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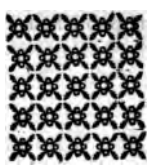
THE CONQUEST OF CHARLOTTE

By

DAVID S. MELDRUM

Author of "Holland and the Hollanders," etc.



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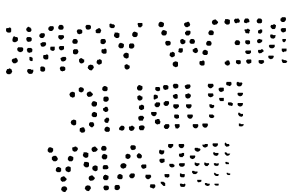

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PART I

My Legacy of Family History

CHAPTER I

THE LEGEND OF THE SABBATH NIGHT

The fire-eating Major was dying in The House, at the tail of the den, which stood aglow against the October midnight. Outside, the autumn trees swayed athwart the windows, from all of which, save one, from cellar to attic, guttering candles (as it seemed) and strange tongues of flame flung contorted shadows and reflections. They streaked the loan, mottled the red rocks in the den, and squirmed bloodily in the burn beneath them, and, climbing above, played capering antics among the gardens and house-ends of the Back Bowes. In the one window lay the shaded light by which two women watched the tough old gentleman wear away the last moments of his seventy-two years.

All in the village who could tumble out of bed were in the Tullis's garden. They huddled together at the spectacle, and held their breath upon strange sounds that reached them from The House,—the crack of flying axles, the rattle of chains, at times a sharp, uncanny treble struck athwart the hum of voices, and the eerie whining of the Major's mare there in the pauses. The three souls in the Major's

room (so said two of them) saw and heard none of these things: if the Devil sent his messengers for Major MacNab, he himself did not know it, and his niece and his nursing-woman did not so much as catch the rattle of their wings. I have heard it put down to a conscience grown rotted in seventy years, to an unbelief in devils or in anything beyond the grave, to exhaustion of an ill-used body, scarce ever to anything worthier; however be it, as the story goes Major James MacNab quitted this world very peacefully up there, in despite of manifestations without so awesome that only the hardiest in the garden could find voice to bicker about the import of them for the dying man.

I am reciting the great Back Bowes legend of my childhood; for the truth lying under it I refer you to the consciences of those who handed it on. This that I tell is the legend, and Rab Cuick and the elder Charlotte sailed in upon its wings. In the elbow of the stair in my father's house in Town of Tarvit hung an old print, midwife to my understanding, which represented two faithful souls being burned at the stake. Into the lower ground of the pattern rolled woolly clouds, furry-tongued, explained to me as clouds of smoke quickened by the flames of faggots, and out of them arose two faces, with expressions of so saintly an anguish, of so sensual a satisfaction in dying, as raked my emotions horribly. Even so appeared to me the legend. Save where Rab and Charlotte emerged from it, shining, the legend was nebulous; and—ironic foreshadowing!—by some whim of sprouting nature I associated these

two in my lyrical mind with the martyrs. Later, when with a more comprehending knowledge I guessed Charlotte's story and could appraise Rab for the man he was, the legend was still hazy as the clouds in the print. Even now, though I possess a key to its pattern which I would put into your hand, it has not ceased quite to be a mystery.

It was a Sabbath night, and dark and close, though there was a shake of wind in the trees. It was so pitch dark that Mr. Clephane, of Clephane, who was driving with Dr. Laverock from St. Brise, landed in a ditch on the Cock-my-lane Road, and had to walk his beast the remainder of the way home; on which account he set down the Doctor at the Bowes corner at three of the morning only, when the tumult at The House was over, and the folks were back in their beds, and there was no need for the Doctor's skill at Robin Cook's cottage. Whereas, with ordinary October light, he had been stabled and sound asleep in Clephane a good two hours before that.

They had been dining with the celebrated Mr. Adam, from whose house with the tower on St. Brise shore you command the Firth mouth; and that, also, may account for the upset and the consequent late arrival at Clephane. For there was a cellar as well as a tower in the house, and the claret in it was excellent, howsoever it came there; and the mandarins (a notion of Mr. Adam, who was in touch with the gay world) passed hot from hand to hand.

Mr. Trail, the lawyer, who in after days was Provost and Admiral of the Firth, was of the company, and discovered himself next morning, with nothing

on him save his hat, nipped with cold on his summer-house bench, and his wig and jemmy and things hung very orderly upon some dahlia-sticks. An hour or more earlier, Captain Duncan, of Fallowfield—"Whaler" Duncan he was commonly called—had been roused from his sleep under Mr. Adam's table by young McCormick, the Lieutenant of the Excise. McCormick also had lain there all night until discovered by his men with an alarum, and now he was swearing that he had been undone, and would clap in irons the whole clamjamphry who had tricked him. The half-awake "Whaler" roared that there was plenty more where the other came from, and, calling for another jorum 'spite of all the revenue rogues between there and the Bass, turned over again; while Mr. Adam, descending upon the uproar with a very haughty frown over his laugh, ordered the Lieutenant, with his men, out of his house, threatening him, as a Justice of the Peace, for a drunken rascal who connived at abominable illicit traffic under his very nose. It was a notable rouse; but if there was further scandalous issue of it, the legend has swallowed it up.

Thomas Tod, the cattleman at Clephane, was sitting up in the kitchen for his master when Ned Blake, one of the bothy lads, came in roaring that the Resurrection was at the Back Bowes and would be at Clephane in a minute or two. "Faith, my man," said Thomas, "you should ha' bided at the Bowes where you're not so well kent."

Blake and his neighbour Aleck had gone to sleep on a heap of dead leaves in the den near The House when returning from a shebeen on the St. Brise road.

Aleck's story was that he had been awakened by a great roar (which I take to have been Ned's in his flight to Clephane), and saw flames spurting from the Major's windows, like the breath from a spent horse. Afterwards, when he came to tell of this, he remembered a strong smell of sulphur. According to him, too, the clock at the moment was chapping one. It must have been that he awoke to hear the last stroke only of twelve, for his father in the Bowes observed that it was seven minutes after midnight when Aleck aroused him with a stone on his window and brought the news to the village. Elizabeth Tullis, who was nursing the Major, said that she had counted eleven strokes of the twelve when Mirrin MacNab rose from her knees by the bedside and bent over her uncle, who had come out of his sleep. For a quarter of an hour, before he dozed again, said Elizabeth, he just looked up in Miss Mirrin's eyes with a smile, speaking nothing, but telling her much. She herself heard nothing and saw nothing by-or-d'nar save the uncommon gentleness of the Major's face. It was a sweet-phrased story with which she was inspired to bear out Mirrin MacNab in the lie from which all this history springs.

It was in that quarter of an hour that the village was roused and tumbled into the causeway. A strange thing, according to the story as some have told it, was to see each of the laddies standing straight close in beside his father, instead of all of them knotted in a bunch or jinking in a string round everybody's knees. At the causeway-head, standing alone, last of the houses out on the road to Kedron, was the cottage of the Highland Tullises. Here

lived the strange man, Robert Tullis, with his sister Elizabeth, the nurse, and a younger, Christian, when she was at home: a proud, composed, and disdainful family who stood aloof in the village. This night, by some common instinct, the crowd drew unbidden to the Tullis's garden, from which there was a path and a clear view unimpeded by trees across the den to The House. That line of vision was one of several attachments between the families of MacNab and Tullis, and it was like the others in being fantastical, romantic, and at any rate not understandable by the Back Bowes shoemakers. They explained the relation of the two houses, separated by the den and by a social difference far wider than the den, as some queer Highland or Gipsy tie of loyalty and regard; and therein, I believe, were mainly right. Whatever it was, they regarded it with distrust. A general saying among them was that there was aye an ill-deedy Tullis to play flunkey to a MacNab's dishonour. Yet there were others in the village besides the Tullises who would have given their all to serve The House; or, at least, there was one other,—my aunt, Janet Seton, who had been maid to the lady Charlotte, the Major's wife, and still waited on her memory.

Robert Tullis, when I knew him many years later, was a silent, gaunt man—but that may have been because he had so much to remember. This night he discovered himself a new creature to his neighbours. He was standing across his own door when the crowd arrived. "It's up wi' the souters o' the Bowes," he welcomed them, and jeered them to the garden end. With his frank and supple tongue, he was like

a man gone a length in drink, extraordinary glib and impudent. He was *fey,* you would have said, only he lived long years afterwards.

My uncle, James Seton, a very dull man, was forever giving voice to the thoughts which he conceived to be passing through my Aunt Janet's mind. So now he says, "The Devil has sent for his own at last;" whereas Aunt Janet, good woman, no doubt was thinking that the Devil has a terrible claim upon us all—a very different thing.

"At least," said Tullis, "the Deil kens a gentleman, and gives to the Major a special escort;" and he pointed to The House, where indeed it seemed now as if a handful of horsemen rode in under the lights.

After that, James Seton and the others challenged the Major's gentlemanly vices only, and Tullis could not dispute them, and did not attempt to. The Major looms through the legend monstrously distorted. I take it that he was a very ordinary gentleman, hot and gamesome, and only a middling Christian. It was Robert Tullis's device this night (or so I divine now) to keep his audience away from The House by the fascination of MacNab profligacy.

He held the crowd gaping at the sight of the Major plumped into seas of debauchery. Before he could show them the Major at the surface making for land with a fine, generous stroke, some fresh manifestations of the Evil One across the den completed the plumping picture; and his lips twitched with the excitement of inventing fresh damnable adventures for his hero. He set his narrative upon the crowd like a collie dog on a herd of sheep.

"Dicing devils and more were the Major and his

fellows in their day," he cried. "Youth! Youth! And some men are never old—go out of this world at seventy, by God! with a splash like a youngster of twenty;" and he jerked his beard in the direction of the terrible House.

A string of bobbing lights disappeared through the wood towards Clephane, and the crack of cart-wheels sounded and died away upon the highroad.

"Men! Men! What's the use of going out when your time comes save wi' the licht spirit?"

"Licht spirit," answered a cooler hand, watching the den narrowly. "A run o' brandy, say I!"

"Brandy it might be," cried Tullis, shaking with excitement. "That would be like the devils. To bury the shotten corpse and then to sell the pickling."

The crowd went fluttering from his mad words. A woman in it fell a-screeching.

"It's body-snatching, so help me," she shrieked. "Look! Look!"

Where she pointed, a cluster of lights were stealing up the hill to the mausoleum on the knoll behind The House.

"It's a Burkeing business," the woman screamed again.

"Huts! Huts!" the little Master answered it. "Burke's been dead a twel'month. Last November it was he got his *ultimum vale*. Young David Baxter told me he watched his hanging from a window in Liberton's Wynd. But Lord! Lord! . . ." and his mincing dried in his mouth....

It is strange how trivial things as well as pregnant have survived in the legend. I give it as it came to me, entire....

Tullis gathered them round him afresh for his story.

"Did they ever hear tell about the Major and the lass o' Langside dikes? That was a story. Hearken close! This was a night to draw together.

