clear intimation was made that he could not sufficiently command himself to venture upon such a task. His text, however—suggested to him by Adam Craig, the elder—was significant, and was taken as indicating a defence of the miracle in white: —"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."—Rev. vii. 13, 14.

Pure white lilies, rimmed by daisies, now grow on the boy's grave. In Spring, snowdrops appear. Who planted these, no one

knows; but all the neighbours are of opinion that it was Jean. Who else has so true an instinct?

And thus the little white coffin and its rich intimations find delicate symbol and exposition.

The Conquest of Willag Anderson.

WILLIAM ANDERSON is the lawful spouse of Babbie Doull, but so successfully has Babbie erased him that he is always spoken of as "Babbie Dooll's man." Only when the grocer-postman has a letter for him, and shows it with others in his window, does Knockdry remember that his name is Anderson. Such an awakening comes but once in five or six years.

The battle for supremacy began on the morning after the marriage. Before getting up, Willag pointed to his trousers dangling from a chair in front of the bed. "Weel, Babbie, which o' us is till wear 'at breeks?" was all he said. Babbie took dire offence on the spot, and inwardly resolved to subdue

him. It was a tough struggle, and the decisive encounter did not come off until, years after, Babbie lay ill in bed. From that time Willag became a humble follower of Babbie—Babbie the Resolute.

Babbie was ordered by the doctor from Wick to take a glass of wine three times a day. Skilfully measuring Willag's talents, she kept the bottle beside her in the bed.

A dismal thirst was upon Willag. He adopted a smile which had long since gone out of fashion with him, and approached the bedside. Babbie lay with her face to the back.

"Wull ye gie me a mouthfu', Babbie?"

"I'll do far less."

"Weel, then, I'll die an' gie up 'e ghost."

"Gie up fifty ghosts, if ye lek; but dinna leave them aboot 'is hoose — they're no canny."

She never moved.

Willag went out to think. A fresh line of action planned, he returned. Babbie lay in the same composed, provocative attitude; but he mounted a stern bearing.

"Are ye till gie me a mouthfu' or no?"

"Maybe 'Yes,' an' maybe 'No.'"

"Ye'll no gie it?"

"Fa tell't ye?"

"See, here, Babbie Dooll, are ye till gie me a' moothfu'—yes or no?"

"*No.*"

"Weel, *I'll shot masel'*."

"Shot awa'."

"Mind, I mean it! I'll send masel' intil Kingdom Come if ye dinna gie in."

"A safe journey till ye!"

Willag stepped furiously to the fireplace and reached down the gun which had belonged to his father, the gamekeeper. He struck the butt on the hearthstone.

"Will ye gie in?"

"Maybe."

"Weel, if ye dinna, mind I'll damage masel'."

"It's a free country; but dinna spoil yer beauty."

Willag rammed home a shot with vengeance, and stuck a pin in his finger for blood.

"For 'e last time on earth, Babbie Dooll, are ye till gie in?"

"Shot yersel' first, an' I'll tell ye efter."

"Weel, I'll gie ye till I coont five. If ye dinna gie in *then*, I'll blow oot ma brains."

"Goodbye, then; an' dinna miss yer aim."

Babbie still lay unmoved, gazing coolly at the back of the bed. This stung him more than her refusal; and Babbie knew it.

"Ye'll repent o' 'is stubbornness fan I'm lyin' in 'e graveyaird, Babbie Dooll," moralised Willag, as he clicked the trigger up.

"Shoot awa', man; an' dinna be blubberin' lek a bairn!"

This seemed to move Willag to the fatal pitch. He spoke with heat and hurry.

"One—two—three—— Are ye till gie me a moothfu'?"

"Dinna bother me."

"One—two—three—fower—— Will ye gie in?"

"Maybe."

"*Five!*" And Willag blew the charge—up the chimney. Then he dropped the gun,

struck his bleeding finger to his brow and reddened it, staggered to the back of the door, and fell to the ground with a shambling thud. A few scientific struggles to the accompaniment of some well-ordered groans, and Willag's warfare was accomplished.

Silence.

Babbie slowly turned herself and sat up. She looked out on the fallen Willag. Fetching forth the bottle, and drawing out the cork loudly, she said, "Here's till better luck next time, braw man!" and refreshed herself with more than a mouthful. Then she put the bottle under the pillow, and lay down again undisturbed. Willag's teeth watered at the sound of the cork, and he was fain to spring to his feet, but he remembered that a corpse did not act in that way.

The last spark of fight died out of Willag when Babbie again laid herself restfully on the pillow. He saw nothing for it but to come to life again. A resurrection to reproach was his only choice. Judging it

wise—for his own credit more than for Babbie's safety—to give some warning of his return, he let drive a few introductory flourishes with his feet. Babbie paid no attention, but when he got up she said, "Oh, ye're back again, are ye? Wud the Deil no let you in doon below?" Then she hid her face in the blankets, and laughed wickedly.

Willag slipped out, crushed and beaten. His best stratagem had failed.

Babbie was conqueror.

From that day Willag Anderson was as a stool or kettle in Babbie Doull's house.

Willdy.

WILLIAM CRAIG was brother to Adam, our elder. He was all his life known as "Willdy," a designation sufficiently distinctive to report his familiar qualities and his kindly station in the esteem of Knockdry. The later history of his being and thinking grew out of three harsh facts—he was a pauper, he was blind, he was lonely.

Willdy mourned sorely the loss of his mate. "Oh, bit ma hert's wearyin' till be wi' her! Fan I'm lyin' on ma back in 'e stillness o' 'e nicht, an' a' things in 'e hoose is caul' an' lonesome aboot me, I skirl (cry) lek a bairn. An' I canna owercome it, for a' is sae still 'at I think ilka thing is waitin'—waitin' for somebody—waitin' for ma dead wifie. The bits o' furniter seem

somehoo till miss her. Puir thing, it's guid she's wrapped in clay, for if she saw me noo in ma quate (quiet), sad hoosie she'd brak' her hert; ay, 'at she wud!"

Willdy could never break himself to the relentless reality that he was at length—a pauper. He had never known actual ease, for though an honest and industrious labourer his wage was of the humblest description. His virtuous mind, therefore, saw no humiliation in poverty. But to be *a pauper!* This, in the opinion of the entire countryside, was a mortification equal to disgrace. "Ochane, 'at I should live till hev sich a dooncome! A pauper! an' ma Faither hes 'e silver an' goold in His han'! Surely it canna be. Somethin' maun be wrang wi' me 'at I dinna ken o'. Bit fat am I grumblin' for? Wisna His ain Son born in a byre?"

When dark shades first began to close out the sunlight from Willdy's eyes, I proposed that we should cousult each of the doctors in Wick. For long he would not

hear of it, but ultimately he consented. "I'll gang, ma freen', I'll gang; but, believe me, no earthly doctor can rub 'e roost (rust) aff ma een. Nane bit 'e Great Physician can meddle wi' 'at job."

It was even so. The visit was paid—an affair of great unbelieving concern to Willdy; but his case was hopeless. "I tell't ye hoo it wud be—I tell't ye. Maybe I ocht till be sorry at no gettin' ma sicht back—an' indeed I am; an' yet 'e first joy I'll hev noo will be till see 'e King in His beauty. Earth is shut oot for ever, an' ma een is already trainin' for Heaven. They'll open first on 'e 'Land 'at is afar off.' Tak' me hame, ma freen'—hame till ma aul' bit hoosie. Ma hert's tethered till it, cheerless an' a' as it is."

Willdy's one-roomed dwelling soon showed that the touch of his wife was lacking. The small window became hazy and untidy. Spiders swung their nets from branch to branch of the flowers that stood on the window sill. The mantelpiece was

undusted, and the candlestick upon it was thick and clammy with smoke. The old prints on the walls—fastened with pins, and ordered after a certain sober taste—gathered a faded and deserted look. The fire was seldom bright—often it was not lit at all. A small mirror, hanging near the window, sat loosely in its severing frame. On the "drawers'-head," beneath the Family Bible, a once-white cover, with fringed edges, disposed itself irregularly. Willdy's wife used to take special pride in keeping a clean cover on the "drawers'-head," the fringes hanging evenly down; now the cover was yellow and disorderly. Willdy's clothes, too, which were wont to be so well patched and tidy, became aged and jaded.

The Summer sun had moved out of the old man's sky, and now the bleak Winter fell shudderingly around him, and its chilling winds swept into his heart. God help those who, lonely and old, are left to the charity of the world!

I visited Willdy one day shortly after his

wife's death. It was a raw March morning. Willdy was sitting in his chair opposite a fireless hearth. The daylight fell straight down the one-storied chimney into the fire-place, and imparted a touch of ghostliness to the quiet apartment.

"Dear me, William," I exclaimed, "are you without a fire on a cold day like this?"

"Fa cares if I hev a fire or no? 'E Parochial Boord hes ordered an' aul' wuman till look efter me, but she's no come in 'e day yet. Oh, dear me, but she's far ahint ma ain wifie! Oh, it's me 'at misses *her!* But I'll soon be wi' her again —an' I'll no be a pauper then; na, no a pauper! A croon! A croon! I'll no ken hoo till wear it, I'm thinkin'; ma broo hes never feelt onything bit ma bonnet an' ma nicht-mutch. I'm frichted 'at I'll gang daft an' glaiket, an' fair forget masel', fan I get a croon on ma broo!"

"That will be a great day for you, William," I remarked, to encourage him in this train of thought. Willdy was always interesting on such a theme.

"*Great?* Michty me, man, 'at's no a name for it! It's pittin' on me till think hoo I'll manage till haud up ma head an' live through it a'. I tell ye fat it is, ma freen', we'll forget a' wir earthly ills at 'e first blost o' 'e Archangel's bugle. Oh, fat a mornin'! Till rise in 'e graveyaird surroonded wi' 'e freen's o' lang syne, an' then till gang awa till a country withoot griefs or loneliness—oh, my, bit it's gran'! Ah, we'll hev nae min' o' wir aches an' kinches fan we sit doon on 'e banks o' 'e River o' Life, wi' wir legs danglin' ower 'e edge, an' 'e Tree o' Life, wi' a' kinds o' fruit (Oh, glory-me!) wavin' abeen wir heads. I'm tellin' ye, we'll be fair flabergasted. An' I'll no be a pauper then; na, no a pauper!"

But Willdy was not always in this victorious key. He was a resolute Arminian and free-willer; a believer in the perseverance of the saints, if the saints persevered. Sannagie had fruitlessly tried to bring him into line with the Knockdry creed, which is mystical and Calvinistic. It is not to be marvelled at, therefore, if Willdy should

now and then tumble into the Slough of Despond.

A certain summer Sabbath morning found Willdy with tear-marks on his face. He had been weeping. He told me the cause.

"Oh, I've hed an awfu' fecht, freen'—an awfu' fecht. Bit I've gotten 'e upper-han' noo. If I could bit read ma Bible I wud soon gie 'e Devil a clink (blow) wi' some promise 'at wud send him hirplin' aboot his bisness; bit I canna see noo, an' 'e aul' Cooward tak's advantage o' ma want o' sicht. Sometimes I fumble ower in ma min' a hale nicht afore I get a grip o' some bit o' truth till hit him wi'; an' by 'e time I've got it weel in han', he's awa oot o' gunshot. I wis lek till be beft (beaten) last nicht; bit a gran' message fae 'e Maister cam' rattlin' intil ma mind jist at 'e richt time. It frichtened 'e Devil clean oot o' his wits. I never saw sich a skedaddle in ma born days! He wis tryin' till tell me—e' aul' Vagabon'!—'at 'e Lord couldna be carin' muckle aboot me fan he had left me blin'—forby bein' poor and

lonely. Weel, 'at took 'e win' fae me ; bit a' o' a sudden 'is text danced afore me—'He took 'e blin' man by 'e han' '—(Mark viii. 23). 'Div ye see 'at, ye born Scoondrel?' I cried. 'Jesus took 'is blin' man by 'e han'—are ye hearin'?' Fat, think ye, did he shout back till me? 'Ay,' says he, 'bit He *cured* 'at blin' man, an' He hesna cured *ye*.' Noo, 'at wis mair than I reckoned on ; bit I up an' let at him again! 'So be it,' I roars efter him ; 'so be it, ye Faither o' Liars, bit I wud raither hev Christ's han' though I hed *nae* een, than hev yer's wi' fifty!' 'At feenished him! Off he went wi' 'e end o' his tail hangin' ower his airm, as I hev seen him in picters. Then I fell till prayin'. 'Oh, Maister,' I cried, '*I'm* blin' ; tak' *ma* han'.' An' richt awa' I feelt His grip! Then I minded 'at blin' fowks hed speecial promises gi'en till them. So I brocht up 'at verse, 'I will lead 'e blin' by a way they know not,' an' a' ma doots gae'd awa'. Ma puir blin' een thocht they saw angels flichin' up an' doon 'e sky, an' roon' aboot me, an' fillin' ma wee bit hoosie. An' they were a'

singin'—singin' as if it wis lek music comin' fae ower a far-awa hill. I sprang up an' got haud o' ma aul' fiddle, an' I made her dirl wi' praise till I wis tired—in 'e middle o' 'e nicht, mind ye. Oh, God's kind, kind! Bless His name!"

Not many days after, Willdy lay down to die. His blank eyes were planted upward, as if endeavouring to see beyond the roof of his bed. As those who have enjoyed good health usually do, he fretted much in his weakness. He wearied for Home. "Oh, I'll soon get ma sicht noo, an' I'll see ma aul' wifie again—an' ma Saviour. Guid-by, aul' hoosie, I'm no needin' ye langer—dear aul' place! I'm goin' awa till a gran' mansion, far ma aul' wifie 'll be an angel, an' I'll no be a pauper; na, no a pauper." It seemed that earth-ties were strong on Willdy: Heaven was dear because the companion of his loves was there. Is not this a mighty truth?

Willdy had a geranium in a pot which he watered and kept with more than earthly

care. He used to say that it could not grow without God, and so long as the flower was living he knew that God was in the house with him. He now requested that it should be brought to his bedside. We placed it on the table which stood close to the bed. Then he said, resolutely, "Bring ma fiddle!" Propped up with pillows, he tuned the strings. His face flushed as he raised the violin to his chin. Then to the tune of "St. Stephen's," accompanying the instrument with his voice, he set off earnestly :—

"Who then can ere divide us more
From Jesus and His love,
Or break the sacred chain that binds
The earth to heav'n above?

"Let troubles rise, and terrors frown,
And days of darkness fall;
Through *Him* all dangers we'll defy,
And more than conquer all.

"Nor death, nor life, nor earth, nor hell,
Nor Time's destroying sway
Can e'er efface us from His heart,
Or make His love decay."

(Paraphrase xlviii.)

"There!" he said, as he handed out the

fiddle, "I can die noo. 'E next time I'll play it'll be on a harp."

At last! Jean and I stood near to him, but he was unconscious of our presence. We watched him, as spectators on the bank watch the swimmer breasting the river. He had folded his eyelids and was breathing heavily. Perspiration damped his brow. Gradually his labouring became less evident, and he seemed to be sliding away. Suddenly he opened his stony eyes. Tears dripped from them, over his cheeks, and down to the pillow. We spoke to him, but he made no answer; he seemed separated from us. He put out his hand, searching for his flower, to him the symbol of God's presence, his fiery bush. Seizing it eagerly, he began to pray.

"Oh, ma Kind Maister, hear me for 'e last time on earth! Ye hev aye been ma best Freen'—an' Ye're more so noo than ever. Oh, ma weel-kent, lang-tried Freen', help me ower ma last sorrow! Tak' me Hame—tak' me Hame till see ma faithfu' Maggie. We'll no be paupers again; na, never again. Oh, Maggie, ye'll be young

an' bonnie noo, lek fan I first sat wi' ye amang 'e heather. Tak' me Hame, Maister, till Yersel'. Oh, bonnie gates! Oh, sweet singin': 'at's Maggie's voice! Gran', gran'! Gie *me* a harp, too—quick! Yes, yes; I'm comin', comin'. Lift—me—up, Maister—for I—canna—get—free. Oh, ma bonnie Maggie. We'll—no—be—paup"———

The voice faded off; the eyelids drew slowly together; the face relaxed and settled; the hand slackened its grip of the flower.

Willdy was no longer a pauper.

"London Rob's" Achievement.

"MEN? Perfect plagues! I canna mak' oot fat 'e Almichty invented them for, if it wisna jist till wear breeks an' keep up barbers. If I wis a free wuman again, wud *I* tie masel' till 'e best mither's son o' them? Catch me! Back o' ma han' till 'e last one o' them! I'd sweep 'e whole ching-bang o' them intil 'e midden if I hed *ma* way."

It was Nelly Bain, the too-lawful spouse of Jonathan Henderson, who had spoken. And whenever *she* spoke deep silence followed.

Nelly announced high scorn for the entire male tribe. She mourned the daft day she was tempted to link herself with one of its representatives. As she braced

up for a ventilation of her special views, it was Jonathan's habit to retire to the garden seat, there to smoke and meditate—carrying with him a smile hanging handily between approbation and amusement. Those who knew him intimately declared that nothing could surpass the skill which Jonathan displayed in manipulating that delicately-balanced smile.

Providence has sometimes a startling way of taking people at their word, even though they speak but half in earnest. Jonathan Henderson fell sick of a fever, and died. The day after the funeral Jessag Shearer looked in on Nelly. Nelly was busy getting the house cleaned, and the things in order again.

"Ye'll be weel pleased noo, Nelly," Jessag began. "Ye'll be a richt prood wuman 'is day, I'll warrant ye."

"Dinna be thochtless, Jessie, lass."

"Bit I'm no thochtless, Nelly. I'm only thinkin' 'at ye've got yer hert's desire noo, an' ye're a free wuman again. Oh, I wish

it was me!" and Jessag ran out her tongue at the corner of her mouth on the sly.

"Weel, weel, Jessie, hev yer ain mind, bit I'm no till let-on if I'm pleased or displeased."

There the matter stuck; but Jessag thought Nelly looked a bit surprised and taken aback.

There was an account standing between the men and Nelly. She had flung javelins at them fiercely. At the nightly gatherings in the smiddy Jonathan was missed and mourned, but the mention of Nelly's name brought on dissatisfied looks.

Some three months after Jonathan's funeral, Geordie Auld made a proposal to "The House," as the smiddy meeting is popularly named, after its progenitor the House of Commons.

"We maun cool Nelly noo, chaps," he said. "She has scaithed us most wickedly, an' I dinna think she should hev forgiveness. I move 'at 'e single men among us cast lots, an' e' man fa's elected maun mak'

love till her." A burst of sarcastic laughter staggered Geordie in his speech. "Hear me oot, chaps. Weel, he maun cod (lead) her on for a while, an' walk her oot afore a' 'e neebours, then cut her, an' gie her the go-by. An' 'e rest o' us maun contribute till pay him for his pains. Fat say ye?"

Before any other could reply, Bob Oman spoke up. "Look here, chaps, I'm goin' soon till America, as ye ken. Noo, if ye'll help me wi' ma fare, I'll run 'e game wi' Nelly. I'll go roond her by hook or by crook, an' then skirt fan things is ripe."

"Good for you, Bob!" was the spontaneous outburst of the assembly.

Bob's proposal was agreed to, strict secrecy being imposed upon every member of "The House."

A fitter than Rob Oman for the task could not have been made to order. He was a red-haired swain of thirty-seven years, swelling a fancy beard and oil-drenched head of hair, and following the united professions of insurance agent and travelling tea merchant. He had once been in

London for a week—hence his title. No one was or could be of rarer value in Knockdry—by Rob's standard. He missed no opportunity of advertising himself, and was in evidence everywhere. His manners —upon which he staked his reputation for good taste—were insinuating and precise. More than once he had proposed emigrating to America. Now he resolved that his emigration should become an accomplished fact after he had bitten Nelly.

Rob got into shape for operations with an alacrity and goodwill which staggered even Geordie Auld. Passing Nelly's house the day after his proposal to "The House," he chapped at the door.

"Wull ye gie me a mouthfu' o' water, Mistress Henderson? I've been ower 'e hill 'e day, an' I'm gey far gone for a drink."

"Surely, Rob. Wull ye come in till I go an' fetch it fae 'e well?" — which was precisely what Rob was anxious to do.

"Ye'll be feelin' sort o' one-sided noo,

poor wuman, withoot yer auld man?" observed Rob, softly, as he edged in.

"Ay, I feel a bit lonesome whiles, Rob. I'll no go by admittin' 'at much."

"Still, ye'll be hantle better by yersel' than plagued wi' a man-body stutterin' in yer road."

"Maybe yes an' maybe no, Rob.—But I maun get ye a drink."

While Nelly went out for a jugful of fresh water, Rob looked about him.

"Faigs (faith), bit Nelly hes a more comfortabler bit hoosie than I wis thinkin'. Efter a' is said, puir aul' Jonathan wisna ill-off. Ah, an' she misses him a little, does she? Weel, 'at's so muckle in ma favour. 'Pon ma word, bit I wudna object till a cosey bit place lek 'is masel'."

Nelly re-appears. She takes down a tumbler for Rob to drink out of, but he objects to such nicety. "Na, na, gie me 'e moog (mug), Mistress Henderson."

"Ye're forgettin' yer menners, Rob."

"No fear; fat I want is till drink oot o' 'e verra thing yer ain han's lifted 'e water

wi'. Ye see, Mistress Henderson," edging the mug to his lips, "ye're sich a braw wuman 'at"———

"'At'll do, Rob!"

"It's true, though. Weel, here's continued health an' good-looks till ye!"—and Rob quenched his thirst.

"Ye'll no be thinkin' o' insurin' yer life, Mistress Henderson?"

"Dear me, no, Rob. I wisna thinkin' o't."

"Weel, it's worth thinkin' o'; an' if ye dinna mind, I'll ca' back some day soon an' see fat ye think aboot it."

"There's no hairm in ca'in' in again anyway, Rob. Bit are ye awa' so soon?"

"Ay. Weel, by-by."

This was Rob's first visit, and he judged it eminently satisfactory. He chuckled to himself at the brilliant idea of suggesting insurance to her—a suggestion which left him an open door for all time coming.

Many visits accrued—each less than the other about insurance. The climax approached, and Rob prepared to execute his final manœuvre.

A knock rang smartly on Nelly's door.

"Oh, is't ye, Rob! Come in. Ye're hurried-lek. Fat's yer news 'e nicht?"

"'E saddest, Mistress Henderson"—hastily.

"Ay? Fat can it be?"

"I'm leavin' Knockdry."

"Leavin', Rob? Fat are ye leavin' for? an' far are ye goin'? an"———

"Oh, till be plain, I'm jist goin' awa 'cause I canna get a wuman 'at'll tak' me."

"Ye're jokin', Rob."

"Faigs, an' I wish I wis."

"There's many a wuman in Knockdry wud be gled till hev ye, man."

"I dinna ken them," said Rob dryly.

"Fat say ye till Maggie Taylor?"

"Too thin! I canna suffer 'e sicht o' skeletons."

"Weel, there's Jean Calder—*she's* no thin."

"Too fat! I couldna think o' goin' till bed wi' a treacle-cask."

"Ye're ill till please, Rob Owman."

"*Me?* I should think so! The fac' is, there's no a wuman in Knockdry I'd gie a

spittle for!"—and Rob buttoned his coat meaningly.

"We're no a' alek surely, Rob?"

"Oh, there's maybe an exception, bit she's oot o' coont. She's far abeen (above) me."

"*She?* So ye *hev* somebody in yer een, Rob?"

"Maybe; bit I couldna mak' bold till 'hang ma hat' wi' *her*."

"Glory-me, fa's she in a' 'e world? 'E laird's dochter?"

"Fat! 'E laird's dochter? She wudna mak' a pocket-hankie till dicht her nose." Rob's bosom swelled at the utterance of this great pronouncement.

"My, my!" exclaimed Nelly. "Fa *can* she be?"

"Weel, I could tell any ither wuman bit ye, Nelly—Mistress Henderson, I mean."

"An' why no till me, Rob? Is she any freend o' mine?"

"Ay."

"Ay?"

Nelly looked straight at Rob, whose eyes

fell to examining the toes of his boots. Without lifting his glance, he broke out: "It's yersel', Nelly—Mistress Henderson, I ocht till say." Then he blushed deeply, but not so deeply as Nelly.

"Weel, weel! Sich a surprise. *Me?*"

"Ay, *ye.* But, then, it's houpless wi' ye; ye're ower braw for me. I maun be goin' noo. Good-bye. I'm leavin' Knockdry 'e morn, a' bein' weel—for yer sake. I canna haud up ma head till sich a fine wuman: bit I'm gled till tell ye 'at I think ye 'e bonniest an' han'somest wuman in — in — 'e world. Noo, Nelly Henderson!" Rob sighed deeply upon ventilating this sentiment.

"Rob,"—she spoke softly, so softly that Rob's heart louped—"it wudna do till mak' love till anither man so soon efter Jonathan's death; bit"—under her breath, and confidentially—"dinna ye go awa' fae Knockdry."

"Oh, bit I canna bide in 'e swither I'm in —its lek till end me as it is. Good-bye, Mistress Henderson, an'"——

"Dinna go awa' 'at way, Rob Owman. Tak' a moothfu' o' somethin' afore ye go."

"Na, thank ye. I'll be goin'. Ye're een's lek till owercome me, noo 'at I've tell't ye a'—an' I canna stan' afore them. So"——

"Dinna be on sich a hurry, Rob. I've aye thocht weel o' ye. Ye're no lek ither men, Rob. Ye hev somethin' in ye more nor ordinar'."

"Fat's 'at till me? It only mak's me worse till hear ye speakin' 'at way." And Rob laid his hand on the sneck.

The vital moment had come. Nelly set her back to the door. "Rob Owman, I canna be 'e death o' ye." She sighed. "If ye go awa' ye'll die. Rob—I'll—I'll—tak' ye—if—if ye—wait a wee."

"Wull ye!"—with mock unbelief. "I ken ye wumen fouks better."

"Bit I wull, though."

"Pit it doon on white an' black, an' I'll believe ye. I couldna think o' a fine wuman lek yersel' bein' fashed wi' a worthless mannie lek me"——

"Ay, I wull, I tell ye; dinna speak 'at way."

"Weel, sign it, for I canna believe ma hearin'."

Rob drew out a sheet of paper and laid it on the table. Then he searched his vest pocket for pen and ink-bottle. These he usually carried with him in the capacity of insurance agent.

Nelly bent down to write—"I will take Robert Oman.—NELLY HENDERSON"—while Rob stroked his beard and winked at the rafters.

"Can I kiss ye ev-e-now (just now), Nelly?"

"Weel, Rob, it michtna be advisable a' at aince lek. Kiss ma picter on 'e wa' there first."

"Oh, bit I wud lek till see hoo 'e real thing tastes. Ye micht let me do it, Nelly"—edging nearer.

"I'll no *hinder* ye, Rob."

Rob put his arms about her and kissed her, then sat down on a chair, with Nelly on his knee.

At the next meeting of "The House," Rob announced his success, and exhibited

the written agreement. An adjournment was promptly made to the inn, where his health was gloriously pledged, and the first instalment of the bribe tabled. Bob here stipulated that the whole amount should be paid before the final act.