"The Major had been dining with a company at Dug Oliphant's, at Edenbraes. What a house that was! And what a woman, Mrs. Oliphant! The Major never spoke of her but he sparkled at the eyes, and if ever a man knew a good woman it was he. That was one thing at any rate: a man must have seen something o' life to ken a good woman. It was high stakes in those days, and The House was full o' aigrettes and Tippoo rings and filigree from Seringapatam. They played late at Edenbraes that night, and the cock was crowing at Gilston when the Major rode home past it, with his pockets full o' money—near a thousand pounds o' money."

Tullis's imagination mounted the crest of that round sum, Tullis desperately giving it rein, and ran away with him helter-skelter.

"You know the woods when you leave Gilston and turn into the Back Bowes road? Red, bristling firs, and ruddy bunkers at the edge, with root-claws dug into them! Past them the Major was riding, when the cloak of rain-cloud was flung off the moon, and his horse shied at a puddle that shot up in the road. The Major, looking over the saddle-bow, saw that it was ruddy. Blood!

"Ugh! I can understand how he felt," continued Tullis. "I mind fine the same thing happening me and a neighbour—only we were walking, and hadn't a round thousand, but we had the matter o' sixteen

pound twelve, coming home from Colinsburgh show, and telling of murders done for less siller, and the red earth washed into the pool was bloody when the moon looked on't, and ugh! But the Major was a gentleman, and tough, and he looks over the saddle-bow and laughs, and would have stuck his heels into his beast's flanks, when he sees sailing in the moon in that bloody puddle, a lassie's glove. . . ."

There was a break in the herding narrative—a bang and a spattering of sparrow-hail among the apple-trees, and a black thing with staring fiery eyes shooting across the boor-tree hedge between Tullis's garden and the beadle's. The crowd went flying from Tullis's story; but he was after them in a twinkling.

"Ho, ho! Men! If Dicky Duke hasn't shot at his own cat in mistake for a deil. Ah! But he has the family grudge against cats. If all stories be true, it was with being over sib with a black Tom that his mother lost her life in the Lochty. She was an auld runt! Dicky, Dicky, you blind awl, you! Who trusted you wi' a gun? A strange thing is it that it's aye the stupidest nowt in the parish that they make the bethel!"

Dicky, on his side the hedge, shaking in the knee-breeches of his office, was as sure as death that it was the Devil himself, staring with red-coal eyes out of the gooseberry-bushes, that he had fired at.

"And hear! There he was coming again, up the causeway—in new shape this time, for the noise he was making resembled a beast's bellowing."

The crowd and Tullis himself stood cock-eared for the advancing appearance. It came—a little,

bearded, pock-marked man, with the legs of a tailor, and a fiddle-bow in his hand. He was shouting like one demented for Doctor Laverock. The crowd drew breath, half-regretfully, at the sight of Robin Cook —the father of Rab, who was not yet.

"Kirsten's taken badly, and I maun go back to her," he was calling. "Who'll run for Doctor La'r'ock?"

"My God!" he cried, halting a second when he reached the garden, and blinking as his eye ran along that straight line to The House.

"The Doctor's not there," Tullis cried sharply. "He's at St. Brise the night, at Mr. Adam's, and Mr. Clephane with him."

"Then Lisbeth Tullis," Robin said, making for the cottage.

"Lisbeth's up there certainly," answered Tullis, pointing to The House, and he stepped out to Robin, and barred the path to the cottage.

"Then run for her, somebody, O! kind folks."

"I tell you, Kirsten's taken, and not a living soul at the causeway foot," Robin went on, when nobody budged.

"There's a man dying over there," says Tullis.

"And will die, whether Lisbeth is there or not," Robin answered. "Go you to your dying Major, who were so thick with him living," he shouted in a sudden blaze. "Go you to The House, and send Lisbeth to Kirsten, if you're a man. O! is there not a man among you all? Not one, not one, you parcel o' petrie balls!"

He ran his eye through the crowd and named them all, from the likeliest to the very beadle. Al-

ready the farthest from him were stealing to the gap in the garden-wall which led out upon the causeway. Tullis followed them, seeking to stop the rout by the persuasion of his tales of wild life and the Major. The little tailor, mounting the turf-dyke by the side of the slap, kept their jostling in hand with his fiddle-bow, like a man counting sheep through a gate.

"Will none of you run?" he cried. "I left her in a fit, I tell you. She couldn't sleep, and I got up and played her 'The Lord's My Shepherd' on my fiddle. And when she was dozing off, I looks out at the window and sees—yon! 'Keep me, Kirsten!' I called, and Kirsten jumps up suddenly and looks out. And then she gives a moan, and there she was, taken in her cryings. And not a living soul at hand. Only William Flockhart there, running up the causeway beating his drum wi' his weather horn, thinking it was morning, and not sure whether this betokened rain or fair."

"Lord! he was funny!" laughed the little tailor. "O! will none of you run for Lisbeth Tullis?"

My Aunt Janet was standing at the gap; Uncle James was half-way through it.

"James, friend," cried Robin in appeal.

At the word my uncle hastened his pace; but in a twinkling Robin had turned him with his bow. "James, my good friend," he repeated.

"It's a gey queer thing," James tried to say, but his tongue clove to his mouth.

"Ask Mistress Janet—she knows," cried Tullis impudently, while the crowd sniggered, to lift the shame from themselves.

"Robin," said Aunt Janet quietly, "James, I daresay, will carry your message to Lisbeth, and I'll go back to Kirsten with you."

"Ho, ho! Janet Seton!" Tullis cried tauntingly. "Aye trying to make a man o' him? He'll stand a lot o' vamping."

For answer she tied her husband's cravat straight, even now thinking of his being presentable on going to The House.

Tullis stepped up to her.

"I'm beside myself to-night, Mrs. Seton," he cried with a note of anguish. "You know, this is a sore night for me. And, Lord, what nowts they are!"

With a meaning gesture he laid a hand on her shoulder, and spoke some words into her ear.

As she edged away from his hand, in shocked hesitation at his news, suddenly he spoke it aloud, desperately.

"Folks! The Major's dying—dead, maybe. But the young Captain's dead and buried."

The village swarmed back, and clustered on him.

"It's true as touch," he cried. "The man that killed him spoke an ill word about a leddy, and that was enough for a MacNab. He would be living now, for he was clever at the sword-play, but he slipped and fell on the other's point; and it was a gentleman's sword whatever."

"How ken ye this?" asked Robin, forgetting Kirsten for a moment.

"How?" cries Tullis, stumbling in his glib story for a second. "From Christian, in London, of course," he righted himself. "It happened days syne,

and far from home, in Touraine; but London's full of it, and she heard it, of course, and wrote me."

"And who was the leddy?" said Uncle James briskly, to lengthen the diversion that was saving him from that jaunt across the den.

"Hey! Found your voice, Solomon?" cried Tullis. "How ken I the woman?"

"But Christian might," persisted James.

Tullis turned on him with a sudden, fierce heat.

"What is the woman to Christian or to me, old haw-berry?" he cried.

"You said 'buried,'" my aunt said quietly.

"Ay, buried I said," answered Tullis, and he exhibited once more the tale of the MacNabs's wild doings. "Gentlemen aye are in debt, and young Captain Hector was deeper in it than most gentlemen. And now he was dead, his body maun be smuggled and buried in dead o' night, out o' sight o' the Jews."

"They've done it—see!"

The lights were descending the knoll to The House again.

"We'll have the Major in beside him before long, and the door clapped to and mortared, and then the Jews can whistle."

In the silence that fell as he ceased, a cry like a child's cry trembled in the air.

"D'ye hear, d'ye hear?" cried the little tailor, dancing away down the causeway in an ecstasy.

The crowd shouted after him in derision, but Aunt Janet followed him to Kirsten.

"Yet it was like a child," a woman said. "A child, and near by here."

"It's the cry of a soul unhouseled," said the little Master.

"Who has a child near by here?" the woman persisted.

Tullis heard, and lifted his voice after Robin in a desperate, drowning note. Even then the lights at The House were swallowed up. The garden sank into darkness, and the path at their feet ran into the pitch of the den.

"Gude folk! courageous Christian cobblers!" sounded Tullis's voice, triumphing and incessant, "you can win home. The ploy is over. The gallant life over there went out wi' the lights. Awa' to your beds, and good night to you. Ha! ha! There's no one o' you worth an old shoe to mend another. Out! out! Shew! Gude night to you, and pleasant dreams."

He swept them all into the road and down the causeway. He was swirling the sweat with his fingers from under his beard, and his talk was unceasing. His gibing rigmarole followed the last of the crowd to their house-doors.

When a little later Tullis reached The House, Lisbeth had laid out the Major's body and made up her own bundle, and was ready for the new business at Robin Cook's to which her brother called her. That is their story and the Legend. The Legend and they lied in the matter; but I see no reason to doubt the surface-truth that the Major had gone out with the lights.

Had there been any fresh terrifying occurrences that night at the stricken House, old Robin Cook

must have observed them. Grey at the lips, he moved about like a dog with its bristles up, pacing his stable-yard, going out upon the highroad at the end of every round to strain his eyes for the lamps of Mr. Clephane's gig with the Doctor, sometimes stepping down the brae towards St. Brise to meet them, then hurrying back when he found himself out of earshot of Kirsten's cryings, fearful lest the silence meant a sad end to them. From his seeing nothing more, I conclude that there was nothing more to be seen.

An hour or two before daybreak the village was sound in sleep, and Uncle James slept until the barking of the collie awakened him, and a faint step in the yard brought him to the door. By the first lifting of the October night he saw the yard empty and very quiet, save for a motion among the cows, and the collie that still held up a nose in the direction of the muir. James looked about him, but saw nothing, and went back to his bed. "I must ha' been dreaming," he said, and fell asleep.

He was sound again when Aunt Janet came in a few minutes later. Softly, and by the light of the fire only, so as not to waken him, she pulled from under the bed a kist, and from the kist took out some little bits of linen things that had been neatly folded away at the time when hope was quick, and for many a year now preserved under the dead-clothes. For the dead-clothes must find a wearer one day. As Aunt Janet knelt there with busy hands, and memory going like a shuttle, she heard the little cry of a child. For a moment, because of the work she was engaged in, it scarce surprised her; but when it was repeated

she had shaken her mind clear of the fancy, and the cry came in like the twitter of the earliest bird and went straight to her heart. Janet was old now, and the longing to wake on such a cry could not have been very quick in her; yet when it came this night it came like meadow scents to beasts in June, and she held her breath for it to repeat itself upon a heart thumping with the humours of spring.

When it did come she rose quickly, and stirred the fire gently, and swung round the kettle over the flame. That confirms the character she held for level-headedness with all her softness of heart—a perfect combination in a woman, that requires no addition save a swift humour and a swift wrath to make a perfect man. Aunt Janet knew exactly where to find the child—in the milk-house where the uncultivated sense of James had overlooked the basket. And yet he might have noticed it, for it was not an ordinary farm-basket, but a flat shallop of wicker such as all households in villages and towns knew in these days—one in which the stuff was kept for the weavers. Into this basket Janet peeped. It was beautifully furnished, and such clothes as the child had on her and those which covered her were beautiful.