It now falls to be written that Rob Oman had a judgment and a plan of his own. That view he got of Nelly's cosey house on his first visit, coupled with his rapturous success in wooing the owner of it, gave his mind a serious trend. Mrs Henderson appeared more taking than America, or any other far off land ; and to settle down with her was, after all, not so risky as crossing the Atlantic. This was a discovery for Rob, and with the discovery came a determination to play his part in a new character. His preparations for emigration were only in speech—to beguile his comrades—and he paid more than usual attention to the parting of his hair.

At the last meeting of his Committee, Rob proposed an extension of their opera-

tions. "I hev a new idea, men. Fat'll ye gie me if I run Nelly till 'e very merriage nicht, an' then say 'No' fan 'e minister asks me if I'll tak' her?"

The unanimous opinion was that the undertaking was risky, and Rob would not have nerve to carry it out. But Rob was equal to their unbelief. "I'm determined, noo 'at I'm intill it, an' soon till be in America, 'at I'll go till 'e bitter end if ye pay me for't. I'll gie ma solemn oath no till rin awa' afore 'e time."

The move was successful, and Rob received an extra bribe. The entire sum now amounted to twenty-two shillings.

Next day Rob searched the town of Wick for a fancy bracelet, value twenty-two shillings.

The marriage day came round. All the members of "The House" were present—by their own request, lest their absence might indicate participation in Rob's act. He was himself in full sail, winking knowingly to them.

Willie Simpson whispered to him—"Fan ye run, go straicht till ma hoose. There's a bottle o' the best Glenlivet an' anither o' port wine waitin' us for a 'burst' efter 'e fun's by."

"Richt, Willie; ye're a' very thochtfu'. I'll need a drap till screw me up efter I gie Nelly e' slip."

A few minutes afterwards Rob despatched a boy to Willie Simpson's house for the bottles, with the message that Willie needed them. They came in time.

Now arrived the feared moment. Matters took on a grave carriage, and certain of those present began to feel that their mischief had gone too far. Rob, it was clear, did not think so. He took his place beside the bride with the utmost coolness, only glancing at the door to see that the way was clear for a run.

"Do you, Robert Oman, in the presence of God and these witnesses, take this woman, Helen M'Beath or Henderson, whom you now hold by the right hand, to be your lawful, wedded wife? and do you

promise that you will be to her a faithful, dutiful, and affectionate husband until God by death shall part you?"

Rob carried his eye from the door with a sharp movement, and fixed it steadily on the minister. "*I do*, sir, with all ma hert."

Sold! They felt mad, but controlled themselves. There was more to follow that they wot not of.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began the minister, as soon as he had tied the couple, "I am instructed by William Simpson, George Macdonald, Benjamin Sutherland, Isaac Muirhead, &c. (naming the members of 'The House'), through the medium of Mr Oman, to clasp this very handsome bracelet on the wrist of Mrs Oman, as an expression of the goodwill they bear to her as a woman and a neighbour. I did not know of this generous gift until a moment ago, and therefore its presence has all the freshness of surprise, which is no doubt intentional. The presenting of a gift at such a moment, and in such a manner, is new to us, but it may safely

become a custom among us. I have now very great pleasure in affixing this bracelet to Mrs Oman's wrist, and I trust she may be long spared to wear it."

Rob turned round to the company. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, adopting an Englishy voice, "this is not the limit of their benevolence. They have sent a bottle of whisky and another of wine with which to drink the health and fortune of my wife. I cannot do better than ask Mrs Oman to begin her household duties under me"—Willie Simpson coughed at the word "under"—"by handing the glasses round, taking care to serve first the gentlemen who have been so generous."

Mrs Oman drew back from the task for a moment; but she soon gathered courage, and filling two or three glasses with whisky, innocently handed them to the astonished Committee. Rob turned away his face and laughed to himself as he saw them silently take the glasses and drain them.

As the dancing flew on, several figures

might be seen dimly moving in the dark to the end of the house.

"No, men," exclaimed Isaac Muirhead, "we canna pay Rob back—it wud let 'e cat oot o' 'e pock on wirsel's, an' if it gets oot hoo Rob hes 'done' us, we'll be lauched at for e' rest o' wir nat'rel days. Rob hes been too much for us—'ats 'e end o't. Forby, he hes 'e minister included in his scheme, an' it wud never do till mak' a feel (fool) o' *him*. There's nothing for't but till tak' things as they are, an' pit 'e best face on them."

The "general public" of Knockdry is still in perplexity as to how a woman like Nelly Henderson came by such a marriage present; and Nelly herself is unaware that she got her husband in any way other than the usual.

The schemers more than once surrounded Rob, but he vowed that he would "split" on them if they laid a hand on him.

He says—"Nelly's no so ill till get on wi' as a body wud think, efter a'. Jonathan didna ken hoo till work her."

Tomshie—"The Original."

A DULLER mortal than red-headed Tommy Henderson never claimed space on the globe. He was the barrenest piece of earth in Knockdry. Jessag Shearer averred that if his skull were opened it would be found filled with clay. That his insignificance was accredited in Knockdry is declared in the appellation "Tomshie," a diminutive form of Tom and Tommy.

Tomshie was never known to smile. The young folks tried all measures and artifices to unbend him, yet no one succeeded. Abundant laughter, however, was created by his unfinished, uninformed face—a face which took on increased mystification as to the cause of all the mirth.

A visit from Tomshie was regarded as one of the events in the life of our hamlet. Upon

entering, he made no sign of acquaintance until he had found a seat by the fireside and stretched out his legs. Then, with a lengthily-drawn breath, he sighed out, "Ay, ay!" He watched the housewife pursuing her domestic duties. At every fresh turn of her skill he exclaimed, "Ay, ay!"—as much as to say, "Oh, that's the way you do it, is it?" He performed in this way for an hour or so, after which he wound up with the variation, "Ay, bit 'is 'll no do, though; I maun be movin'." The only communication I remember him making in our house—other than his distinguishing burst of "Ay, ay!" now and again—was that during the day he had seen "a cock fecht 'tween twa hens!"

It was Jessag who christened him "The Original," on account of what she called his "inventive stupeedity." She was wont to affirm that the reason why he never married (he was fearfully red-headed) was that he could not get a wife to suit his complexion, and it would never do for Tomshie to be out of the fashion.

When carting his peats home from the

hill, Tomshie always piled them high in the front of the cart. He argued that the horse would thus have to carry them a shorter distance by a cart-length. Neill Donaldson and William Young once accepted a wager with Peter Sandison that they could, if they tried, convince Tomshie that he was adding to the burden of his horse. They lost the wager.

The minister asked him to tea on New Year's night, along with some other poor folks. When he had finished his first cup he ejected the leaves over his shoulder (according to the etiquette of his own cot), thus doing despite to Mr Simpson's wall-paper. The reverend gentleman suffered silently; but when Tomshie was nearing the conclusion of his second supply, he observed, "Don't trouble emptying the tea leaves, Thomas; I will pour them into this bowl for you," pointing to the slop-basin. Tomshie's honour, for once, was awakened, and with a gentle flush of heroism he replied, "Oh, 'at's nae trouble, sir!" Then over his shoulder, with an

energetic splash, went the refuse of his second cup.

In former days Tomshie and his mother lived together; and slept together, too, although he had arrived at man's estate. One morning, between two and three o'clock, she died. Only Tomshie was present. When he was sure that she was really dead, and that he could do no more for her, he lay down again beside the body and slept unconcernedly till the morning. It remained the surprise of his life that the neighbours should have seen anything very unusual in that.

The chief fact of Tomshie's life was his love for mice. He considered them worthy of protection. There were undisturbed swarms of them in his house. They came upon his table and ate crumbs from his hand. He could call them out of their holes at pleasure, but they would not approach him if any one else was present. This singular circumstance is the sole guiding suggestion in unweaving the mystery of Tomshie's brave end.

Geordie Barnetson's daughter came home from Glasgow. It was reported that her health had broken down in the city, but it turned out to be her character. Her mother was dead, and the strayed lassie lighted upon no sympathy. Her father—a hard, austere man—ordered her out of his house. Tomshie came upon her crying by the roadside and said she could sit at his fire if she liked. Knockdry was in arms against him. Few sympathised with the wanderer who had caught her sin in Glasgow, and then had come to lay it on the doorstep of Knockdry. There was a cause for this, other than moral revolt. A year or two before, this same Jeannie Barnetson had visited Knockdry with all the latest whims in her head. She spoke with badly-managed condescension to her old acquaintances and neighbours. She smiled at the dresses of the women, and upbraided them for their lack of taste. It was said that she even went the length of reading novels and carrying them in her trunk. Her father and the neighbours were not sorry when she left. "Guid-bye, Jean,

lass," said Jessag, "an' a safe win' till yer tail!" Now she came home again—characterless! "She's a brazen limmer!" was the universal verdict.

Jeannie Barnetson's bairn was born in Tomshie's house. A woman from Wybster, who defied the opinion of Knockdry, volunteered her services. Her presence intensified the excitement. The young folks put out their tongues at Tomshie, and threw sarcastic sayings after him. He did not seem to understand them.

Life and Death met in Tomshie's lowly dwelling that morning. Jeannie's father so far relented as to give her a decent burial—in a grave set apart. He refused to recognise the child. Everybody stood shy of her. "Fa kens fat lek she'll turn oot?" "We dinna ken anything o' its faither—maist lekly some playacter or ither rag (prodigal)." "She *micht* dae weel; but, then, hoo could she?" "It's no canny till be mixed up wi' a bairn o' 'at sort."

Tomshie, with the help of the woman from Wybster, tried to nurse the baby.

The poor infant cried constantly. For the first time Tomshie's countenance gathered a look of concern. " He's got mair nor he reckoned for noo, an' serve him richt!" observed Babbie to the neighbours. Truth to tell, more than one felt satisfied at Tomshie's dilemma. But they hardly knew how weak the infant lassie was getting.

Tomshie was missing. Surprise called Knockdry to a standstill. It was unanimously believed that he was too stupid to " do away with himself," or to effect a good stratagem. The bairn was missing, too! What *could* it mean?

The miller was returning from his mill. The footpath edged the border of the mill pond. Clear at the bottom of its shallow water, on his side, lay Tomshie, folding the infant in his arms!

The neighbours soon gathered to see the wonderful sight. Babbie fairly broke down when her eyes fell on Tomshie clasping the innocent child—down there, so still and cold. Jessag could not speak. Geordie

Barnetson only said, " God forgie me !" as he dried his cheeks with the sleeve of his jacket.

Knockdry was repenting.

But it was reserved for Jean to expiate its wrong-doing after a worthy fashion. She had been absent for several days, and was passing the mill pond homeward as the bodies were laid on the bank. The tragedy was explained to her. Quietly she fell on her knees beside the cold forms. She patted Tomshie's brow, and kissed the cheek of Jeannie Barnetson's bairn. Then, still kneeling, she burst into a flood of tears. Kissing the cheek of the child again, she arose and said, grievedly, " Oh, neebours, ye hevna done richt !" After this nobody spoke.

That night every man in Knockdry communed with himself.

"April:" a Tormenting Foreigner.

HE came ashore that month. Outside, one booming day, a foreign-looking ship hit the rocks hard, and lay on them. Then she heaved over, and slipped, swaying, to the bottom. An irregular providence pitched him to a plank. He held on, and so came to land. No one else was saved.

He was a foreigner, and the make of him had never been seen in Knockdry. On this account it may be thought that he has no claim to a chapter in Knockdry life, but the phenomenal concern he demanded atones for the intrusion. Being a dummy—barring some gibberish we were not able to interpret—he could tell us nothing of his nationality, family connection, or upbringing. We could not even find out his name. So we set him apart as "April," after the

month of his appearance. We should have called him "December," for he had an impudent and provocative face. But what's in a name? Only a few letters.

Once on the beach, he fought to his feet. Then it was seen that although young in years, he was bent in the back and battered —not with sea only, but with life. His history was, without doubt, varied and stormy. Around he gazed on the gathering crowd, wistfully but unconcerned. We could not shove him into the tide again; but who was to take him? To be truthful, nobody was anxious to be saddled with such a foreign-like being. His airs were wholly unrecognised in our standard of manners. By the look of him, he was not likely to reverence the douce and century-shaped customs of our hamlet; and even a bairn could see that devilment burned in his eye, although his countenance bore an undisturbed and grandfatherly gravity.

Debate ended in an agreement to toss for him. The lot fell on blind Kitty Bain. Kitty fetched him home. He went quietly

enough with her, and every sign declared the likelihood of a tranquil friendship. As Kitty saw not, his colour was no great objection; and being an old maid, she rejoiced at his inability to torment her with speech.

Kitty's cat, unused to visitors, at once set up a protest against the incoming of "April," but the poor wanderer had sense enough to take the matter coolly. He composed himself in front of the hearth-stone. Warming up, his good spirits came upon him. Then he washed his face and trimmed himself up (but, singularly, without taking off his cap), and quietly invited himself to a piece of cheese.

Kitty's custom was to let her cat sleep at the foot of her bed. She thought of giving "April" a berth there, too; but he stoutly objected to the degradation. He even refused to lie at the head of the bed beside herself. He had apparently not been used to Christian beds. When Kitty proceeded to take off his jacket and trousers he wakened up most fiercely. She sweat over

him, then sat and thought it out. By and by, she went to bed and left him to sort for himself. He did this with a satisfaction that indicated a plan on his side. In the early evening Kitty was wrung from her sleep by fearsome yells in the house. "April" had come upon the cat asleep, and jerked him into the fireplace—in payment for his sulky reception. This kindly item was rehearsed several times during the night. By morning the cat was as many-coloured as Joseph's coat.