The next thing that happened was James's awakening to hear the cry of a child almost at his bedside.

"Woman, woman," cried he, "that's not my bairn?" at which it seems Janet fell to laughing. And, indeed, to a humorous eye the affairs of the morning were running on laughing lines. The child here (whosoever she was) was clothed at any rate; whereas by this time, maybe, down at Kirsten's was

another child awaiting these linens. At the recollection of that, and maybe with a little pang of envy at the recollection, Aunt Janet tumbled James out of bed and into some clothes, and set him down to watch the wicker shallop and the little bundle now sleeping again in it.

"It's a gey queer thing," was all that James could utter as Janet bustled about the kitchen before setting out for Kirsten Cook's again.

With her on her return two hours later in daylight came Robin, the proud father (he was not to know the rascal he was parent to), with a brisk step sounding the morning's triumph. He had crowed so loudly about his bairn that Janet had not found occasion to tell him of her own find. When they entered James was standing with the bundle in his hands, "handling it for all the world like a skep of bees," Janet used to say, and "it's a gey-queer-thing-ing" it up and down; but Robin had no eyes.

"It's a gey queer thing," says James at the sound of Robin's voice.

"Maybe it is," said Robin, nettled, for he had some reason for believing that James must refer to the tardy arrival at his own home. "Lor' ha' mercy! —there's a queerer," he cried, catching sight at length of the bundle in James's arms.

He fell into a kind of trotting laugh, in which James tried to pull him up.

"What are you nickering at?" he said, with an unusual briskness that only seemed to whip up Robin's laugh the more.

"Man, it doesn't set you to handle a bairn," Robin said.

"And you," answered James, the recollection of the other event swallowed up in his present wonder, —"you haven't a bairn to handle."

"Me not got a bairn!" cries Robin.

Somehow, with Janet's assistance, the two were brought to an understanding of the double wonder of the morning. Nothing would satisfy Robin but that James should step across to see his boy, though it were but through the window; and James went with him, and returned to his own kitchen to practise the manœuvres which he had learned from Lisbeth Tullis's management of young Robin Cook.

And thus, out of the mystery of the Sabbath night, Rab Cook and the elder Charlotte emerge, borne on the arms of the two old men.

CHAPTER II.

THE RASCAL IN BUD.

As they emerge, so they have remained for me,—wrapped in unnatural arms.

The figures of the Legend, or all save one or two of them, are scarce more than stains upon my memory; faint, legendary markings. Major MacNab, the last of that gentlemanly race, goes serenely into the black night where the invisible Pluto drives; the impression of the Legend, here, clearly transmuted by subsequent groundings in the Classical Manual at the school in St. Brise. Mirren, who lost a lover as well as a cousin when young MacNab was stuck in the Forest of Amboise, and afterwards became the Mistress of Clephane, and lies in the family vault there, still seems to me, despite the secret that was buried with her, to kneel weeping like the angel on her sarcophagus at her uncle's bedside. The silent old man Tullis, past whom, on the causeway in the gloaming, we children in my day slipped furtively and ran, I still see flying on the business of that night which concealed a deeper crime than the smuggling of a body and some brown brandies home from France; sometimes, too, I think of his sister Christian and the young MacNab wearing him out with reproaches in the hours of dark. And always, even in the fulness of their manhood and womanhood, I

see Rab, a prodigy, handled by old Robin Cook, and Charlotte, a gentle foundling, in the simple rude arms of my Uncle James.

With the Back Bowes village itself and the den, the stage and mounting for these legendary figures, it is different. Since these figures vanished from them they have been stage and mounting often for my own adventures. The first night I ever slept out of my father's house was when I visited the Setons at the Nether Bowes; and I slept many nights there then, and saw with the eye the causeway and the Den House and the black path running up from it to the cottage where Robert Tullis lived, and the beadle's garden adjoining where the Devil flew out of the currant-bushes—all the places so familiar to my mind through the relation of the Legend. I can remember standing on the second night of my visit outside my uncle's door just as the monster dusk descended: it had swallowed up the den behind me, but in the east, where Town of Tarvit lay, a gallant cloud had thrust a sword of fire between its jaws; and first I felt a pang in thinking that Town of Tarvit and my home lay so far away as the cloud, and then it seemed to me that the cloud was myself, and I was fighting the monster that was ready to swallow, and suddenly all the creatures of the Legend came flying out of the den, and they were the monster, and I rushed inside into Uncle James's knees, and howled because the Legend was in pursuit.

By and by, however, when the unnerving home-sickness was gone, the Back Bowes and the den of the Legend had disappeared. A new village and a new den had taken their place. The peat-smoked

causeway was as unromantic and familiar as any street in Town of Tarvit, the Devil's gooseberry-bush was the sweetest of green gaskins, and against Robert Tullis's gable was a cricket-pitch as smooth and level as the sands of St. Brise; and at the House in the den, which for some reason or other was now called Nochty, there lived a splendid man, old Mr. Clephane's younger son, James Clephane, who kept pigs and ferrets and I know not how many more engaging creatures. Thus the dark shadows of the scene of the Legend were dispelled by the familiar rush-light of childhood; a day came when a younger Charlotte, my Charlotte, appeared in it, and by a wondrous alchemy it was bathed in golden sunshine.

As yet, however, that day is far off. At present, Rab and the elder Charlotte have emerged only upon this little world; and them, too, shadows and lights and a golden blaze awaited. Then, as in my day, the houses on the causeway were set down on an irregular plan, haphazard, like the furniture and ornaments in Aunt Sarah's drawing-room in St. Brise. Between those on the right (that is, if you are walking in the direction of the coast) there blaze on you patches of colour from stocks and asters and foxgloves and peony-roses in the gardens that slope to the den. The descent from these gardens, however, is dangerous, and impossible to all who have outgrown youth and suppleness, by reason of it being by perpendicular red sandstone that rises sheer from the burnside below; every here and there, therefore, narrow black paths start off from the causeway, descending between hedges or stone dykes, under holly and flushed rowan bowers, and by

shrewd windings find the easiest way, like burns in the hills, to the river running in the gully.

But down in the den itself! The tempered sea-breezes have kissed the sward and left their clean and perfumed breath upon it. The burn goes dancing and singing under the rock and the hill. The village sleeps on the rock; and round it night and day the tall, straight beeches, like a great company of knights, stand guard upon the hill, crowning it with their green and silver panoply. The very nomenclature of the den is sweet; many of the names of it are Scriptural—here is Jordan, here is Kedron. And all the world over there are wanderers who surprise themselves thinking of this chosen land, and the thought of it sweetens their sorrows with a sharp pain. You have seen it, you know it? Ah! they and I have looked on it with the eyes of a boy and a lover, and it is all the world to us!

The Back Bowes lies on the nether lip of the den, and all the mystery down there overflows and works its way among the houses. In this manner, something of size, of romance even, is imported into a village which, were it set flat upon a plain, would be too small to hide a single action, and scarce a thought or desire, from the friendly observation of every inhabitant. Not that, as it is, much is hid (though there is the case of the Legend); but that every little bit of news revealed is, as it were, a citadel stormed. For, if you are on the causeway, the intimation of something forward in the den will come to your ears with a rustle defiant and challenging, yet what exactly, or even in any manner, it is, is denied to the eyes until you have run down one of the

pathways to the den and fought to the innermost keep and guardroom of the event. On the other hand, the watchful eye of one in the den will see signs of commotion in the village: the quick passage of heads over the top of the low wall that skirts the gaps among the houses, a rapid clearance from the gardens of straw hats and bonnets that a minute before were bobbing over spades and hoes and amongst currant-bushes, or the disappearance of those who worked in a part of the den nearer these heralds of the unwonted; and in that case he must fly up the pathways if he is to share the early spoils of causeway news. And all through the year, and all day long, these challenges and sallies are going on between the village and the den, which are separated by two minutes if you are on the descending paths, and by thrice as many if you are on the ascending: either of them a greater space of time than you might think, for I have known Rab Cuick's bull-dog dispose of three of Laird Thallon's prize bantams in less time than it took Rab to run down the causeway and pull him off by the tail. And no doubt it was the same when Rab was all ignorant of bull-dogs (if ever there was such a time) and Charlotte was crying for Aunt Janet to take her out of Uncle James's clumsy hands.

Although my Uncle and Aunt Seton and Old Robin Cook are rather misty figures in my memory, and greatly coloured by the Legend, still I knew enough of them in childhood to understand the circle at the Nether Bowes, the world within the little world, into which Rab and Charlotte emerged. At the heart of it was my aunt, a fair, not unhandsome woman, even

when I knew her, with a white show of teeth, and distinguished by a grave reserve of presence and conduct. I see her now in her light blue shawl, and stuff gown, and the plum-coloured petticoat with the leaf pattern of her own working: she was remarked for a particular skill in needlework acquired under the Leddy Charlotte in the den. Janet Seton came of a superior stock, and carried the badge of race upon her features, and she was a sweet woman: so sweet indeed that the foolish question never quite died on Back Bowes lips, "However did she marry James?" James was hard-grained and knotty, and extraordinarily stupid, among other things for which he got less credit; his figure was lanky, and he looked broken at the knees; he had a face coloured like a haw, with a fine and stupid nose over smooth and well-shaped lips like many women's. Janet ought to have wed a man who farmed a bit of his own land at the least, her neighbours thought; and I say that she was good enough for any Clephane or the like in the country-side, though far be it from me to encourage a misalliance—least of all with a Clephane. As it was, she married my stupid uncle, who rented an acre or two from the Clephanes at the Nether Bowes, and kept a few cows and a pony and pigs and hens, and assuredly should not have kept them long but for her management. This I will say for my uncle: his recognition of Janet's worth was even greater than her superiority. He was very cock-sure as well as stupid, especially when he had been to St. Brise market and fell upon an argument in the homecoming; but never so with Janet. To her he deferred in everything, always (if she were

present) rounding off his remarks with a "But ask Janet—she knows," until, as we have seen, that became a by-word in the village.

My sharpest impression of Robin Cook, again, apart from that memorable appearance in the Legend, was made at my earliest meeting with him. It was on a Sunday night, when I had followed my uncle through the paddock to the hedge between the two houses, and to my uncle's greeting across it, "Well, and were you at the kirk to-day, Robin?"

"That was I," Robin answered, "and an excellent precentor we had, too!"