Kitty was troubled. Bairns gathered at her door and window to get a further look at the singular stranger. Old folks, too, flung their gaze that way. Indeed, Knockdry was a trifle proud of having a curiosity. "April" stood in the door at his ease, sunning himself, vastly satisfied, and, beyond suspicion, thankful for his rescue. Once or twice the boys poked him, and then he let out some curious balderdash, which gave them much fun. But their mirth fled when he darted at a lassie and gripped her hair till she fainted. His chances of friendship

were straightway wrecked, and the entire youth of Knockdry proclaimed vindictive hostilities against him for the rest of his natural life.

One would almost incline to the belief that, before taking to the sea, "April" had spent some time under a gauger in his own country. Not a corner of Kitty's house did he leave undisturbed. He mounted the top of her box-bed, and inspected every parcel and bandbox there. He picked the crape off her twenty-year bonnet, and turned it to items. In sheer derision he danced and chuckled with its remains on his head. From off the bed top, too, he shied a bottle of paraffin at the cat on the floor, and nearly ended the career of that sage.

Kitty's anxiety spread, but her patience grew less. Resolution took form. She called softly and enticingly to "April." He came to her side. Then she clutched him firmly and bore him, kicking and protesting, to the flagstone in front of the door—there she laid him on his back, and cruelly shut him out. He did not under-

stand her; and, conscious of his own integrity, he lay at the door all night, and coolly walked in again when Kitty opened it next morning. He skipped noiselessly past her. Kitty thought he had relieved her of his company, but that afternoon, in the house, she was suddenly hit in the left eye with a piece of soap. What on earth could it mean! That foreign torment again? She felt all over the house for the supposed "April," but could not fetch her hands on him. That reckless youth had slid into the bed, and there he lay, without a smile on his face, watching his wrathful benefactress and planning extensive schemes for the future.

A few mornings after, Kitty's cat floated with his head down in a pail of water. "April" was in the house, sure; but where? He slipped about on tiptoe, eluding her hands. But her blood was up. She called in Jessag Shearer. Jessag spied him behind the bed, and she let at him; but he dipped underneath and slid out at the open door, a smirk of quiet satisfaction on his face. He up with a stone and sent it rattling in at the

door. Jessag gave chase. "Ye foreign deevil!" she yelled, "I'll claw yer head for ye!" But she hasn't done it yet. Quickly turning a corner, "April" led Jessag to do likewise and thereby to pitch into a drain which was being opened right there. "April" took it easy and enjoyed the joke—much to the further unsettlement of Jessag. He seemed to think that that was but a trifle compared to what he might yet do. When Jessag had gathered herself together, he was out of sight; but she took a vow of vengeance on the spot.

He returned home that night to find a kitten where the cat was wont to be. Kitty lectured him. "Ye ill-bred wretch," she said, "'e verra Mischief is in ye. Hev ye no gratitude till me for takin' ye in fan ye wis homeless an' friendless? If ye are goin' till stay in 'is hoose ye maun learn till behave yersel'." "April" looked at her and said nothing. He took it all seriously, and really seemed impressed; but in the morning a certain kitten was found smothered amid the blankets.

Kitty was overcome. What *could* she do with him? His upbringing, it was clear, had been none of the choicest. His parents would appear to have been of a low origin. His seafaring life, too, had given him loose habits, and added restlessness. There were likeable bits about him, no doubt, and she was willing to give him a chance; but he was too set and thrawn to learn good manners and gentlemanly behaviour. Kitty must send him about his business. She "read the Riot Act," as Jessag Shearer put it. He listened with grave unconcern and wondering stupidity. Surely never such a mixture had been inside a skin before!

Many a day did forlorn and outcast "April" hang around Knockdry. No more offers of a bed came to him. He slept anywhere, picking up his food anyhow. Often he came to Kitty's door, but never again got he in. Then Kitty sickened and died, and was carried out.

Frailer and more shadowy became the cast-off "April." A sold-out look took hold

of his face. No man ministered to him. His sins, by the inevitable law, had found him out. No item of respectability remained. He abandoned himself to despair.

One day the children found him stretched and chill outside Kitty's back window. His wanderings had wound to a close; no more would he keep company with hardship. With one redeeming instinct unblemished, the lone transgressor had returned home to die. Nature does not leave even the most abandoned without some streak of good.

Knockdry regretted "April's" short and stained career, but it took his death somewhat lightly. It was not thought fitting that one of such untamed and disrespectful qualities and foreign extract should be buried among our own folk. What could be done with him? Who would be at the trouble of undertaking his burial? The difficulty was accepted as solved when some one proposed that, as the sea had given him to us, the sea should take him back. Thus it fell out that his corpse—clad in trousers, jacket, and cap, as found—was

borne to the shore. There it was stretched on a plank and lifted out to a rock projection in front of the harbour. Laid on the water gently, the plank was then pushed forward into the wide, lonely sea—the body of "April" lying on it, like that of an ancient Viking on the deck of his war-galley. Before putting him on the waves, Jessag Shearer covered his face with a red handkerchief. Surely Knockdry was bereft of its wits when it perpetrated such a funeral. No minister was present, nor any elder of the church.

Taken at last from association with unfeeling men, and relieved from the scenes of his ignominy, "April" floated serenely out of sight in the friendly clasp of an ebbing tide—far, far into the dimness, and away from an uncharitable world. Standing on the braehead, we watched the red handkerchief till it melted beyond sight. Then we turned home.

Now, "April" was a monkey.

A Dead Man's Tale.

DICKIE—Dickie Donaldson on the hill—was dead. Bell Morrison and Betsy Manson had been with his wife when he died. Bell tried him with a looking-glass and was satisfied that no breath was in him. They streiked him out and sent for Mansie the joiner to measure him for his kist. Mansie made the coffin and arranged Dickie in it. He observed that he had "seldom seen a corp fittin' a coffin bonnier." The day and hour of the funeral were made known and a bottle of the best spirits ordered against the same. Johnnie Calder received orders to dig the grave. All of which were authoritative manifestations that Dickie was indeed dead. And he was spoken of kindly, for he was of an original and jolly cast.

It was the night after Dickie's demise. His wife slept in the kitchen, alone. Dickie lay white and stretched inside his coffin in the room bed. At this point I am under the necessity of requesting him to sit up and become his own historian.

"'E first thing I can mind wis me thinkin' till masel', 'Ma word, bit it's caul'!' Then I tried till get ma han' oot till pull up 'e blankets. Ma han's wis bound! Fat could it mean? I gave one jerk, an' oot flew ma airm, an' ma fingers banged against somethin' hard. I wundered fat in a' 'e earth it wis, so I feelt softly wi' ma fingers roon' an' roon'. Then I shived ma han' up abeen ma head. 'A coffin, by Jingo!' says I till masel', an' I feelt lek till sink through her bottom. Thinks I, 'Am I a corp or no?' May Providence forbid 'at I should hev sichna a experience again, for, as sure's death, I wisna sure for a while if I wis a corp or a livin' man!

"Then I thinks, 'Fat a nairrow escape! Me in ma linens an' coffin! I micht hev waukened efter I wis dead an' beeried!' I

thocht o' masel' comin'-to efter I wis doon in 'e grun'. I saw masel' knockin' an' kickin' on 'e coffin-sides—an', oh, sich a dull thud!—an' then strugglin', chokin', an' turnin' black in 'e face. Then I cooled a bit an' began till wunder if Johnnie Calder wud hev ma grave deeged.

"By an' by, I began till think o' ma wife, Georgeena. Fat wud I do till gie her warnin', poor widow wuman? 'Bit I maun get oot o' 'is first,' says I. Easier said nor done, though! Still, I wis 'at frichted 'at I feelt a unnateral pith comin' ower me. So I shived 'e coffin-lid till a side, an', grippin' 'e edges, I pulled masel' up till sittin' point. Then, getherin' puff a bit, I couped masel' ower 'e coffin-edge intil 'e bed. Fair oot o' win', I lay far I wis for a while, pechin' for breath.

"In coorse o' time I scramm'led oot ower 'e bed, ontil 'e grun'. Oh, it was a fearsome fecht, bit Dickie's no 'e chap till gie in! 'E lamp wis burnin' very sma', so I up wi' 'e low. Fat a sicht! God forgie me, bit I wis fair frichtened at masel'! I never see'd a

ghost afore in a' ma life. 'E table an' lookin'-gless wis covered wi' white sheets. I whupped awa' 'e sheet 'at wis on 'e gless an' looked in. Michty me, I never see'd sich a figger—never; an' may I never see 'e lek o't again! Oh, ye can lauch as ye lek, an' so can I noo; but God kens there wis nae lauchin' in ma head 'at mornin'!

"Weel, I see'd a bottle o' whusky on 'e table, an' a gless—in readiness for ma funeral, ye ken. An' fa hed a better richt till it nor me—'e corp fa's beerial brocht it there? So I oot wi' 'e cork, and treated masel' till a moothfu'—or two. Man, I never thocht whusky wis so sweet! Oh, it wis gran'! Many a gless hev I gi'en lodgin's till, bit never one 'at cam' so close till ma hert—no, never. It set me up most wonderfu.'

"'Side 'e bottle wis ink an' paper, fat Adam Craig hed used for warnin' ma fowks o' ma death. 'E sight o' them pit a rich notion intil ma head aboot Georgeena. So doon I sat at 'e table—in ma linens, as I wis. I glanced at masel' in 'e lookin-gless,

an' 'e sicht o' me sittin' so white-lek at 'e table made ma blood near freeze. Hooever, I up wi' ma courage an' gripped 'e pen, an' I wrote till ma wife yin letter 'at ye see stuck abeen 'e mantelpiece."

[The letter reads:—

"My Dere Wif,—
"God be prased I am not ded. Do not be afrad.
"Your Loving Husband till Deth,
"DICK DONALDSON."]

"It took me a gey long while till ken fat till say, but at long an' last I managed it. Fan I hed written it, says I till masel', 'Noo, I'll lay 'is oot in front o' 'e door, an' Georgeena 'll see it, afore she comes intil 'e room in 'e mornin'.' Wi' great pechin', an' stiffened wi' anither gless o' 'e Auld Kirk, I got till 'e door, an' opened it canny-lek. Georgeena, I heer'd, wis snoorin' in' 'e kitchen. I thocht she michtna hev sleepit so soond fan she kent I wis a corp; bit wumen dinna fash themselves wi' too muckle love.

"Weel, I wis layin' ma letter on 'e floor in front o' 'e door fan 'e thocht cam' ower

me 'at maybe she wudna notice it so far doon, so I oot wi' a peen (pin) fae ma linens an' fastened 'e letter weel up on' 'e door. Then I creept back intil 'e room, an tried till lift ma coffin off 'e bed, but I wisna able; so I took anither refresher, an' shived it till 'e back o' 'e bed. Then I took doon ma troosers an' jecket fae 'e nail, an' I pat them on along wi' 'e linens. 'At helped till warm me. So I lay doon aside 'e coffin, under 'e sheets; an' says I till masel', 'Is is a hantle better nor a coffin, Dickie!'

"I waited long, long afore I heerd Georgeena movin'. I wundered hoo she wud behave. But I wisna keept in doot. She cam' till 'e door, an' then stopped. I jist thocht I could see her shakin' a' ower. I wundered if she wud hev difficulty in makin' oot ma han'-write, for she hedna seen it since wir merriage nicht. 'E thocht 'at she michtna be able till mak' it oot wi' 'e fear o' her bein' frichtened at 'e sicht o't, made me think she'd be feared till come in, so I cries oot, 'Dinna be frichtened, Georgeena! I'm a *livin'* corp, an' livin' lek.

Come in, lass!' Wi' 'at I hears a thud on 'e floor, an' I kent 'at Georgeena hed fainted. I tried till rise, bit 'e strength 'at cam' till me fan I first waukened hed left me by 'is time, an' I couldna move. Oh, if I hed an airm long enouch till reach 'e whusky bottle I bet ye I'd soon hev pit spirit intil masel'! So I lay an' thocht. May I be forgi'en for it, bit it cam' powerfu' on me 'at fat made Georgeena faint micht be disappointment! She micht hev been pridin' hersel' in thochts o' hevin' a trial o' anither man fan I wis beeried. I canna think fat else could gie her sich a shock, for I wis aye good till her, an' 'e mere soond o' ma voice should hev gi'en courage till her speerits.

"Bit Georgeena soon cam'-to, an' I heerd her makin' for 'e ootside door an' rushin' oot lek mad. An' then I kent she wis awa' for Betsy an' Bell. They werena long till I heerd their feet at 'e door. 'I'll gie ma oath for't he's livin',' I heerd Georgeena sayin'. 'Ye maun hev been dreamin',' says Bell. 'God grant I wis,' says Georgeena, 'but I ken I wisna.' Till end a' dispute I

gied them a roar. They oot wi' a most fearsome yell, an' banged oot at 'e door. By an' by, they cam' in again. I resolved 'is time till haud ma tongue. Efter bletherin' under their breath for a while, some o' them shived ma door open a bit an' waited. Then I heerd Bell sayin', 'I see a bottle o' whusky o' 'e table. Hoo much wis in it last nicht?' 'Oh,' says Georgeena, 'it wis fu'. I jist took one nip oot o't masel'.' 'Weel,' says Bell, wi' power, 'I'll gie ma oath 'at Dickie hes been up, for 'e bottle's near half-empty.' It wis a clear bottle, ye see, an' she spied it fae 'e door. Wi' 'at Bell steps grandly intil 'e room, an' says, 'Fair fa' ye, Dickie, bit ye're a brick!' Weel, d'ye ken, I couldna keep fae lauchin', caul' an' shiverin' as I wis. 'At brocht ma wife in. She ran till me, an' pitched hersel' aboot me, an' skirled wi' joy, poor thing. I wis thinkin' till tell her 'at I heer'd her sayin' till Bell an' Betsy 'at she wished it wis a dream, bit I let it gang by, an' gave masel' till her bosom. I jist let her cuddle me till her hert's content. Man, it's worth

while dyin' jist till fin' oot hoo fowks miss ye!

"I wis soon happed warm wi' blankets, an' cam' roond splendidly. Then Bell an' Betsy an' Georgeena an' me feenished 'e bottle; an' it wis observed by us a' 'at we never kent we wis sich real freends, or 'at whusky could be sich a treat. They tell't me 'at Johnnie Calder hed ma grave deeged, an' I sent word till him no till fill her in till we wud see if I wis till live or no. An' she hesna been filled till 'is day; she's lyin' open waitin' me yet. Sometimes on a Sunday I go an' hev a look intil her, an' think."

Joey Tosh to the Presbytery.

KNOCKDRY is of the mind that Joey Tosh "is no lek ither fowk, fatever's wrong wi' him." The man has not yet been born in Knockdry who can hit off his oddity, but the universal conviction exists that he *is* odd.

Joey has for many years been ticketed "The Surveyor." In sympathy for the unsuspecting, I may offer the enlightenment that Joey is a lord entirely of his own creation. He toils not, neither does he spin, and Solomon was never arrayed as he. He has advanced himself to the post of Inspector of Landscapes, and, without fee or reward, generously gives all his time to the pursuit and adornment of his office. Hence, with an aim at truthfulness characteristic of him,

he describes himself to inquisitive folks as "Land Surveyor."

Yet land is not his only line. He surveys many other things—chiefly the interior of whisky glasses and beer jugs. He is an advanced student in the wet art, and an obstinate believer in the existence of spirits. For a certainty, if you were waking him in the middle of the night, he could tell you how many clures are in every whisky-measure of the Inn; and, prompted by a "wet," he would recite from memory all the scribblings on its whitewashed walls. To give the undreaming public some hint of the agility of this obscure genius, I may let out that he can balance a glass of beer on his nose and recite, "Just Before the Battle, Mother," with enlivening genuflections. Then the battle comes off; and the glass is laid down empty.

He has ideas of enjoyment and ease commensurate with his position. Saturday night is a time of high abandonment to festivity. He and his wife go to bed with pipes full and steaming. Once in position,

they plunge into animated competition to determine whether of the twain can blow smoke the higher. When Joey is too "tight"—or slack,—which is weekly the case, the wife wins; and then the show comes to an abrupt and lively ending—greatly to the disadvantage of the winner. Like other gentry, Joey claims the Sabbath for laziness and reading; and he carries out his ideal with original skill. He lights his pipe, posts himself in a chair, and folds his arms. Then he issues orders for his son and heir to fetch the stool and the newspaper. That youthful diplomist, forseeing the rewards of rebellion, obeys. He plants the stool and himself in front of his august parent. Then he unfolds the paper and holds it up to "The Surveyor's" line of view, turning over the pages when commanded. It is but just to "The Surveyor's" sense of duty to admit that he has only succeeded in bringing his successor to obedience by innumerable slight inducements and encouragements of a physical order.

But to our tale. It was after an inglorious submission to the spirits of the Inn that "The Surveyor" came home the night he tackled the Presbytery. The Presbytery had been meeting in Knockdry that day, and, after the dinner, Mr Simpson had sent to Mrs Tosh a portion of the corn-flour left over. That was done out of sympathy for Mrs Tosh, who, on account of her spouse's diligence in surveying landscapes and inns is, by that gentleman, granted a magnanimous liberty to look after herself.

"The Surveyor" entered. He was ill-tempered to the last degree. And not without reason. It was during the time of war between Japan and China, and "The Surveyor" had conceived a burning dislike to the Chinamen. He used to say in Mansie's shed that "the *Japanses* gave an awful licking to the *Chineeses!*" Coming through the field, which lies by his house, he indulged in the notion that the thistles which grew up in his way were Chinamen. Firmly gripping his stick and buttoning his coat, he determined to lick them.

Lounging fiercely towards one, he made its head dirl off, crying as he did so, "*There's* a Chinee!" Finding Chinamen so easily disposed off, he laid about him right and left, with shouts of, "Doon, ye scoondrels, doon!" Most unfortunately for our hero's courage, a moor-fowl thought it proper to rise suddenly in front of him with much fluttering and declamation. Whereupon he dropped his weapon with ignoble promptness and yelled, "Oh, spare me!" Some boys beyond the wall witnessed his surrender and laughed him into wrath.

His practised eye caught sight of the white thing in a plate, and he furiously demanded the meaning of its intrusion. His wife told him. Now, there were spoon-marks on that corn-flour; and the fact disturbed "The Surveyor's" lordly mind. He adopted a statuesque attitude and flung double fury into his face. "D-does M-maister Simp-son think 'at I-I'm till tak' 'e leavin's o' *his* b-bairns an' ser-vants, so to-speak? T-thunder an' l-lichtnin', I'll mak' him hear aboot it, as it were!" He grabbed

the corn-flour from the plate, like a man clutching an escaping rabbit, and, flourishing it on his right palm, set his helm straight for the manse.

As "The Surveyor" takes the road, I may steal time to tell the reader that he has a slight halt in his speech and lengthens out some words by hanging on to them. He also possesses two crutch-phrases—"as it were" and "so to speak"—picked up at an election meeting, and these he employs with skilful frequency to give himself time for composition. His mind only grips one point at a time, too, and sometimes he walks off under the belief that he has delivered his full opinion; but before he has gone many paces he sees some new point, and returns with an addendum to his former deliverance—which addendum, like a lady's postcript, is frequently the more important. When he addresses any one he fixes his hands in the waistband of his breeks.

"The Surveyor's" step was not the steadiest as he piloted himself to the

manse. One result was that bits of the corn-flour escaped to the road, a fact which seemed to become known without loss of time to almost every duck and hen along the way, all of whom followed our hero an expectant escort.

The members of the Presbytery aired themselves in the manse garden. "The Surveyor" was not prepared to see such a spread of black cloth. He therefore meditated. Would he advance? Advance! Yes, if they were as many devils! His first intent had been to creep near and shy the trembling thing at Mr Simpson's head. Now he resolved to hide his ammunition and await the development of events. Thereupon he laid the corn-flour away in the tail pocket of his black surtout—one given him by the minister. Then heaving his hat back, plunging his hands deep into his waistband, assuming an oblivious air, and striking up "Just Before the Battle, Mother," he advanced to the slaughter of the innocents.

Mr Simpson soon awakened to the coming of "The Surveyor." When that notable neared, he called over the paling, "Dear me, Joseph, are you actually drunk *again?*"

"The Surveyor" put on his official countenance. Seeming to be completely taken by surprise, he stood erect in the centre of the road, gave his head a set back, half-closed his eyes, and surveyed in amazement the man who dared to address *him* so. "M-maister Simp-son," he said, after a studied pause, "I-I'm sur-prised 'at a man o' yer ed-i-cation, so to speak, d-disna ken better than till talk in un-be-coming l-l-language, as it were. Sir,"—he spoke with grave aspect—"why div ye ca' m-me d-drunk, as it were?"

"Why? Because I see you staggering and swaying about, and acting in an otherwise unusual manner."

"The Surveyor" came confidentially to the edge of the ditch which fell between the road and the garden. "Jist fat I thocht, so to speak! 'At shows 'at yer e-edi-ca-tion

hes been s-sairly mis-trysted in yer y-youth, as it were. Now, ye'll m-mind 'e speech 'at ye g-gave on Dis-e-stablish-ment, so to speak? Man, it wis as good's a m-menagerie till see ye f-flamin' an' stampin', as it were. Ye wis d-drunk, sir—d-drunk, so to speak! It seems t-till me, as ye wud say, 'at it disna maitter f-fat a m-man's in-tox-i-cated wi'—whusky, s-saut w-water, or p-p-politics, as it were—he's drunk, so to speak, if he be-haves in a un-usual m-mainner: 'at's till s-say, if yer d-definition's richt, as it were." And "The Surveyor" scanned Mr Simpson, and calmly awaited an answer to that avalanche of logic, while the assembled hens and ducks hung on patiently, and wondered what had become of the corn-flour.

Mr Simpson coughed, and looked awkward. One of his visitors attempted to assist him by venturing on a humourism. "It wasn't salt water that painted your face so red anyhow. Perhaps it was lemonade my friend."

"L-lemon-ade, so to speak? L-lord bless

ye, as it were, hoo could *I* get l-lemonade? If I hed only p-practised 'e richt set o' ma m-mooth early in l-life, as it were, an' come oot for a minister-body, wi' mair o' a s-stipend nor I w-worked for, so to speak, I m-micht by 'is time hev m-mounted up till l-lemonade. No, reverend sir, it wis g-gruel —cruel g-gruel—'at made ma f-face so bad, sir—*g-gruel*, as it were. Ma spouse hes m-made me tak' it ower often, so to speak. Bit then, she hes no soul. Mind, I'm n-no j-jokin'—she hes no soul. She hes clean s-spoilt ma beauty, as it were." He walked off a bit, but came back to add—"Bit m-maybe ma f-face, if it's n-no t-too honest lek, m-micht be decent enouch f-for a minister's yet, so to speak."

Mr Simpson saw his chance. "That's a new theory, Joseph. I suppose it was gruel that drove your nose out of joint, too. Eh?" And the minister laughed the laugh of him who scoreth.

This was a sore subject to touch, and its history is needful to the reader. "The Surveyor" one day, while pursuing his

drunken peregrinations, entered an unknown smiddy to light his pipe. He walked briskly in and marched up to the fire, saying, "G-gie us a l-l-licht, so to speak." Now, that venerable man of iron—a small but fiery mortal—had also a halt in his speech, which the boys sometimes mimicked, to his vast indignation. He, therefore, interpreted "The Surveyor's" lilt as an attempt at mockery. Tongs in hand, he roared, "F-f-fat are ye m-mockin' me f-for?" "The Surveyor," for once, lost balance and became agitated. "It's *y-y-ye* 'at's m-m-mockin' me, as it were!" he cried. "G-go till 'e D-devil w-w-wi' yer l-lies!" "G-g-go ye!" Forthwith they plunged into each other. Legs and arms flew rapidly around, without plan or discrimination, amid thickening clouds of dust. In the pell-mell, the blacksmith's tongs assailed "The Surveyor's" nose and shifted the foundation of that peninsula for ever. When a farmer looked in to get his mare shod he was startled to see two flaming, bare-headed terribly-ruffled figures sitting opposite each other on the smiddy

floor, attempting too-late explanations in language illustrated with apt quotations from unknown authors. After-mention of the combat riled "The Surveyor." He gave no answer, therefore, to Mr Simpson's hit. That gentleman proceeded in his gentle sarcasm.

"I suppose you wept a good deal when you found your countenance defaced, Joseph?"

"Y-yes," replied "The Surveyor" with brightening eye. "I w-wept 'cause there wisna a m-minister there, so to speak, to 'm-make a few rem-marks' or say s-somethin' 'ap-appropri-ate to the oc-casion,' as it were. It wis a g-gran' oppor-tun-ity for d-denouncin' 'e sin an' f-folly, so to speak, o' f-fechtin' wi' b-blacksmiths wi' a t-tongs in their han', as it were."

Some of the ministers now wished the intruder to move on; but the individual who had mainly to be consulted on the undertaking saw not the matter in that light. He sat coolly down on the edge of the ditch—and on the corn-flour. That article had

quite escaped from his mind, and was now escaping also from his pocket. The hens and ducks stood by, feeling sure that good times were yet to be looked for.

A third minister essayed to try "The Surveyor" on a fresh tack. He flattered him on his speech. "Upon my word, good friend, you would do for a minister. You have"——

"N-no, reverend sir, ex-excuse me, so to speak. Two things s-shut me oot o' 'e m-ministry, as it were. I-I'm too honest, an' I can b-blush, so to speak. A minister mustna b-blush. He hes till m-manage 'at up his s-sleeve, as it were, jist as he lauchs there, so to speak."

"I see ye know something about it."

"Somethin'?" "The Surveyor" got to his feet again, as if wakened by a sudden inspiration. "Look here, sir." He dug his hands into his waistband. "'E f-first thing needed, as it were, in 'e m-ministry is a um-be-rella, so to speak, an hoo till cairry it. There's m-more authority, so to speak, in a m-minister's um-be-rella nor in his e-edica-

tion, as it were." Our orator thought of moving away, but more material came to hand. "An' then, 'e second maitter is hoo till hum-an'-ha at v-veesitin'. There's a airt in't, as it were; an' till do it at 'e r-richt p-place, so to speak, n-needs a man—a *man*, reverend sirs"—and the orator coughed unbelievingly for his own special benefit. "Bit, godly f-faithers, so to speak, there's s-somethin' o' still more con-se-quence, as it were. It's 'is:"—he lowered his voice—"a m-minister m-maun ken h-hoo till smoke on 'e sly." His audience fell into good humour, and laughed loudly. "Ay. He maun do it solemn l-lek, as if he wis t-takin' a d-doze of s-senna an' d-didna want it, so to speak; so 'at if any-body comes on him kind o' unex-pected he can p-preserve his d-deegnity, as it were. Bit for any m-minister till l-let himsel' be c-catched, as it were, is a f-fair proof o' his l-lackin' gifts f-for his ex-alted poseetion. He m-maun do it so as no t-till be c-catched, an' yet s-solemn lek, in c-case he is, so to speak. D-div ye see, holy f-faithers, as it were?"

"Yes, yes. But the preaching—how would you manage with that?"