He was a fiery and mercurial man, with a most honest and prodigal heart. In calm moments he looked out upon all things humorously, even upon music, his love of which was a passion. As not infrequently is the case with that passion, it was regarded by his neighbours as a misfortune: a ne'er-do-well in the family of his virtues. I myself play a tune upon the fiddle, in modest fashion, and have at times felt a strange working of the inwards on hearing a fine performer. But Robin would sit uplifted night after night while his bow and a neighbour's ran a hurdle-race over the bars of a Highland reel. The harmonies of "Old Hundred" labouring through the rafters of the Parish Kirk filled his soul with joy: that was his own expression. I have frequently observed that there is no fervour like the man's who can put in a good bass; but Robin could not do that. He had neither voice nor ear. As his graceless son said, he was a poor singer before the Lord. His execution upon the fiddle, again, suffered from a coarseness of ear, and from fingers crooked

in patching and stitching the small-clothes of some generations of the Back Bowes—"there's a hantle o' wolfs on my father's strings," Rab said—and it was marred further by a mistaken idea that all virtue in the instrument lay in speed. There lived in Fife one Mike Runciman, lamed in a foot and an eye,—a true fiddler whom young Rab Cuick named Twang-dillo. It was one of Rab's stories that at his father's entreaty Mike once tramped to the Back Bowes, bringing with him his precious "Duke" (it had a "Duke" back, at any rate), upon which he made Robin happy for a whole night, and that afterwards Robin wrote to Mike asking him to send him the music of the last tune he played: "he would know which one he meant," Robin wrote, "for it went like this—*Tum, tum, tiddle-diddle, tum-tum.*" I certainly remember Mike, almost weeping, say to my uncle, who did not pretend to understand his grief.

"Robin Cook a fiddler! Man, he's aye glad if he's over the page afore ye!"

Yet despite Mike Runciman, and his own son Rab, and my inability to fathom its nature, Robin had a passion for music. That in him, somewhere, the soul of music lay, and that his physical disqualifications, in making it breathe, were perhaps his good fortune, are two things that find countenance in the career of his son Rab, who had the sweetest voice and the finest execution upon the fiddle and the most callous heart of any man whom I have ever known.

This was the circle in which Robin Cook's son and Aunt Janet's foundling were brought up, hand-in-hand almost. They tumbled about the causeway

together, worked for the same farmer in the summer vacation, and left school and started on the business of life on the morning of the same day, which was at the end of a white harvest thirteen years after they were born. Rab apprenticed himself to his father in the small cloth-shop, and Charlotte took up the work in the Back Bowes kitchen, where the frailness of my uncle and aunt made her help very necessary.

There was another respect, or so I think, in which Rab and Charlotte continued to be brought together. Fate had associated them in worldly introduction and condition, but Nature had been beforehand in working them in complementary moulds. Every man and woman in the village had his and her roughnesses and odd corners and queer gradations of character; yet to unperceptive eyes, and really in the main, they were much of a muchness. Whereas Rab was singularly apart from everybody in the Bowes, and Charlotte, of a truth, was not of it at all. This exception, in a manner, would have paired them, even had not their variation from the common been of the same nature. Nay, when I remember that she was the picture of my Charlotte, as we know who have seen mother and daughter together, I will not allow that there was any likeness between Rab Cuick and her. After all, it needed only their being distinguished, which is an exhilarating and morally bracing thing, to associate them. Charlotte had a more delicate nature, as certainly she had a more delicate configuration, than her girl neighbours; even as my Charlotte has, else how could I describe the mother? And Rab—— Men in every condition of life have ex-

plained Rab in the same phrase. He had a streak of genius, they said. Genius is not a thing I understand, but I could not esteem it so lightly as to have it explain the viciousness of Rab Cuick. He was, it is true, a very efficient man, yet withal a man of most unnatural ill-doing. That is how the sense of him as a prodigy is kept fresh in my mind.

Of Rab, up to this point, however, few things have come down to me, and none that concerns Charlotte. It was later than this that his voice ripened; and about the rare gift coupled with his name from an early age, his skill upon the fiddle—his father's fiddle, which old Robin none the less eagerly touched now though his son's dexterity put his practice to shame rather—the village tradition holds nothing that is discriminating. I catch a glimpse of the man I knew so well in somebody's recollection of Rab's display in school of acquaintance with affairs in the bigger world outside—of the scraps of information which he might have picked up in the newspapers and in books, had there been any for him to read; and there is the very man himself in the boy who spent half his free time with the queer man Tullis, and the other half by himself, gathering the woodland lore and the knowledge of beasts of all kinds and birds and fish, in which surely none ever surpassed him. The prodigy again: with something of wild nature in him that was alien to humanity. The Misses Justice used to tell, with much shaking of their ringlets, how they would have kept a class in their dining-room on Sunday nights, but had to give it up because Rab incited the others to steal the beans on their way home through

the garden. The ladies told this to account for his lapses later; but I daresay the story is just as common as boys and beans. More to the point is the other of Rab and Mr. Borrowman of the Parish Kirk, which gave rise to the saying in the Bowes, "It's a Borrowman privilege," when any one claimed more for himself than he granted to his neighbours. At the Bible-class which Rab attended with the others, Mr. Borrowman, a pompous empty body, was always harping on the uncertainty of life, and "God willing" before his intimations for future meetings. Once, being tortured with a toothache, he dismissed them, saying that he would defer his remarks until the next Sabbath; whereupon Rab——

"D'ye hear him, lads? He's well off to ha'e a next Sabbath: he'll ne'er allow us one!"

There is here perhaps a premonition of the strange horror of death which Rab always discovered. But that which I should most like to know about his early days is whether he made his fellows uneasy in their hearts and consciences, as undoubtedly he made men when he grew up. That was why my Uncle James never liked the lad. In my legacy of family history are many stories of how Rab baited James: bringing him from his bed by simulating his calf bleating at the other end of the paddock, for example, or sending him home to Janet with a prodigious story of a lamb dropped at the first touch of winter, for he had heard its pitiful cry over on the quarry hill as plain as man could hear it, and fooling the stupid man in a hundred ways, but generally by the exercise of these wonderful lips and tongue and throat of his; yet James would

rather have been enticed over three parishes on such a fool's errand than have an hour of Rab's conversation as they all sat round the fire. The moment Rab came in James began to fidget on his chair, never taking his eye off the laddie, watching for his damned innuendoes, and then he would rise and go out, leaving Rab chatting with Aunt Janet and Charlotte with a laugh in his words.

At length Rab's apprenticeship with his father ran out, and Eben Smith, the tailor in St. Brise, who supplied Robin with most of his cloth-stuff, offered him a place in his workshop. On the eve of his departure, Rab stepped across to the Nether Bowes to say good-bye to them all, a natural thing to do and a neighbourly, even keeping Charlotte out of the count. Of course he was to be back in the village every Sunday, and doubtless already they had laid their plans for meeting in the Silver Wood; still, St. Brise was the bigger world, and people are wise to say "good-bye" when they step into any bigger world, though it should be no farther off than the other side of the street.

Uncle James was very full of that view at the parting, and said to him by way of advice—

"Don't set too much store upon your fiddle, Rab."

"I'm thinking we all play a bit upon fiddles," Rab answered him.

"Hoots! Your father skirls now and then," says James, not catching his meaning.

"'Skirls' is the word," answers Rab, "and ye maun have a nice ear yourself, Mr. Seton, to name so well the puir display he makes o't....

"But I was meaning other instruments forbye catgut," continues the impudent laddie.

"And what are they?" says James almost briskly, while my Aunt Janet was ready to break in upon their bicker.

"O! religious differences and mash for kye," answers Rab, touching upon two instruments that my uncle was very fond of playing a stave on, especially when returning from St. Brise market.

I believe that my uncle's mind was wholly set against the lad from that moment; and Janet had her misgivings. She could not but guess that there lay something between Charlotte and Rab; but being nearer their calibre than any other in the village, by nature partly, and partly by affectionate study of the girl (who was hers and yet not hers), she divined that whatever was between them was grounded on the fact of their being uncos in the village, and that to emphasise Rab's strange qualities would be to attract Charlotte's. For even so early as this she had noticed a proud mouth in the girl she had to drive.

So now she interposed, having already signalised the farewell visit by casting off a certain distant manner with which, at most times, she met Rab—the only sign she gave of noticing his conduct to my uncle.

"We would be glad to have you stay, Rab," she said; "but we mustn't forget that your father has first claim on you this night."

Rab, with a clever eye, drew a deal of assurance from her unbending; and still more from her next words—

"When you are at the door, Charlotte, just bring in the washing things that are on the hedge."

"Guid night, Mr. Seton," says Rab; and my uncle gave him his cold hand. But Aunt Janet's shake had a kind of entreaty in it, as she sent him after Charlotte.

I know the girl to have been like her daughter, according to all folks' words. My Charlotte was like a lily among poppies: if her mother was like that, there was no man brisker than Rab Cuick to see it. He had the gift of keen senses: little good it did him. Yet I think that, though he had had ten sharp eyes for his two, had he been in love with this girl whom he was leaving, he ought to have forgotten all else save that. Whereas he noted how she had gone white and was shaking in the first blast of passion as she waited for him outside, and that her face shone to his, transparent, in the soft light of the autumn night. Ay! he noted these things, and he remembered them; for it was from his unmanly lips that I learned them; and how, when he would have left her with the promise of meeting each Sunday in the Silver Wood, she had flung herself into his arms, and with a "Stay a minute, Rab," discovered her heart, discovered it to him by her girl's weakness; and he kept it for years, and then brought it out in a gibe when his own daughter seemed to have a secret to match it.

Young Richard Clephane had a way of accounting for Rab's heartlessness, and even of justifying it. "The artist's temperament must be given the whole world to experiment with—especially women," he would say. You have pricked that bubble for your-

self, Mr. Richard Clephane, likewise of the artist's temperament. To the same end was the saying of the woman who bore the smart of all the ill it was designed to cover. "Rab was aye fond of his fiddle," I have heard his wife say often: and from her lips, in love, must have come this other patch in the history of that night handed down to me. After Rab had left her at Uncle James's hedgeside, she could not return to the house at once, but must travel to the garden end again, and even far into the paddock towards Robin's cottage. Rab would be there by this time. O! happy Robin to have Rab! And listen! she heard the bow strike the strings. The music got to her heart, and because it did, she knew that it was Rab who played, not Robin. It was a sprightly air: how could he play so when he had just given her good-bye for days? But he had not gone straight to it to express his feelings, she said to herself: they had been callous feelings if that air expressed them. No, she remembered, this was the air he was practising, and she condemned her own disappointment with her "Rab was aye fond of his fiddle."

To me, that shows his callousness more than ever.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAST SHOE.

In making so much of his callant peccadilloes, perhaps I am too hard upon the man. I know him, I cannot forgive him; yet I might be merciful until I come to his maturer ill-doing, and for it even there may be found some measure of excuse.

This Eben Smith's shop was not a likely place for a lad to improve in, least of all a lad of Rab's calibre. It went like an inn; and not so much like an inn as like some small house of call at the cross-roads. The manner of life which it betokened had disappeared before I came to know St. Brise; but, as I have heard from men of that generation, Eben's shop sheltered all the frolicsome spirits of the town. I conceive it to have been a change-house of much waggery and ready wit: it is no great title to honour for it or for Rab Cuick that all its days he was a credit to its curriculum. There is, too, in the profession of a tailor, for which Rab was in training, an incitement to nimbleness of wits; the very attitude of the tailor is apish, and suggestive of the tricky. Eben Smith was a man of small proportions of body, with a big head and neck, and a grey and even manly beard. As he sat in front of his bench he had a busy way with him that pervaded the whole

room. He was a good workman, I am persuaded, who amused himself with his visitors, keeping a shrewd eye on the main chance the while, and upon their follies. If one of them, as happened more or less to all, fell away from respectability (I cannot say from virtue), he had no mercy. Such an one might have been in the habit of coming about Eben's shop for half a lifetime, and counting on Eben's friendship; but once he was in a hole, it was good-bye to him. Eben had not a finger to his aid, nor, it appeared, the thought of lifting one. Here was a school in which the two chief lessons taught were ready-wit and callousness; and Rab, it must be said, learned his lessons.

Most of this I have gathered from those who had matriculated at that school; for the greater part, from those who had graduated in it. All sorts and conditions attended on it, for their amusement. There was one set,—I will not say the most lovable, —who matriculated, and took such classes as they chose. They took their bite, and flung the rest away. But there were others, studious frequenters, upon whom the spirit of the place took hold. Many of them were honest and gentle, without self-seeking, and without grit,—so hardly must all virtue be snatched. The homeliness and the apparent generousness of the place were virtuous in their eyes uncorrected by any ambitions: so ignorant were they of life, so ignorant of themselves. And thus, for want of buckling to of character, even imperfect, they became wastrels; yet it was these poor devils who entertained me by the hour with tales of Rab's wit and waggery, and of his beautiful voice that

was just then forming after the cracking, and of Eben's ill-concealed enjoyment of them, and his sharp fling of the garment he was sewing at each audacious sally. They clung, like any woman, to the cause of their ruin, it was easy to see, and would sell the story of their soul's damnation in dribblets for a small carouse.

That was Rab's day-school: and, ill as it was, the night-school which he began to attend was worse. For one thing, it was of a meaner social condition (for Eben's could boast of the genteelest company), and, for another, it was unaccompanied by the semblance of work. On his first coming to St. Brise, Rab lodged very straitly with an honest woman in the East Port, in the tenement in which he took up house later (as you shall hear), and in the very flat, if I mistake not. Had not the woman been honest he must have gone bankrupt, or not fed, so meagre were the winnings to which he had to lay his way. Amusements and amusing company, or such at any rate as had to be paid for, were beyond him then. For companion after the day's work was done he had his fiddle, and he made wonderful strides to its heart. If a string or two were gone beyond mending, there was nothing for it but to lay the instrument aside, or play Paganini on such as remained, until he could afford to buy new ones; and as often as not he compassed that by saving a meal, appeasing his hunger with a guddled trout, or, that failing, rambling in the woods where haws and berries will stay a stomach if nothing better offers, and sometimes even being content with feeding his eyes on all the doings at the harbour and on the

shore. As he said, often in these days he played himself the tune that the old cow died of.

This sparing life, however, did not last long: not longer than it took for his skill on the fiddle and his song and his waggish turn to get abroad, with a corresponding slackening of his morals. All three were introductions to those who had less wit, and more money, and a greater practice in ill ways of acquiring it; and they earned him many a night of jollity that cost him nothing. Herein, even if in nothing else, there was a decline: to set yourself to amuse and to be paid for it is not a manly exercise; and to me it seems still less manly if, as was the case with Rab, you take it with your head high in the air.

There was a steeper decline than this, of course, discovered by later events to be set down in their proper place, which is only a few pages off; but at this time, save these on the down-path with him, no one ever guessed it—not even my father, although he came to persuade himself that he had known it all the time.

I do not lay great stress upon Rab's poaching. God made him with a little quick, beady eye like a bird's, and a throat and teeth and lips that could imitate any sound in the woods, and a mind like a pointer-dog. All the days I knew him, he never said to me bird or flower; but, then, he always thought little of me, and indeed I knew nothing about the fields. He kept all his fine craft for them who had a touch of the craft themselves, even as, save when he could wound your feelings, he kept all his wit for witty ears. But (so I have heard)

"Birdy" More, who was reckoned the finest stuffer north of the Forth, and had work sent to him from England sometimes, would get hints from Rab for his nicest jobs—hints, it seems, about the pose of the birds, which "Birdy" had not the imagination to come at himself, but only the knowledge to approve. The Postmaster in the Bowes, who was a poet, and had something in Blelach's *St. Brise Journal* almost every week, said to me once, and I will never forget the fulness of his voice as he said it—

"He's a fine mind, Rab Cuick, though he's a bad body."

Certainly, Rab was a fine talker; yet there was another wise man in the village who said of him that it did one ill to hear him.

There was no wrong in Rab's woodcraft. What was it, if not that, that led him to the discovery of coal on Clephane, years later? I lay no stress upon his poaching, which was done for the love of it and not for the gain. But, even so, poaching is a road with a hang to ill company, and it brought Rab into the clutches of Black Veitch, who was the great smuggler of that day on our coast. Into Black Veitch's clutches, do I say? It brought two rascals together, to the loss of honest men: there never was a man who could boast of having Rab in his clutches. My father, in the Excise, used to say that from about this time smuggling on the St. Brise shore became a fine art. Well I know who was the artist!

As yet, however, all this was known to none, not even to my father, and least of all to the Cooks and Setons in the Back Bowes. Rab was not obviously

vicious. Until the very end of his life, drink had no hold upon him: he was too proud and careful of his wits. With women he had a way, but not the libertine's. He treated them as he treated men, and debauched their minds as he debauched men's: it did them, likewise, ill to hear him. He must have amassed, somewhere, a considerable amount of money at this time: it was now, I suppose, that he laid in those reserves upon which he was to draw for long; but he never flung his siller about so freely as to arouse questions. A discreet mind might have suspected so strange and rapid a popularity; but it was wafted to the Bowes in a pleasant repute of "well-doing and well-liked" which made his friends happy. It satisfied even James Seton, who never unduly lamented corroboration of ill-doing that himself had prophesied. James judged Rab mainly by his regular appearances in the village on Sunday mornings, which entailed early rising and a walk of seven miles, and at the end of them three hours on a hard pew, before breaking fast. My uncle and aunt were too frail now to walk into St. Brise on Sundays, so they sent Charlotte there, and were content themselves with the big Bible in the kitchen; saving on Sacrament Sundays, when the pony was yoked, and they all drove into the town together. Thus James was in a fine position to mark Rab's regular arrivals on Sunday. At the moment of them, Charlotte ought to have been close upon St. Brise, for she made an early start. She should have passed Rab on the road somewhere above the town on the hill of Cluny. But she did not. Rab always was in the Silver Wood a full hour before his appearance

in the Back Bowes, and so always had time for more than a passing word with Charlotte before she struck the highroad, which she contrived to do in front of the other worshippers who tramped from the Bowes to St. Brise. But James Seton knew nothing of this Silver Wood dalliance, howsoever Janet may have guessed at it.

Things went on this way for three or four years. As my uncle and aunt grew older, Charlotte became more and more of a comfort to them. The girls in the Back Bowes had ripe and moist affections; but an overflowing heart does not mean a delicate sense, whereas breeding does, and Charlotte joined a delicate handling to a ripe heart. Nevertheless, as I have hinted, in one respect Charlotte gave them some uneasiness, which in all likelihood a daughter of their own would not have caused. She was not irreligious. Poor woman: she died with all her affections crying out in love for the man who scourged them through a lifetime; and, I take it, that is the last claim that will be set aside in Heaven. In her young days, however, and perhaps always (else she could not have been so forgiving with so little reservation) her nature had a kind of contempt for narrow, accidental moralities and for the Puritanic attitude. There is no saying how far she might have gone in scorn had not it been for Janet, who, withal her rigid creed, had a saving womanliness. Perhaps the little weakness, on market-days and holidays, of the righteous James acted as a restraint. But although the virtues and follies of this good couple kept a bearing-rein on her nature's lightness (as they would have called it), now and

then she ran off—and once, to the hurt of all their lives.

It was a beautiful, bright Sabbath morning; and when as usual Charlotte met Rab in the Silver Wood, they found it hard to leave the greenery and the kind shimmer and beauty of it. I do not know if they tried diligently to overcome the hardness: at any rate, it was very human not to succeed. I am not going to tell you what they said to each other, that day in the den, with the sun shining down from a clear sky upon them, and shining through a little cloud of their own consciences' creating. I am not going to tell you, because I cannot; and that not only because I do not know, but because, also, a man shapes every love-story into his own, and the time for telling of my own Charlotte has not come yet. They lingered in the wood, there, with never a soul to remind them that it was not the whole world and they the only persons in it, when the tinkling of the church bell, rising in the air, as if a cloud of earth-heat were to sing as it rose, quite near them, rung them into their senses. Even then, because of a new relationship, which just a look or a word will breed (and in their case, bred by many words and looks), they could not disentangle altogether, but must see each other a bit on the way, back and forwards; which is much like tampering with conscience in its manner, and a poor method of progress in its result.

So the Back Bowes bell had rung itself out, with a gasping, dying finish common to hand-rung bells, when Rab approached the village. James Seton had been seated on the low dyke at the end of the

garden, and as the last strokes came was walking up the garden towards the house, when he turned sharp at the unexpected sound of a whistle. Presently, the whistle changed into a voice, which came lilting up the den very sweetly—like a woman's, thought James, surprised by it into a sudden pleasure which he might have entertained on any day save the Sabbath. By this time the bell had ceased, and the swish and rustle caused by late-comers and those with an urgent anecdote or argument in the kirk-yard had died down. The village was a dead quiet, the very sunshine laid all sounds; so that Rab's voice,—for there was none save Rab with a voice whose mere humming could take the air as this voice took it,—broke upon the village as loudly as the first psalm in the kirk, and much more siccarly, I am sure. And while it lasted (for it was a snatch only, at the most, which could not be held in by him, because of all that Charlotte had said and looked in the den that morning) it made quite a stir, as many white mutches in the doorways testified; and even Janet came out and joined James in the garden at the sound. And there was Rab, emerging from the pathway as usual, the stave silent upon his lips now, and his step to the kirk-door specially clean and smart because of his being late by some quarter of an hour.

How carefully has my legacy preserved the kernel of this history! See how it is linked bit by bit by the pity of it! I can hear again Rab's voice lilting up from the den in a simple stave, to you and to me a sensation of joy, but in the hearts of that faithful couple echoing a nameless terror. I see them going

about, listening to it in their hearts, and pretending to each other to have heard nothing, and Rab, the cause of it all, supping his kail with his family with a gay spoon, and setting forth to St. Brise again with a light foot; and Charlotte, the while, with all her life just at the shaping.

When Rab left her this morning, she set out for St. Brise at a run, with conscience laying on the stick. Long ere she came to the hill of Cluny, within sight of the town, her feet were blistered, so that she ran almost on her toes; yet she never thought of putting on her shoes till then, so binding is custom. When at length she sat down on the customary green knowe and tied them, and pushed back the tousled wisps of hair out of her eyes, wondering if she would be presentable when she reached the kirk, and how far on the service would be ere she did reach it, her eyes fell on the Firth beyond the town, and on an outward-bound ship upon it. She had seen the sea, thus, fifty times a-year, and the ships upon it, and thought no more about them; to-day, somehow, at the sight she forgot her blistered feet, and the kirk, and she forgot herself, and skipped down the hill with love at her heart and a godless, happy ballad on her lips.