"Weel, f-fan I w-wisna in health, so to speak, I wud p-pit a white cloot roond ma collie's neck an' send *him* till bark in 'e p-poolpit, as it were. He wud do j-jist as weel as s-some ministers I k-ken o'—with-oot m-men-tion-in' names. 'E s-secret o' p-preachin', g-godly men, so to speak, lies a' in 'e coch (cough). Till be a m-minister, ye maun c-cultiv-ate a g-grave-yaird kind o' a coch, so to speak, an' ken hoo t-till in-tro-duce her. If ye can m-manage till p-plant yer coch and a r-richtly-m-manefactered 'Hem' in their p-proper p-places, as it were, there's n-no fear o' ye. See, 'is is h-hoo till do it, so to speak." He turned to the waiting hens and ducks. As he did so, he exhibited to the dignified gentlemen within the paling a problem of the greatest mystery. They saw the back of a man transformed. His coat tails and the legs of his trousers to the knees were white and plastered. He was not so when he arrived. How *could* it have come about?

Meanwhile, all innocent of his own picturesqueness or the amazement of the reverend collection, "The Surveyor" constituted the hens and ducks his audience, and, stretching out his hands entreatingly, prepared himself to address them. A low and measured cough opened the programme. Then he spoke, slowly—"B-brethren and s-sistren—Hem!—s-suffer the w-word of im-plor-ation, so to sp"———

"You seem to be fairly well acquainted with the Bible," broke in one of the ministers, jocularly.

He turned gravely. "'E Bible? F-fa wis m-mentionin' 'e Bible, so to speak?"

"Well, you very nearly quoted from it."

"D-did I, as it were?"

"Yes. You said, 'Suffer the word of imploration,' which should be, 'Suffer the word of exhortation.' You came pretty near it."

"Is 'at a f-fact, so to speak! Weel, as s-sure's death, men, as it were, I didna k-ken. It ap-pears 'at I'm a r-religious man then, so to speak! I n-never kent 'at till 'is

b-blessed m-minute, so to speak. I'll n-need till g-go home now, as it were" (he began buttoning his coat), "an' try till b-behave masel', so to speak, as b-becomes a man o' m-ma p-profession. 'Is k-kind o' l-life 'll no do, as it were, f-for I be-lieve 'e Bible s-says in s-some place, 'A candle 'at b-burns at b-both ends 'll soon b-burn oot,' so to speak."

"The Surveyor" assumed all the seriousness demanded by his new position. He pressed his hat resolutely down on his head, and turned to leave. "F-fairwell, godly f-faithers, so to speak. I'd lek a' ye h-holy g-gentlemen, as it were, till come till ma f-funeral, so to speak, an' try till m-manage a tear or t-two ower ma grave, as it were. I'd be real p-prood o' yer company, I'm sure, so to speak. An', one ither r-request: ye micht l-lift a c-ollec-tion—ye need n-no instruc-tions on' *at* point!—for a g-graive-stane till me, wi' 'e same r-readin' on it 'at's on ma f-faither's, 'Here lies ane godly and honest man, named Joseph Tosh.'" He seemed to have finished, and had gone a

step or two ; but something new crept over his mind. " An' n-now, godly f-faithers, good-bye. I'll s-say till ye, 'in c-conclusion', as it were, fat I said till ma f-faither, so to speak, fan he wis dyin', twenty years ago, 'Good-bye,' says I. 'I'm s-sorry ye're no lekly till be s-spared till see hoo good a m-man I'm goin' till be.'"

" The Surveyor " now fairly moved off, but he turned, after having gone some fifty yards, and, remembering that he had omitted to display his reverent upbringing, he plucked his hat from his head, laid his outspread palm on his heart, and made a most profound bow in the direction of the clerical museum.

When last seen Joey was fading down the hill, followed by his congregation, who now and again stopped to squabble over choice bits of corn-flour as they fell from the tails of his surtout coat or rolled off the legs of his trousers.

Danie and his "Bit Hoosie."

No mansion could have a prouder owner than had the poor hut of old Danie (Donald) Sinclair. It had been built by his grandfather and occupied by his father. Now it was his. His good wife had taken her long farewell of him within its sanctified retreat. He doated over it, remembering the scenes and faces of long ago. Every item of furniture had its history, every stone in the wall was familiar to its setting.

Danie worshipped the very arrangement of the pictures on the walls. To a neighbour who suggested a departure from the irregular coincidence of their appearance, he said, "I canna touch them. They wir pit there by han's—bonnie han's—noo turned

till dust an' ashes. They'll no hang itherwise as lang's I'm livin'. Dear aul' biggin', there's no a castle on earth I'd tak' for it!"

Every morning after breakfast Danie stood in the window thoughtfully for a few minutes. This was in reproduction of a habit acquired by his father years before his death. The smoke from Babbie Doull's "lumhead" was surveyed to see how the wind blew; then the clouds were scrutinized for signs of the probable weather. On Sabbath morning he opened his mother's "kist" and lovingly laid out her bonnet and "Sabbath things," as she was wont herself to do. In the evening twilight, he dwelt over the contents of his wife's box. Trifles—to all but Danie. To him they brought visions sweeter than dreams, and thoughts unknown to poetry.

Days of trouble dawned for Danie. His dwelling had been erected under the old system of ninety-nine years' lease, and the lease was fast concluding. Would he die before the fatal time arrived? He hoped so.

Could he buy the house back? His brain tottered amid curious calculations, impossible hopes, disturbing fears, and unworkable plans. Twenty pounds would do it; but that was a mountainous sum for him. He could never raise it—never. Yet, to rent the house, and he the owner of it, was not to be borne.

There was no escape. On a fine June morning Danie dressed himself in his Sabbath clothes. Something unusual was on his mind. He sighed. "No mine?" he asked, as he looked round wonderingly. "Ay, it's mine—bigged (built) in ma hert!"

That morning he occupied the window longer than usual. The smoke from Babbie Doull's chimney never seemed so homely and suggestive. The clouds overhead looked like old friends who had gathered in silent sympathy. Everything Danie's eye fell on, even the graip sticking amid the potatoes in his garden, took on an added charm. Opening his mother's "kist," he handled her articles with great tenderness. Then he looked over the love-links in his wife's box.

Ah, when the faces of our fireside have been carried out, when love is dependent upon memory, when silence is the only speech we care for, how unutterably great do such mean memorials appear! Levities all else!

Strong tides met and contended in Danie's breast. "Oh, puir things,"—addressing the furniture—"witness 'is day 'at I love ye—love ye wi' more nor a mither's love. An' oh, ma bonnie Jean, yer name fa's sweeter on ma hert 'e day than fan I first warmed ye in ma bosom. A' things here I love for yer kind sake." He gathered courage, put on his hat, and looked out his browned whale-bone-ribbed umbrella. He put the key in the door and stepped outside. Then he hesitated—and entered again. His heart was full, and he sat down to cry. Resolution, however, gradually mastered grief, and he arose. The door was slowly fastened, then Danie set out for Wick. He appeared at the factor's office.

"I hev ca'd 'e day, sir, till inform ye 'at as I canna buy ma bit hoosie, I hev determint till remain in't as tenant."

"Your house is sold, my good man. It has been purchased by a gentleman for a retired servant. You will require to leave it when the lease expires."

Sold? Leave? A great lump rose in Danie's throat. His sight lost clearness, and the things in the office began to melt. His brain felt heavy. His heart pounded his ribs. He found succour in an outburst of sobbing. "God help me!" he muttered, "It'll be 'e death o' me!"

"What'll be the death of you?" queried the factor—a lawyer—without lifting his eyes from the letter he was writing.

"Till leave ma aul' bit hoosie, sir. Oh, it'll end me!"

"Oh, fudge! Better men than you have had to leave their houses."

"Nae doot, sir; nae doot. Bit"———

"George!" shouted the lawyer (still writing) to his clerk in the next room, "show this gentleman out."

Danie's grief was lost upon the lawyer. He considered it a piece of pious prudery, assumed to extract sympathy. Heaven

knows, if Danie had been capable of such artifice, he knocked at the wrong door.

Gloomy was the heart of Danie that night. He related afterwards that as soon as he stepped over the threshold he locked the door and bent himself, face down, on his lonely bed. A dull pain moved in his breast.

He was thinking of his father, and fancied himself a boy again. "Oh, faither, can ye see me noo? I'm needin' ye 'e nicht sairly!" Then his thoughts grouped themselves into the image of his wife. "Oh, Jean —ma bonnie, bonnie Jean!—I wish ye wis wi' me noo! Ma grief wud be licht if I could bit see yer sweet, kind face, an' feel 'e grip o' yer soft han'. Oh, if I could bit rest ma head 'tween yer white, warm breests!"

He lay thus on his bed, without moving, far into the night. He kindled no fire, nor did he light the lamp. At length he stretched himself upon the bed-clothes without undressing, and tossed and sobbed till morning. As the growing day revealed

the empty fire-place his sadness deepened. He resolved never again to kindle a fire on its hearth. Why should he recall brightness there, to mock the flame which was dying in his heart?

The days went by as if pushed. Danie had provided no shelter; he could not get himself to believe that he really *must* leave. On the fatal day arriving, his furniture was (by the lawyer's instructions) carried out to the green at the back of his house. The pictures were taken off the nails which had known them so long. Ruthless hands undid a spell which, to that poor man's heart, was greater than the power of kings.

Danie sat in his father's chair, out on the green. At sight of him the new tenant hesitated to undo the cart-load of household necessities which he had brought. With rustic generosity, he invited Danie to take his "things" in again and live with him. Danie did not hear him.

The arrival addressed himself to the work of getting his furniture into the house. But

he soon stopped abruptly and turned to the neighbour who was assisting him. "Wull ye gie me a bed in yer hoose 'e nicht, Chairlie?" "Surely I wull, Alick; bit ye'll no need it if wi' hurry up wi' yer things." "Ay, bit I wull need it, though! I didna ken 'at 'at poor aul' man wis till be shived oot till let me in; an' I canna thole 'e sicht o' him cownin' (crying) on 'e green. Pit ma things back in 'e cairt! If ye can gie me sleepin'-room for a nicht I'll manage till get some place till lay ma head afore anither day gangs by; bit I'll no bide here an' shut oot 'at poor aul' man." And the cart moved off again. Danie could not believe it.

The minister and Adam sought an interview with the new proprietor, many miles distant, and opened the features of the case to him. He, too, was unaware of the fact that the lawyer had sold Danie's dwelling to him without consulting the old man. In the circumstances, he was not unwilling to re-let the house to its former occupant.

It was towards evening before they returned. The news of their success was at

once distributed over the district. Friendly hands soon carried Danie's "things" again within the familiar walls. He insisted on carrying his father's chair himself, though greatly overcome. Tomshie ("The Original"), poor doited mortal, accompanied Danie inside and sat down to watch him. For some mysterious reason, best known to himself, if known at all, Tomshie sat gazing at Danie until he fell upon the hearthstone at midnight.

Danie wept, prayed, and laughed in turn. His delight was pure and great. Every picture was hugged to his heart ere being hung up, then was patted softly with his hand when it rested once more in its charmed position. He turned out the articles in his wife's box and his mother's "kist," and handled them fondly. He stood in the window and looked out into the night as if it had been day. He laughed as he saw the stars. "Ma bonnie Jean's up there noo—amang 'e angels. An' I'm in a mansion here; ay, a mansion," and he laughed outright. "Maybe she'll come till

see me," he said, musingly. "I'll need till hev a fire on for her." Then he gathered together some sticks and coal, and built them on the hearthstone. "Ay, I'll big (build) her a fire o' precious stones—ma bonnie queen—a fire o' precious stones." His grief had dissolved, now he only laughed. A tide of wild joy was carrying him high on its disquieting breast. Carefully he laid the coals. As he finished, and was about to rise for a light, a swift pain plunged into his heart. He covered the spot with his hands and groaned, then fell beside the hearthstone.

Tomshie thought something must be wrong. He went and woke Bell Morrison. Bell sent for Betsy Manson. They called for Babbie. Danie was found lying with his cheek on the hearthstone, and his hands pressed firmly to his heart. They lifted him into his bed. He spoke not.

Two days after, as Bell and Betsy stood at his bedside, Danie suddenly wakened up and sprang out of bed. In a moment he stood by the window, looking out. He smiled as once again he occupied his

favourite spot. Only a second or two—then he sank to the floor. Bell and Betsy hurried to him. He gripped Betsy's hand with a terrible grasp, and cried, "Jean!" He gazed awfully into her face for one flashing moment, and threw back his head.

When the doctor came, Danie's heart was still.

His joy had been too much for him.

The Elder's Exposition.

I CAN never drift from the power of that night which Adam Craig spent under our roof. Adam had been shut out by the unexpected arrival of a former neighbour's wife. He came over and slept with us.

When Jamie had taken his accustomed tour to the end of the house, to forecast the weather of next morning, the door was locked and the Bible laid on the table. Nellie placed the arm-chair opposite the Bible and pointed to it. Adam understood her and sat down.

He chose Luke ix., 28 to 36—the Transfiguration of Christ. As was his custom at family worship, Adam commented in homely language on each verse. The warm motion of his thoughts gave his manner a quaint dignity and lifted his speech beyond

the more familiar marks of the Knockdry tongue. His saintly attitude, his reverent accent, his unconscious spiritual perception, his sagacious speech—all these are freshly sculptured in my mind to-day as on that impressive night. I recall every look and tone—ay, and the influences, too, which were born in my young heart, never to die. Speak of the backwardness, the narrowness of our forefathers! I tell you, sirs, I would pluck out my right eye to be again the humblest figure in a scene so powerful as that which then revealed itself behind Jamie Bremner's kitchen door! Heaven breaks out in lowly places. Did not the wise men find God's Messiah in a stable?