St. Brise, as Charlotte passed through it and wound down one of its narrow closes to the sea, shimmered in the sun. The tide was far out, and the beach hummed under the blue sky. Charlotte took off her shoes and stockings again, packing each stocking into its shoe and slinging them over her shoulders, and bathed the blistered feet in the little waves, and in this delicious exercise moved

slowly to the harbour. That was a new sensation to her; the ships, the sea, the salt sting of romance, the surprise at seeing all the things of which Rab had told her. From the harbour she wandered farther east, to the old and grey ruin, and scrambled over the rocks at its base, in awe and wonder, to the cove beyond. Her heart, it seems, was like a bird, and light and soaring: the sunlight lay on it, and on the sea, and on the great rocks, topped with bent and tree.

And so, at every step almost, she burst out into a little snatch of song; and as she sang it was always Rab's snatches, because as yet she was no great singer herself, and Rab was the only one almost in the Back Bowes who did sing; and because she was in love with Rab. And so she came to the yellow rocks,—rocks the like of which I have never seen elsewhere, save in some old paintings of foreign parts, and never see in them or here on the St. Brise shore without a lift in my blood. Perhaps that is why Charlotte, as she approached them, began to sing Rab's favourite air. Even I, who am like a crow in my voice, have seemed to sing like a lintie at sight of them.

She had sung her stave, just a snatch of melody as Rab would have sung it, and was silent in a moment, when out of the wooded rock came Rab's signal of the sea-gull. All surprised, out of her joy, she gave back the *ki-ak,* as she might have given it back in the Silver Wood; and looking up unconsciously for Rab, as she did always when the *ki-ak* was sounded between them, there rose from the undergrowth a black-a-vised man. For a mo-

ment they stood gazing at each other, she on her bare feet on the sand, and he half hidden in the underwood upon the rocks above her; and then she turned and ran. From point to point of the bay is not more than two hundred yards, and the sand was clean and flat under foot. In her flight the ribbons of her shoes, which slung them over her shoulders, came loose, and the shoes flew asunder: one she caught in the swing of her arm as she ran; the other was flung a yard or two off upon the sand. She reined herself up to turn for it, when behind her, again, the sea-gull's note sounded, twice this time, and from the wood alongside of her pushed out another man, younger and better favoured than the first, as she noted in the glance of her eye; and without waiting to pick up her shoe, she raced this man for the point. And because she had the start of him, being in a straight line with the tail of the rocks, and was supple, and he had a yard or two of growth to push through ere he could clear his feet, she reached the turn first, and when, half-way along the next bay, she looked back, there was no one to be seen, and she stood to ease the stitch in her side.

As she stood there panting, the sound of the kirk bells for the afternoon service, which she had designed to attend, hummed along the shore. Then she remembered the shoe she had left on the shore round the bend. It seems that what she thought was—the Back Bowes training was strong in her—that the man, whosoever he was, would pick it up, and there would be a clue to the Sabbath-breaker.

There was nothing for it but to set off for the

Back Bowes from where she was, without so much as entering a kirk-door. She slipped through St. Brise, bare-footed, and with a hot face, for all that the streets were empty, and she did not meet a soul; being ashamed of her nakedness, now that she had an extra bad conscience for her ill-doing, and, moreover, was like to be found out. And so, having tarried in the Silver Wood again until the kirk-folk from St. Brise appeared in their home-coming on the hill beyond it, which, happily for her, was as the gloaming fell, she arrived at the Back Bowes very miserable, and with only one shoe upon her back.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLOSSOMING OF THE RASCAL.

THE cast shoe was the pivot of all their fortunes. The Nether Bowes couple, it seems, did not miss it on Charlotte's return; nor did they note her flustered condition, caused by her fright, and the race along the shore, and anxiety about concealing the whole matter, if it could be concealed, or of explaining it if it could not. The gloaming sheltered her; but indeed her true cloak was their own alarm, woven of Rab's whistle and stave of song that Sunday morning. The moment she entered, Charlotte was aware of something amiss: they wore it like a mourning; and having no inkling of its cause, she imagined that the news of her morning's dallying in the Silver Wood, if not of her whole day's truancy, must have reached the Back Bowes before her.

Her mind was soon put at ease of that alarm. It was Rab's habit of a Sunday night to call in upon the Seton household on his way back to St. Brise. That was only friendly, for his way lay past their door. At such times, Charlotte and he were wonderfully indifferent to each other, or affected to be so: whether that was easier after the meetings earlier in the day in the Silver Wood, let you lovers say. To-night, while it was still long before his customary hour of coming, Aunt Janet took Charlotte

aside and warned her that Rab must not show face there that night.

"He shamed us all to-day," she said, and told Charlotte how. Charlotte's own performance, ranged alongside Rab's in the light of Janet's and James's displeasure, did not look very pretty; whereupon she conceived that a great injustice was being done to Rab, and, with a glowing pity for him at her heart, set forth to warn him from the Nether Bowes.

We are to suppose that Rab little needed the pity, and that he cared for it less, for he made a great laugh at the affair. That way of taking it suited Charlotte's present mind; it threw a shade or two of grey into her own blackness, which kept comparing itself with Rab's. All the same, that way of taking it would not do with James and Janet, when they made the discovery of her offence, which might be any minute; and, try as she would, it was with a poor show of Rab's lightness that she recounted to him her own doings of the day.

Her decline—obedience to the call of an outward-bound ship from the hill of Cluny, and the delicious paddling in the romantic waves—was easily understood by Rab: therein she was like a piece of himself. I gather that even thus early he had begun to know himself; later, the rascal showed that he could read himself like a book. When she came to the escapade of the yellow rocks, with its answering signal of the sea-gull's note, and the bare-foot flight along the shore, Rab hummed and whistled so mightily that she fancied that her sin must be blacker even than her fear of being found out had painted it.

Then he began to examine her about the adventure. He made an especial point of the beach being empty save of herself and the black-a-vised men.

"No other grievous revolters among the people?"

She was certain that no one saw her save these two, unless, of course—— Hey! Rab was laughing at her! But—but—and here ever was the sting of the story—she had left her shoe behind on the sand. It was a witness to her decline for any who cared to precognosce it.

"And the men? What were they like?" Rab continued with his questioning, ignoring the shoe and all its consequences. "A black-a-vised man" (as she had told him, and he filled in the portrait) "cracked with years, and a cloak hunched round his shoulders, making him look like a cockroach on its hindlegs?"

"That's the man," Charlotte cried, startled by the sight of him again, called up by Rab's description.

"And the other lad—the handsome one?"

Now that she thought of it, he was familiar somehow,—she seemed to have cast eyes on him before.

"Passing through the Bowes in a cadger's cart," Rab suggested.

"Yes, yes," Charlotte cried again. "And you know him, Rab? And, maybe, he knows me, and will bring the shoe to the Nether Bowes, and then —— What's a bit whistle to bidin' away from the kirk all day?"

"You may well ask," cries Rab in great glee, until Charlotte got into a fever at the thought of it. Then he comforted her with a gallant resolution—or so she read it.

"I ken the two ne'er-do-weels brawly," he said. 'Smuggling rascals both. I'll get back your shoe for ye."

At word of smugglers she was in a flare of concern. She would fifty times rather the loss of her shoe and the discovery of her truancy, of her tryst even, than that he should risk his life with the bold and wicked smuggler. But he just crowed at her. She didn't know the bold smuggler. He was a poor creature. Once he was a man, and would have cut a hatchet down your backbone as soon as look at you. But if she knew him now, as well as he knew him, she wouldn't count him a snap,—which was true. Besides, the smugglers as likely as not would never touch her shoe. It would have leave to lie on the sands until the tide came up and washed the dainty thing away. The tide wasn't full till two o'clock that morning. He knew that. He noticed most things, he said, and crowed again. And the moon was full early, and if he were quick—if she could forbear delaying their adieux now: "Morning's our time for a particular *tête-à-tête,* but then we're a queer pair"—who knew but that he could recover her shoe still by the light o' the moon. And to-morrow night—never mind how—or the next night at worst, if she would mak' an errand to the Silver Wood she would find it in yon fork of the fir where the chaffinch sat on eggs. Never mind how it was to be there: there it should be. And now —ae fond kiss, and he was off on his adventure.

With that she had to be content. And, indeed, for the moment it comforted her pride greatly that the shoe might be hers again, and that the discovery

of her day's ill-doing should rest on the slender cord of a chance inquiry by some of their neighbours about her absence from the kirk.

Now my father, who was in the Excise, as you have been told, was at this time an officer at St. Brise, and likely to remain there, or on the same level somewhere else, unless his own exertions took him a step higher. Marriage with Miss Grace Trail, which he was ettling for at this time, might have lifted him—and ultimately it did; but so far fortune had favoured that match little, and Mr. Trail, Miss Grace's father, had not favoured it at all. So it seemed that advance lay with his own exertions. Most folk, and Rab was one of them at that time I conceive, took Mr. Shirra for a dense man; whereas he was only an awkward, who saw and hoped for much. Therein, I am told, I take after him.

"True, true; you're like him i' the head," Rab said to me once in after-days. "Your father was a fell clever man wi' his head; but he was not very happy in his manner."

He had, indeed, a way of hitting upon the right thing, but of coming at it so unskilfully that men put down his discernment to his luck. It ill became Rab to labour that point. It was my father's fortune to have that vagabond's unusual wit set against his own in most of his enterprises—his ill-fortune. It began with this affair of Black Veitch, and the two played a game of checkers all their days.

Most of my knowledge of the Black Veitch affair was gathered from my father's lips, and they were unwilling. It came out in random shafts of bitterness against Rab—not the best way of getting at the

ruth. Yet, I daresay, I have the strings of the tory.

Some whisper had gone abroad about the sea-gull's signal, and it came to my father's ears and seemed a happy find for him, especially as he and the coastguard were in a rivalry for the catching of Black Veitch and his gang. Their doings were notorious, and whichsoever of the officers should steal a march upon the other in their capture was certain of a feather in his cap, and a round sum in his pocket to keep it oiled.

I suppose, too, that there was an informer, as usual, and that my father had bought him for his own ear. At any rate, he came to know where this particular cargo was to be landed, and the vessel that was to bring it, and even the vessel's whereabouts off the coast. So, when Rab reached St. Brise on the Sunday night, or rather towards the Monday morning, and made down to the shore (for Charlotte's shoe—but he went very warily, whatsoever his reason may have been, and it may have been habit only), he came plump upon my father and his men. But for his wariness, he must have discovered himself to them, for the moonlight still lay on the shore: as it was, he made a clean survey of their disposition, and with his knowledge could understand its meaning,—my father and the main body well hid by the yellow rocks, where (so my father's information was) the cargo was to be floated, with outposts at the doo-cot to the westwards and on the footpaths above where they led to the landward road. All this Rab, out in the moonlight hunting Charlotte's shoe, had discovered a good two hours before the tide was

at flood; and long ere that, be sure, Black Veitch had it all at his fingers' end, and had changed his course accordingly.