28. *And it came to pass, about an eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.*

"Wir Maister hed His favourites lek ither fowks. He hed seventy disciples; an' oot o' them He picked twel'; and oot o' the twel' he picked three (Peter, John, and

James); an' oot o' the three, He chose one (John). The miracles we see will a' depend on fat circle we belang till; the twel' see more than the seventy; the three are allooed intil speecial favour; an' John rests himsel' on the bosom o' God's Son.

"Fan Jesus went intil the hoose o' Jairus, He sent everybody oot; then takin' Peter, John, an' James, he went intil the room far the dead lassie wis, an' in their speecial company brocht her till life again. A' the mockers—them 'at lauched Him till scorn—wis shut oot, as mockers always is. Only them 'at love Jesus see Him at His best! A' mockers—baith learned an' eegnorant—are no lekly till see miracles. God disna work afore mockers.

"Here, too, wir Maister tak's the same three, an' gangs up till a mountain till pray. Oh, till hear *Him* pray! Yet, as we see farrer (further) doon, them 'at hed the chance till hear Him missed it through dulness. Ah, Christ's veesits, lek lilies growin', is lost on them 'at isna quickened till see them."

29. *And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered and His raiment was white and glistering.*

"Let us notice the word *as* here; it's a michty word. '*As* He prayed' a' the changes cam' ower Him. Div we see the full meanin' o' 'is? Nooadays I hear 'at fowks in the toons an' cities run till speecial meetin's, conferences, an' books 'at's praised by good men, an' in sich things they expec' till fin' 'at changin' fae the earthly till the heavenly 'at their hert yearns for. Bit no Helps is no till be despised, but they canna tak' the place o' prayer. It's *as* we pray 'at the changes—the real changes—tak' place. The glory o' heaven fell aroond Jesus 'as He prayed'—His coontenance, an' even His clothin', catchin' the brichtness; an' if fowks is till see 'at kind o' sunshine aboot *us*, it maun be gotten in the same way. The actual time we spend in prayer is richer in answers, till ma way o' thinkin', than ony time efter. 'While they are yet speakin', I will hear,' is the Lord's promise in Isaiah—a promise for the moment. Daniel, 'at man o'

God, says 'at it wis 'Whiles I wis speakin' in prayer' at Gabriel touched him an' informed him 'at he wis come till gie him skill an' understandin'.

"It must have been a rare sicht till see Jesus fan His face an' claes glowed wi' licht! An' we'll see it some fine day, in His ain good time!"

30. *And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias.*

"Fan prayer begins the heavens open an' veesitors fae the skies surroond us. A prayin' soul hes communications an' sees sichts 'at unbelievers winna credit.

"'There talked with Him two men'—talked wi' Him. Noo, fat'll they speak o'? Fan the leaders o' men foregaither, fashionable fowks is on needles an' peens till ken fat they say. Weel, here we hev a conference 'tween the leaders o' the Aul' and New Dispensations. Noo, fat'll they speak o'? Fat's the theme o' their discoorse? We'll see."

31. *Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.*

"Wonderfu'! Wonderfu'! Moses an' Elias appeared in glory—glory wis a' aboot them—an' yet they hedna a word till say anent it, nor o' goolden streets, o' angels, music, or heaven itsel'! Their talk is a' aboot the death o' Jesus! Here is the three greatest preachers the world ever saw—an' they canna fin' a mair welcome subject o' discoorse than the death o' Jesus! Ah, it's a noble theme—grander nor ony ither! Wud 'at wir preachers micht a' tak' the hint! Heaven and earth meet on 'is Mount o' Transfiguration, an' the supreme subject o' baith is the death o' Jesus! Its sovereignty ower a' ither themes is hereby established."

32. *But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep.*

"There's a *but* in maist fine stories o' 'is imperfect world. There's nae rose withoot it's thorn, I'm fearin'.

"Peter seems till be saiddled wi' the sin

o' the rest—'Peter and they that were with him,' it says, as if Peter had shown them the way till fa' asleep. Sleep is smittle. Peter wis aye a ringleader. He's makin' a bad name for himsel' fast. Afore we get till the end o' his history we'll hear mair o' 'is sleepin' bisness, for wrang-doin' disna jump on a body a' at aince. I'm no sure bit 'is wis the first step in Peter's actual doonfa'—onyway, it wis a prophecy o' it.

"Bit Peter missed an awfu' deal by 'at sleep o' his—jist lek fouks 'at sleep in the kirk or walk aboot wi' sleepin' minds. Their neebour may be in the third heavens wi' delicht, an' them missin' everything. Ah, heavenly glories sweem aboot the man 'at's awake: he'll see heaven aneath his feet as weel as abeen his head. There's naethin' lek keepin' awake fan' the Lord's aboot han'."

. . . *And when they were awake, they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him.*

"So they didna jist miss everything. They saw the feenish o' the Transfiguration,

an' fat they saw made them vexed at themsel's for fat they missed. Ah, if they had only been wauken a' the time! Peter micht hev seen somethin' 'at wud hev kept him fae fa'in'. They were grieved at sleepin' sae lang; an' fan a man is veesited by the grace o' God, his former life seems a great waste till him—he grieves ower it fan he thinks 'at he micht hev been wauken a' the time."

33. *And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias, not knowing what he said.*

"Peter, ye see, has seen enouch till mak' him lang for mair: 'is is the nater o' heavenly blessin's. He's noo the leader in eagerness, as he wis afore in sleepiness. Oh, 'at Peter! He wis a bundle o' impulses. His head wisna richt screwed on till he got a proper clink (fall), an' efter 'at he wis a brave sodger. Oh, 'at fowks wud wauken

in time an' see the Son o' God in His glory —an' no be gettin' up at the end o' their days wi' ootrageous shouts aboot the years they've lost, an' thinkin' till mak' up for lost grace wi' wrang enthusiasm, as Peter did here! His earnestness is so sweepin' 'at he runs too far noo—he wants till stay on the mountain a'thegither! Fowks o' Peter's stamp is aye runnin' till one extreme or the ither; but it's no good 'at the hert should be ill-balanced.

"Ah, Peter, ye made the mistake 'at many mak' in thinkin' 'at an abidin' tabernacle can be beelt (built) here in 'is perishin' world! 'Let us make tabernacles,' they say; an' Death an' Time lauch at them. Na, na; earth was never meant for us till stay in—it hes ower many pains an' ills; in Heaven alone is wir bidin' place. It is good till be *here*, bit it's a hantle better till be *there!*"

34. *While He thus spake there came a cloud and overshadowed them; and they feared as they entered into the cloud.*

"There's a queer connection in 'is words, no observable at first sicht. 'While he thus spake, there came a cloud;' 'at is, a clood gethered as Peter spoke wi' his inadvised mooth. I hev a notion 'at there's some inveesible relation atween Peter's daft speech an' the arrival o' the clood 'at frichtened them. They shouldna be frichtened for a clood, ye wud think, unless it cam' suddenly an' unexpectedly doon on them. It's plain by their fricht 'at it wisna a nateral clood; an' I conclude 'at Peter, wi' his rash ongoin', brocht it on. I ken 'is, onyway, 'at we bring mair cloods doon on the tap o' us wi' wir rashness nor we imagine. A' wir troubles is no o' the Lord's makin'; some o' them is o' wir ain manefactere.

"'They feared.' This soonds strange, fan the Lord wis aside them. An' them apostles, too! Bit they wir sleepin', an' they missed an experience 'at wud hev strengthened them against ony occurrence. Besides, they wir maybe feelin' a bit guilty noo, an' thocht the clood wis sent as a kind o' punishment for sleepin'. Hooever it cam'

aboot 'at they wis feared, I'm gled o't. It's comfort for tremblin' souls till ken 'at even apostles, in the presence o' Jesus, too, trembled at a clood. We mustna despair. The Lord is still aside us—as aside them—though we shak' an' tremble. I aye think 'at wir preachers should pit a little mair o' 'is human weakness intil the apostles' mak'-up fan they're preachin' aboot them. It wud be a great encouragement till maist o' us."

35. *And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him.*

"Cloods hev voices—ay, an' a' things—if we hed ears. Ay, bit wir ain cloods hev voices, too! Never a sorrow comes 'at hesna a voice for us, never a trouble withoot a message. Oh, that we micht listen better! Happy is the man 'at disna sleep in his grief; he shall hear the voice o' God oot o' his clood! Bit it needs keen hearin' till catch the Still Small Voice.'

36. *And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.*

"Moses an' Elias faded awa', bit Jesus remained. Remained! Yes, He remains fan prophets an' rulers an' kings pass awa'! A' things must decay, bit He'll endure, the Eternal Hope o' His trustin' people! Visions an voices maun fade, too, hooever heavenly; but Jesus abides. Dinna let us forget it! 'When the voice was past, *Jesus* was found.' Found! 'Alone.' Fat a deep word! I saw written on a hoose-end the ither day the words—'God is lonely.'* They struck me most powerfu'. Lonely—for fat companionship can He hev wi' us, 'at can comprehend so little o' His work, an' are so little lek Him in disposition? He canna fin' His equal till speak till even amang the angels. Ay, God is lonely—lonely amang His great works. Jesus wis, too. Oh till

*This was a quaint misreading. Somebody had written in chalk "God is love," then another had added "ly"—"God is lovely." Mr Craig mistook the *v* for an *n*.

ken the awfu' meanin' o' His loneliness! Nae prophet—no even Moses or Elias—wis fit till accompany Him through the decease He wis till accomplish at Jerusalem. 'I have trodden the winepress *alone*.' 'Jesus was found alone'—girt, single-handed, for His awfu' struggle. Alone—alone! Oh, meltin' word!

"'They kept it close, and told no man.' Some experiences get spoilt wi' the tellin'. They canna be set in language. It's only the lichter sensations o' the soul 'at can be tethered till language; wir finest feelin's canna be gript wi' words. Naebody can fully describe a sunset, though a' may feel it. A mither's love wis never yet sung or spoken as *she* feels it.

"An', noo, as we bend 'egither in prayer, may the Saviour's glory fa' ower us an' shine oot aroond us; an' may we enjoy a heavenly upliftin' so calm an' beautiful 'at it'll be too sacred till babble aboot!

"Let us pray."

I was kept awake that night by the fancy

of a great calm pervading the house and pressing me around. Long, long I lay, looking at the soft moonlight drifting into the room. It seemed to touch and illuminate my spirit. My thoughts swam out to the quiet heather, dreaming its sweet dream of the hills in sight of the tender moon. A pure repose lay on hillside and hearthstone—God's sweet emblem of an inner peace borne that night into a boy's fresh heart.

Reckoning-up a Precentor.

HE would not do. That was undoubted the first Sabbath he officiated. He might satisfy the standards of the unthinking south, from whence he sprung, but he was light weight for Knockdry.

His fate was determined at a confab of the authorities at the foot of the hill road.

The preface passed, Jessag Shearer took the track. "I never saw 'e lek o't," she announced, abruptly. "It beat a'."

"Fat beat a', Jessie?" asked Adam Craig.

"Did ye no notice?" queried the indignant Jessag, with a heave of her right arm. "He cam' intil 'e kirk wi' only a bonnetie in his han', grippit in 'e middle lek a dead rat; an fan he got up till his desk he dropped it wi' a clacht intil a corner o' 'e seat as if he didna care a spittle for anybody

in 'e heavens above, 'e earth aneath, or 'e waters under 'e earth. I'm no tickled wi' an ower-squeamish stomach, but I'm dashed if I wud pit up wi' yin take-me-off style."

"Dinna swear, Jessie," ventured the elder.

"Fa sweared? I only said 'dashed.' Can a body no get relief till their feelin's?"

Sannagie broke in. "Fair fa' ye, Jessag, bit it's yersel' at hes a clever eye in yer head. Yer mither wis blessed in hevin' ye."

"Close up, or I'll ile yer hair for ye!"

Thus admonished, Sannagie turned to the men portion. "Freen's, it wis a fair lack o' deegnity till appear in a bit bonnetie. He micht hev borrowed a hat for his trial-day, if he hedna ane o' his ain; or, at 'e very least, he micht hev held his triflin' keppie (cap) kind o' respectfu'-lek."

Geordie Corner here pushed his arm into the circle to make way for himself. Something heavy was on his mind. "I wud pass ower a' 'at," he said, earnestly, "if he hedna looked at his watchie so often durin' 'e sermon. He whupped her oot an' whupped her oot till I began till think he wis boilin'

eggs. It's a bad example o' restlessness—
—him 'at's sittin' in sich a prominent position. I'm frank till own 'at fan I saw him lookin' an' lookin' at his watchie I couldna shak' aff 'e temptation till hev a teet at ma ain watch—a thing I hevna done since 'e day I wis kirked. Forby, it's bad mainners, if I micht say so—a mark o' ill breedin', an' a lack o' genteel eddication. Fan I wis sooth at Edinbro'"—Geordie coughed, and looked somebody—"I went one day till a fine kirk wi' ma son, an' I noticed 'at every chiel' listened gentleman-lek, an' didna pu' oot his watch, tho' I'll wager ma snuff-mull many o' them didna ken or care fat 'e minister wis sayin'."

"Ay, man, bit 'at explains somethin' for me," said Adam Craig, venturing an aside. "I wis readin' in a book o' mainners fat ma lassie fae 'e sooth hed home wi' her last summer, an' it says its bad breedin' till look at yer watch fan ye're in company."

"Is 'at a fact?" asked Sannagie, surprised.

Then silence fell for a moment on the company, till Isaac Muirhead tacked his

contribution to the main theme. "Bit hear me, men, an' be kind till me. Ye hevna touched 'e worst bit yet. *He never opened his Bible till look for 'e text!* I dinna ken fat he's made o'—it canna be flesh an' blood anyway. I swung ma eye ontil him fan Maister Simpson gave oot 'e text, an', will ye believe me, he jist sat an' glowered aboot him. I couldna and I winna thole it, tho' I wis paid for't!"—savagely. "More nor 'at, he keepit his een open a' 'e time o' singin'. Peter San'ison used till close his, an' lay his head on one side so solemn-lek, 'at it wis a sermon in itsel'; but 'is moniment (insignificant) critter lookit a' aboot him wi' no concern, lek a hen-wife coontin' her hens. There may be no principle in't, bit a man fa hes till haud up his face till God's fowk should keep his face in order."