My father and his men lay listening for the noise of the oars. It was a quiet night, and the sound came just when and where they expected it—towards the flood-tide when the moon died, and away out in a line with the tail of the rocks. By-and-by it ceased, and that also they had expected; but not that when it began again, it should be short and choppy and yet fainter, as if the boat, whereso-ever it was, had changed its tack. Then, too, the man at the doo-cot slipped down to tell my father that he had seen a flash well to the eastward, towards Torrie Town, and by the time he reached the main body they had all seen it, and heard (so it seemed) the sea-gull's note faintly from that airt. But my father, being cock-sure, I suppose, in his information, which he had kept to himself, and proud of how he had laid his plans, would not budge. And in a little, to justify him it appeared, the *ki-ak* sounded from the rocks more immediate to them. And so it kept sounding, coming nearer if anything, but slowly; and my father gave the order to lie low, which was done even until the tide was on the ebb again. But no seizure was made. Then my father was got to believe that the game was up for that night. He had been outwitted; and it was characteristic of him, for he was given to bursts of heat, that by a sudden command he spread his men along the shore, and among the rocks, and through the wood inland beyond them to the main road, with

orders to take man, woman, and child they should find, and bring them to him.

And, by-and-by, those down on the shore came upon Rab walking very gingerly over the wet beach and carrying a shoe in his hand.

Rab, of course, had a fine story ready on his tongue's tip. I have never known him without one. He had come down to the beach to pick up a shoe that was lost. It was a leddy's shoe. He repeated that tale when they brought him before my father where he stood fuming by the outgoing tide at the yellow rocks.

"And there—they could see for themselves—he had found the shoe. Whose? Ah," and he made a mighty man-o'-the-world mystery over that.

"Doubtless," said he, with a turn of his eye that took in the whole band, but pivoted on my father, "doubtless some of you ken how inconvenient it is at times, and how delicate, to mention a lady's name."

This was a thrust at my father, of whom the town's gossip had it that some nights before he had boggled at toasting his mistress; I think because (but I never knew the rights of the story) her father, the Provost, was of the company.

There was a kind of snigger among some of the band, which whipped up Rab's impudence like a top.

"I'm not ashamed of my trade," he continued; "but I'll not say that it finds favour wi' the lassie's people."

"I ken your trade fine," cries my father, all heated. A dull man, they called my father: he was

the first of all that countryside, it seems, to read Rab to the bottom. "I ken your trade fine," he cries, "and mine is to catch you at it. To-morrow I'll have ye before the bailies."

"To-morrow I'm at your service," says Rab; "to-night still, I'll not deny, I ha'e business wi' her whose name is no' to be mentioned." And he passed the shoe again under my father's eyes. "I'm happy to say that her folks haven't found out our little ploy yet."

"By God!" says my father, "to-morrow I'll cage ye."

"I'm thinking," says Rab, "that in the meantime some other bird's escaping you."

And, surely enough, at the moment he spoke, the *ki-ak* sounded far to the east again, and a flash sprang up among the rocks there.

My father drew off his men and hurried them all eastwards, and Rab was left alone. He mounted among the bushes above the shore, and watched the lights flash fainter and fainter, beyond Torrie Town. By-and-by the sound of oars from Torrie Bay reached him, and with a chuckle he struck northwards on the Back Bowes road.

The next day, the town was in a ferment about the smuggling case. It was known that Mr. Shirra in the Excise had been outwitted, and the folks were not sorry, and still less surprised; but they cocked their ears at word of Rab's connection with the affair. As the week wore on, more and more of them kept coming lounging about Eben's shop, where Rab sat with extra clever things on his clean lips, while Eben watched him from the corner of his eyes.

Mr. Shirra had laid an information against Rab before the Provost and bailies. So far as Provost Trail was concerned, my father might have spared his breath; and there is no reason why I should beat about the bush in telling why. Of course, there was his opposition to Mr. Shirra's courting of his daughter; but in truth that was little more than an outcome and corollary of the other thing I am aiming at. He had a very deep interest in these ventures of Mr. Black Veitch. Some people in the Provost's place would have welcomed a family tie with my father. An interest in the Excise would have been a fine reserve string to his bow in the event of the other strings playing him false. But the Provost was not of that kind. He was a man of siccar spirit, and he showed it, not only in making no terms with the enemy, but in taking his steps so that he needed not to make them. If Black Veitch had turned king's evidence on any day, it would have puzzled him to discover Mr. Trail's hand in any of his dealings.

But if the Provost pooh-poohed my father's story, and not without some flouts at my father's intelligence, the bailies were eager to take the matter up. These were the days when suspicion of well-stated authority seemed the likeliest qualification for municipal office. So in a quiet colleaguing way behind the Provost's back, the bailies and one or two of the councillors set about probing the affair deep.

One thing they found that looked ugly: Rab's landlady testified that on that Sunday night he had not come in before she fell asleep; and, thinking to

shelter Rab, she had added, "but that was nothing by-ordnar." The bailies seized upon this, and drew from her that Rab was aye a late bird. When they and Mr. Shirra came bursting west to Eben's shop and tackled Rab with this admission, the rascal answered that he could have told them all that himself, and indeed had done so.

"I was late," he said, "finding the shoe, as I told Mr. Shirra there; and as I told Mr. Shirra, too, I had to return the shoe that night, and return it I did."

Perhaps, Rab added, seeing Mr. Shirra had such a wonderful short memory that he forgot that, he could maybe sharpen his recollection by recalling various civilities that passed between them.

"Whose shoe was it?" cried my father, flushing hotly.

"You'll pardon me, gentlemen," says Rab, turning to the bailies with a laugh in his mouth, "but that's my business."

As to the matter of use-and-wont lateness, "I'm a kind o' romantic lad," he explained, "for all that I'm just a tailyer," at which Eben looked at him sharply again, "and fond o' communing wi' Nature. In fact, I can think o' nothing more entertaining, unless it be a crack wi' the bailies."

"Rab," cried Eben, tired of the suspicion likely to rest upon his shop, "you'll either redd up this matter, or you'll march."

Ha! the rascal was keen enough to clear it up, but at his own time and in his own way. How far before this he was in the Provost's confidence, or the Provost was in his, I cannot say; but now, at any

rate, I know, though it was not suspected by any then, there was a great deal of laying of heads together between them up at the Provost's house of nights. Had you known them as I have, you would laugh to think of these two confederates, so disproportioned in years, playing at the exchange of confidences. I think it very unlikely that the Provost gave Rab one single hint to fasten on; and just as unlikely that Rab needed one hint to aid him to the knowledge of all the Provost's secrets. They were well-matched wits, though Rab was to prove the keener.

I have heard Rab on the subject in later days.

"D'ye ken, Dauvid," he said, "between the Provost, who died highly respected and is lying up i' the auld kirkyard there with a mighty load o' ill-designed granite on top of him,—between him and me, whose end, I mak' bold to say, you believe likely to be lamentable, there was just this great difference, —I've been honest to mysel'. You'll not understand it, Dauvid, being yourself one of the dying-respected order. Huts! You're angry. There's room for all kinds, man; and i' faith in this assembly of a world them that come masked are given most elbow-room. My consistent way o' living is the same thing as that grand essential symmetry in music which you have heard Mr. Parabo discoursing about with that feckless artist would-be son-in-law o' mine, Richard Clephane. I tell ye, sir, it's not a question o' morals, —of good respectable living, which is just accidental morality. It's a question o' 'Have ye the gift? D'ye feel yourself standing outside the world, uplifted like, an' seeing it whole, like a diorama at the Kirk-

town market?' The man that has that gift, lad, is an artist, and I tell you, if he's true to it, he'll be a kind o' vagabond all his days."

"Then I'm glad I haven't the gift, Rab," says I.

"Perfectly, Dauvid, perfectly; that's a sentiment that throws a light on the whole question."

That chatter of Rab's is beyond my comprehension, which is exactly what Rab said; but it needs no special wit to see that he was goading these persistent bodies of bailies into having him up before them, and to guess the reason why. It was mischief partly, doubtless; just a wicked delight in fooling them in public. But there was always roguery behind his roguishness. He had up his sleeve a trump-card, to be played before all the world; rather than keep it there, I declare, he would have shamed his mother.

On the famous—nay, notorious—day of the Blossoming of the Rascal, the most distinguished man in the court, and all St. Brise was there, was the lad in the dock. The bailies looked down from the bench a little shiftily, for Rab's head had a confident, jerky throwback, like a red gamecock's, as his glance travelled, full of secret, from them to Provost Trail. The Provost, in his usual coat of blue and brass, and yellow waistcoat, watching the fun from the outskirts of the crowd, edged away from Rab's eye, it was so familiar; so that in the dim light of the court-room he was like a vari-coloured shadow moving on the wall. There had been no talk of his defending Rab himself, though he was a lawyer, his business being above bailie-court work. Nor could he have done it so well as the friend of

Rab's choice, one Rolland, the Writer, a new-comer who had attached himself to Rab almost from the first day of his entering the town,—by a kind of free-masonry, I suppose, for this was his first case in a long career of getting rogues out of scrapes by the skin of their teeth.

And over against Rolland, of course, was my father, poor, cock-sure man, deep in his life-long business of trying to sharpen his wits on that rascal Rab, and confident of succeeding. He had got some fresh evidence, the knowledge of which gave a crow to his voice as he went through the old story of connecting Rab with the shore, and the landing of a cargo somewhere on it. A load of the illicit stuff, he explained, had been discovered in a disused quarry in the Porter's Brae, which was to the east of the road to the Bowes, and that very day a witness had come forward who had seen Rab in the neighbourhood of the quarry on the Sunday night. And my father called Thomas Crummles, the herd on Milton.

I question if, excepting Rab, there was a man in court who knew Tam when he stepped into the witness-box that day. In my time, a score of years later, he was "The Philanderer,"—a bye-thing to everybody's hand, a reprobate token in the exchange of the town's humours. And he first went out of his course on the day he testified against Rab. My God! It makes me ill to think how many ships may have been lost through being signalled by that rascally barque.

Before the bailies Tam told his story plainly enough; with a glibness of tongue, indeed, which

may have been his weapon as a Philanderer, for in nowise else did he look the part. He had in his tending some sheep in fields that Milton hired from Gospetry, and on the Sunday night, or rather the next morning—it was nearer four than three o'clock—he had left them and was walking homewards along the Bowes road, and was close to where the St. Brise road cut it, when he heard voices. A minute later, or maybe two, just as he arrived at the crossing, a man came up from the Porter's Brae and turned past him into the road to the Bowes, and he recognised that it was Rab Cuick. He could not be mistaken, dusky light as it was,—it wasn't the figure that he recognised so much as a bit whistle that came from the teeth of it. "I would ken Rab Cuick's whistle amang a million," Tam said. So sure was he of his man that he had cried out, "Good morning, Rab!" but Rab had paid no more heed to him than just to stop his whistle and hurry on. By-and-by, when about half-way up the Brae to the quarry, he heard voices again, and behind him, on the Bowes road, he thought, the sound of a sea-gull—a queer beast to be screeching at that time o' day—and immediately two or three figures scrambled out of the quarry-hole against the streak of light in the east, and there was a sound of wheels, till all was quiet. It was himself who found the stuff in the quarry a day or two later, of which they had heard tell from Mr. Shirra.