"Yes, an' he grippit 'e Psalm-book in *one* han'," augmented Jessag. "Peter used till grip her in twa han's an' haud her oot forenent him lek a drum, as tho' he defied 'e devil an' a' his imps. Bit wir new freen' propped her up in one han' on 'e tips o' his

fingers, as if he wud be gled an' ready till drop her fanever it wis convenient. I'm—I'm—weel, I'm *dashed* if ever I saw sich an exhibition o' weakness in a' my days. No, he'll no do."

"Mind yer language, Jessie, lass," remonstrated Adam, meekly.

"Bless me, Adam, can a wuman no speak?" She paused. "I'm *dashed* if he'll do, now! I'm *dashed* if he wull!" And Jessag flounced off from the company of the too-nice critics.

John Sutherland, our philosophical shoemaker, had not yet spoken. He had been busy smoking and thinking. He knocked the ashes from his pipe now, and cleared his throat. The assembly faced to him expectantly, for John always saw things from an angle of his own. "I dinna lek his boots," he began. Glances passed. Were the precentor's boots in need of half-soleing? When the pause had grown to emphasis, the shoemaker hitched up his trousers and made preparations to explain. "A man is kent by his boots. If he's a carefu' man he'll hev

his boots kind o' neat—ay, tho' they're patched. A reckless mortal, on 'e ither han', 'll hev his boots untidy, hooever good 'e leather may be: 'e laces 'll be ragged an' 'e bleck (blacking) 'll be claggy. I've noticed, too, 'at gushlin' fowks wear hard on 'e inside o' 'e heel, an' prood fowks wear hard on 'e ootside. Now, 'is man's boots disna please me; they're trashy, they're no tidy, an' they're a' *in* at 'e heels. I wudna trust a man oot o' ma sicht fa hed boots o' 'at kind on him."

John's speech opened up a fresh line of contemplation. The critics meditated. Jessag was observed to be edging close again.

"'At minds me," at last essayed the policeman's wife, "o' his hair. It wis drookit wi' hair-ile an' combed most pernicked. I dinna care for seein' a man in *his* place wi' his head laid oot lek a field o' turnips. It's too muckle o' 'e Frenchman or play-actor for me—tho' Frenchmen an' play-actors is no doot richt in their ain place, lek middens."

"Richt ye are, Bell," broke in Jessag.

"An' did ye notice yin wonderfu' tie he hed on his neckie? My, my, bit it wis knotted an' twisted an' turned ayont a' reason. Twenty minutes at 'e lookin'-gless wudna pit yin tie in order on a Sabbath mornin'. Forby, I'll lay ma head, it wis a 'cheat-the-public.' Braw in colours—God forgie us!—yet it didna cost more nor tippence, for it wis thin 's paper: sheep could eat gress through it. Hoo could a man o' 'at stamp be lippened till? No, he'll no do! I'm d—cheated if he wull!"

"A' that tells, men," added the shoemaker. "Efter 'e sermon, I micht add, I edged up till him an' asked 'e time; an' I wis carefu' till notice 'at tho' he sported a braw chain, his watch wis one o' 'e kind 'at's goold for 'e first twa weeks o' their existence an' bress for 'e rest o' their days—an' ye ken hoo till value fowks 'at wear sich watches. Then, I thocht I'd lek till see doon behind yin gran' wide collar o' his; an' ma unbelief wis justified, for 'e neck-rim o' his inside shirt wis ragged an' hed a suspeecious scum ontil't."

"Bit, till get back till his qualifecations," resumed Sannagie. "I objected most wickedly till him snappin' off 'e ends o' 'e lines wi' sich haste. Peter used till haud oot a long time 'at 'e end o' every line, an' then slide doon softly wi' a twirl till 'e next line withoot haltin'; an' it gave us a' time till gether breath." A wild bee flew by. "Bumbees disna snap off 'at way fan they're singin'."

"Fan a' is said, tho', he's a gran' singer, an' he really hes a splendid trumpet in his throat." It was Adam Craig who dared to say a good word for the subject of discussion.

"Yes, Adam, 'at's true, an' we'll no dispute it," retorted the shoemaker. "Bit fat's 'e good o' his *singin'?* He's wantin' in *solids.*"

"'At's 'e point, men," said Sannagie with eagerness.

The shoemaker's winding-up was accepted as final. Hands were shaken silently, and the council came to an end.

That precentor was never again seen in Knockdry. He lacked "solids."

A Fell August Day.

AYONT Knockdry Harbour, by the run of the coast-line, a whitened, divot-roofed cot sits. Widow Mary Groat and Nelzie Gunn stay in it. Mary is advanced and broken down now, and Nelzie's freshness only lingers. They are greatly indoors, but on the nineteenth day of August every year they appear on the braehead together —Mary, aged and short-stepped, holding hard to Nelzie's arm. They stop when they come to a spot marked by a cairn of stones —whereat Mary stood long years ago; then they look down to a humpy sprout of rock tipping into the sea. Sometimes the rock is foam-laced; on other days it is gently caressed by the swing of a calm tide. But Mary and Nelzie always see it surrounded and o'ertopped by a maddened, runaway

sea, storm-crazed; and on the ridge of the rock they see a boat, and in the boat two outstanding figures.

Never a blacker day drew to Knockdry than August 19, 1848. The memory of it clings to our fishermen like a superstition. On that date they shirk the sea, however the barometer invites.

Red, red was the sky the night in advance, with a lowered line of smoky cloud. There was uneasiness in the sign, but our frank fellows put away to the fishing-ground.

At break of morning the heavens were let loose on the sea. Then the conflict set on. Belch after belch assaulted the ocean. The waters, galled by ripping tornadoes, rose dishevelled, and with husky cries flung back the charge. Wind and wave attacked each other with hoarse challenge and daring. Oh, the mad warfare of breeze and billow! And when the gale at length gave in, wave waltzed with wave in delirious victory.

Ashore, roofs were plucked from many a

home, ricks of hay and stacks of peat were scattered in circles by windy whirlpools, windows fought frantically with their frames, as lunatics with their keepers, and the storm sobbed in the chimneys, like a thousand sad lunatics in pain. In Knockdry, history and memory have no other such day recorded.

Early the people struggled with one impulse to the braehead, crawling, staggering, holding fast to each other; and they cried, "The boats! the boats!" How the boats sprang and reeled in that lunatic pitch! The tide was one white mess—spurting foam carousing in disordered antics. Out there in it, specking the trembling dawn-light, bits of black careered helplessly. Nearer, and still nearer! Here they are pitched to wave crests, there they are tugged down again into pits. Spectators rub their eyes, dreading—yes, one has disappeared! Whose boat is it? But another is missed, and another, and another, and another! Wailing rises from the onlookers on the angered blasts, for who can

say what women are widows or children are fatherless now? Some of the boats in time sweep in, and are secured; others charge the rocks fatefully, and split. One fills at the harbour mouth; another heels over in the offing. Along the coast that black morning the driftwood of many boats floated, sad-like and forsaken; and the bodies of thirty-seven men tumbled about among the deep sea-weed.

Geordie Groat's boat was the "Fireside Hope," WK 395. Gavin Gunn was "a hand" on her. But Gavin was not feeling sound that night of the 18th, and his wife came over to ask Geordie if he would take his own son Bill in Gavin's place for a night. Bill Groat was sweetheart to Nelzie, Gavin's second lassie.

Geordie Groat and his son Bill make for the harbour. On their way they meet Willie Grant, a neighbour, and a dummy. Willie lifts his hands and shakes his head meaningly, then acts a man fighting with water, and drowning. "Willie's no

sure o' 'e weather," said Bill, unconcernedly. "'At's no it a', Bill," replied his father. "Dummies is said till hev a queer insicht sometimes. Ye micht gang back, Bill. I'd raither try an' do withoot ye. I dinna lek Willie's warnin'." "Ye dinna think, faither, 'at an auld dummy's goin' till frichten *me?*" "Maybe no, Bill; bit if anything wis happenin' till us *baith* fat wud Mary an' Nelzie do?" "Dinna fash yer head wi' sich fears; come awa'."

The boat slides sweetly out, the quiet water patting her sides and the crimson sky tinting her canvas. Nelzie on the brae-head waves her hand to Bill. He takes off his cap and returns the love-sign. Look long and kindly, gentle lovers! Wave your last farewells!

Loud vents the storm, and the wind curses rudely. Geordie Groat's wife is stirred from her sleep in the early morning. She lights a candle and goes to the door. In sweeps the wild wind and wipes out the light, and again the house is darkened. An

eerie feeling overcomes her as she peers back into the dark room. Then by passes the harbourmaster, who calls, "Oh, men, men, wull ye no wauken! Souls are goin' till Eternity!" His dim, scarcely-outlined figure, gliding through the darkness, seems the image of Death to that shuddering heart.

She puts a foot beyond the threshold, ventures out, and tugs-to the door after her. Then manœuvring the gusty beats, she wins the braehead. Many are already there, lying on their faces and looking over into the scene of mixing white foam and scowling cloud. They hold to the grass, too, for oh! but the wind is crafty.

Tardily light arises from the East. The dark tottering vessels take shape against the foam. See there! One boat, hit by a swelling sea, loups on to an outlying point of rock. It's the "Fireside Hope!" For a pulse-beat, she trembles and reels on the peak, which the quick waves have left. Then up starts Geordie Groat at the helm, and, plucking a bundle in a red handkerchief from beneath his oilskin, flings it with

main into the face of the uprising cliff, and cries, "Psalm forty-six an' one!"—his voice wedging up faintly to his wife through the uproar and din. Only a moment—a full, tragic moment; then the boat swerves, poises, whirls, and crashes side-long into the foam—staved and ripped. Bill Grant is to wave his sou'-wester as the boat topples, but a hurled oar smites him on the face and shoots him far over the gunwale. See the scattered figures bobbing in the surf! God help them! One is propped rocking on the tip of a tumbling billow and heaved to the rocks. Strong men wrestle to the spot ere the sea comes back for its prey. But they are late. Death is too swift for them; and Mary Groat is a widow.

Sad weeps the widow for her sire and son, sad weeps she by the lone fireside. Gently the door opens, and Gavin and his lassie step across the floor. Mary is grief-wrapt and hears them not.

"Mary!" and a big hand is laid on her shoulder.

She does not heed.

"Mary, lass, be comforted. I'll sow 'e corn an' cut it, an' I'll plant 'e tatties an' lift them for ye. As God 'll help me, I'll be yer freend."

But Mary is dumb with grief.

"Leave her to me," says Nelzie. And Gavin slips out in sorrow and wonderment.

No word utters Nelzie. Her heart is voiceless over her own loss; yet is she thinking more of Mary's greater sorrow. She slides down at Mary's feet and lays her head in the mourner's lap. She sobs grievedly. Mary does not observe her; but she sits quietly there, cooing with closed eyes over her own heart-rent, and so telling Mary that they are one. By and by, Mary's hand steals to Nelzie's head and strokes it. Mary is thinking: Nelzie's loss calls her half way from her own.

"Poor lassie, ye're hert-broken in yer youth. God pity ye! Yer braw lover's awa' fae yer airms for ever!"

Nelzie does not reply, but she rises and sits down on the edge of Mary's chair and

lays her arms around her neck. Then she whispers, "Ye'll always hev *me* left, Mary."

"Na, no *always*, Nelzie. Ye hev yer ain fowk till mind."

"Yes, bit it *is* always. I'm till stay wi' ye. Ma mother said it."

Mary stops sobbing an instant and lifts her red eyes to Nelzie's face. Nelzie understands the look, and says, "I mean it. I'll never leave ye. My faither's till tak' Geordie's place, an' I'm till tak' Bill's."

"God's good, Nelzie!" blurted out Mary.

"Ay, He is, Mary; though we dinna think it whiles."

Far, far into the darkening they sat thus, crying and heartening each other. And when they went to bed they lay like lovers in each other's embrace. On the table the candle shone. Said Mary, "Something tell't me it wud be a sair day fan 'e win' blew oot 'e candle in 'e mornin'. Bit it's lichted again, Nelzie; an' I hev *ye* gi'en till me."

"Yes, Mary, an' I'll never leave ye."

"God bless ye, Nelzie! God bless ye!"

During that night, and many another

after, Mary started up asking, dazedly, "Fat is it, Geordie? Wis ye cryin' for me?" And Nelzie put her arms around Mary's neck and drew her warmly to her breast; then Mary remembered.

"You'll no leave me, Nelzie; wull ye?"

"No, Mary, I'll never leave ye."

That was in 1848; but they still lie twined in the enfolding of each other. Every nineteenth of August since then has seen them walk silently to the stone cairn on the braehead. They stand there and look down, and they see a boat (to all others existing no more) reeling on a peak of rock. Only last year failed they; Mary was too ill. But they observed the day by the fireside. In the morning—at the same hour when Geordie Groat rose up in the boat—they took out a battered and swollen Bible, tied in a red handkerchief (found on the shore three days after the storm), and they read the forty-sixth Psalm, laying down again the corner of the leaf at the first verse. Then while Mary looked on from her bed, Nelzie

wrought into a bit of tattered canvas the words of Geordie Groat's favourite verse; and, ere nightfall, a piece of rude sampler work appeared for the first time above the mantel with this on it—

"GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH;
A
VERY PRESENT HELP
IN
TIME OF TROUBLE."