Taken with what had gone before, it was a damning enough piece of evidence, and the bailies nodded, and the blue shadow slipped round the wall uneasily to get a glimpse of how Rab was taking it. And

that rascal's white teeth were laughing in Rolland's ear as he got up to cross-examine Tam.

The lawyer had understood Tam to say that he was out that night on his duties as the Milton herd. It was so, Tam said. And when he had first heard the voices he was on the road between Gospetry and the cross-roads at the Porter's Brae—somewhere, probably, near the by-road leading to the manse of Bogie?

"The same," said Tam.

"Now, Thomas," said Rolland, "will you swear—on your oath, remember—will you swear that it was the Milton sheep, and not Nelly Moyes in Bogie manse, that was your errand that night?"

Tam swore to heaven that it was the sheep, and with a red-faced vehemence that sent a ripple of laughter over the court, that broke in a little guffaw in the Provost's corner.

"So you tell the court," continues Rolland, "that you had not visited the manse-kitchen, and had the misfortune to be detained beyond elders' hours?"

"That was in the outgoing," roared Tam, his gills matching his red hair.

In the middle of the laughter, I believe, my father got up to protest against this line of questioning; but these were indiscreet and humoursome days, and the bailies would not have missed the scandal for the conviction of a dozen Rabs.

"So! It was on your road to see your sheep that you paid a visit to the manse. And you were late of leaving—wearing on to midnight. How did you leave, by the way? Was it by the front door, or the back?"

Tam fidged and fumed on a change of legs.

"Out with it, Thomas," Rolland bullied him. "But perhaps you don't remember how you left?"

"I have gude reason to mind it," Tam blurted.

So he had, to his dying day. Rab was prompting Rolland with questions now so loudly that the lawyer did not need to repeat them. The court-room was dissolved in laughter that anticipated the joke. Only the blue shadow on the wall bit his fingers on his smile, observing Rab keenly: this lad was discovering himself overly clever for a confederate. And poor Tam, in torment on his stand, like a goose on a hot gridiron, boggled over the story of his philandering: how the minister's wife, thinking that she heard strange voices, had come to the kitchen, and Nelly and the other wench had pushed Tam out of sight into the poultry-house adjoining, from which he had only escaped through a window in the loft. His entry set the hens and ducks clucking and quacking.

"What ails the ducks the night, Nelly?" her mistress had asked; and "Oh! it'll be a strange drake among them," answered the other maid.

"That'll do for the Philanderer," cried Rolland; and, after the roar with which this story filled the court,—

"Call Miss Charlotte Seton of the Back Bowes."

CHAPTER V.

RAB CUICK'S CHARLOTTE.

HER pale face trembled as she entered; and for a moment she shrank back upon old Robin Cook and my uncle James, who were following her in. Her gaze fluttered round the court till it rested on Rab; then, at sight of where he stood, a flush mounted to her brows.

"It was all my fault," she cried, and pushed forward to beneath the bailies' bench.

To this day, all St. Brise can tell so much of what they call "the witnessing of Rab Cuick's Charlotte."

Rolland handed her into the box, and with a knavish wit bade her speak simply what she knew.

"The Sabbath before last," she said, "I was late in getting to St. Brise. The bells had rung in, and instead of going to the kirk I went down to the shore past the harbour, and waded along to the rocks. And when I was wading, I heard the sound of a seagull, and—and it minded me o' something—and I gave the note back without thinking, and there on the rocks above me was a black-a-vised man, and I ran to St. Brise. As I ran another started up alongside of me, and I ran harder, and when I got to St. Brise it was without one of my shoes, and I had to go home without it."

Rolland put her a question as she hesitated.

"And did you recover your shoe, Miss Seton?"

"I told you already that Rab Cook got it for me," she answered, facing the lawyer. "You see,"—she turned to the bailies,—"when I got back to the Bowes, I told Rab the adventure of my losing it; and he said that as soon as he got down to St. Brise that night he would seek my shoe on the shore, and I was to look in the Silver Wood the next day, or the next, in the tree where the chaffinch nests, and I would find it. And so I did. On the Monday forenoon I went to the wood, and there was my shoe. They were my Sabbath shoes, and I have them on now."

"And I'm sorry," she said,—she turned to the Rascal, and the blue shadow on the wall shook,—"it was kind o' you, Rab, and I'm sorry I've got you into trouble."

"It wasn't you that brought me here, Chatty, or brought you either, but just your ain ungallant freend, Mr. Shirra . . ."

"Tush!" cried Rolland over his shoulder. "Let me ask you one more question, Miss Charlotte. Have you ever seen or spoken to Mr. Cook here since that Sunday night?"

"Rab? No!" answered Charlotte. "I wasn't allowed out last Sabbath."

Her own words tore the veil from her own eyes, helped, perhaps, by a little laugh that went round the court at the thought of that fine gracious lassie under any Back Bowes thumb—Uncle James's thumb, for example. In a flash she had explored the whole course of events to their fountain, as she thought—this narrow religion of her uncle and aunt,

against which something in her had always revolted. That was why they were ill at Rab's bit whistle. That was why she minded the loss of her shoe; why Rab, for the finding of it, was standing in the dock. That was why—the blood leapt in her with a new inspired pride—why she, her consecrated self, stood vailed for the sport of this burgh crowd.

I have but a dim glimpse of her feeling, for my nature is not like hers; but my own Charlotte's is, and every day now that wonderful country is revealed to me.

"Is that all?" she cried, with the imperiousness of the woman awakened.

The new note, and the sight of her so haughtily transfigured, startled the court, from the bailies to the scum at the door, and she had to repeat her question ere they told her she might go. Rolland sought to assist, but she set him back with a look. The blue shadow had flitted through the crowd to the foot of the steps. When the Provost held out his hand to help her down, she glanced at him for a second, and then took it. God knows I like neither him nor his kind; but there was a touch of quality in him that brought him nearer than any of us to Charlotte at that moment.

Even old Robin, her greatest friend and confidant in the Back Bowes, disaffected her now. They were standing in the street behind the court-house waiting for Rab, whose acquittal was certain. Up the wynd from the street came the hum of the town's tongues, and by an instinct she knew her name was the refrain of it.

"We'll go home, uncle," she cried.

"Won't you wait and see Rab?" asked Robin.

"No, no, no," she cried, and set off on the road to Back Bowes.

James followed, with the thought that it was a regenerate sign to see her so ashamed of herself; but gradually something in her gait as she dragged him at her heels made him doubt if her shamedness was of the kind he had in mind, and he panted on with a "gey queer thing" trembling on his lips.

On the grassy knowe above Cluny, she took off her Sabbath shoes. Uncle James, all spent with the climb, sat down beside her. Once more her eyes fell upon the Firth, of blue and green inlay, and on the ships far out with their sails set for the silver streak that shot into the North Sea. The sight of them startled afresh her proud and perturbed spirit.

"Why did you take me there? Why? Why?" she cried, leaping to her feet, and James, looking up at her with his hand on his side, thought the girl was mad.

"It was your own misdoing," was all he could say.

She looked at him for a moment; then she dropped on her knees at his side. The stupid honest man looked about him in wonder and alarm: all was hushed and still, the long shadows lying sleepily on the grass and gorse, and the sharp salt breeze from the sea filling the air here without a murmur.

"Was it misdoing?" she asked. "Then why does not my heart tell me of it?"

He laid a hand upon her, gently.

"You do not understand me?" she said.

"I don't understand you, Charlotte," he answered. "But we'll get home to Janet."

Following my Uncle James and Charlotte some three hours later came old Robin Cook on an errand of comfort—seeking it at the same source. The day had become more exciting after they had left him; its revelations following one another so fast that his mind was dazzled, and kept winking over them still. The bailies had given young Rab a handsome acquittal wherewith to cock his beaver, and some advice about not doing it again to vex the lug beneath it. The Provost, taking the occasion of handing Charlotte out of court, had crept away to his own house. My father I can fancy making use of a backdoor way, the thought of his mistress and promotion farther off than ever gnawing inside him. Rab was escorted down the Townhouse steps by a riff-raff crowd hoarse-throated in gratulation: he would know how little triumph there was in that, or if he did not he was soon to learn. Once on the pavement, he could see the respectable craft cruising about the High Street opposite, preserving between him and them the wide berth of the causeway. Presently Eben Smith hailed him.

"You needn't mind coming back to my shop," he said.

"But I'm acquit," cried Rab.

"Honourably acquit," said Eben. "All the same I haven't a board for you."

Rab was himself again in a twinkling.

"Man, I'm sorry to hear that," he cries. "I knew that these ill-fitting hose and things you have been

sending home o' late had done you no guid, but I never thought your trade was leaving you so fast as all that."

The little tailor came dancing round Rab in a fury, swearing out of his big beard that no ill-fitting clothes had left his shop in all the six-and-twenty years he had sewed in it.

"Well, well," said Rab. "I shouldn't have whispered a word about it—and in front of so many of your customers, too" (nodding over his shoulder at the ragged ne'er-do-weels behind him),—"so long as you had need o' me. Though, Heaven kens, I've been tired for many a day of the poor class of work that comes your way."

Eben stopped in his protestations, and laughed.

"Rab Cuick," he said, "I'm afraid you're a bad rascal."

The rascal shook himself clear of the lousy crowd with a chirrup, and crossed over to the tailor.

"Therein, Mr. Eben," he said, "you misjudge mankind, I think."

"Not you, at any rate."

"So be it. Each one plays his cards, such as they are: ilka one for himself, according to his nature. Mine, I confess, is queer. I hold an unco hand; and by the same token so do you, Eben, though maybe you're not so fond of displaying it. And the Provost, too,—the closest sitter of us all! God's sake! Human nature's queer—three or four strings at the most, and there's not a tune you cannot play on one o' them."

"Humph!" says Eben. "Your tongue was aye good company."

His foot was already in the swim of passengers on the pavement again.

"But mind you," he cried, as he was borne away with it, "I'm done with you for work."

The crowd swirled and bubbled round Rab in curiosity and amusement. From the outer rim of it old Robin Cook was crying—

"What means Eben, lad?"

Robin's blood was up, because of a dozen wrangles on his way hither. When left by James and Charlotte, he had dropped down to the High Street, triumphant, in search of his boy Rab. The High Street was a battlefield for that hero's repute. Its main intrenchment was the fact of his acquittal, but that had many weak spots for such as wished to be enemies, and these were assailing them hotly. Down the street came Robin, engaging and scattering them with parental fury. When the honest, avowed detractors were routed, his sense of Rab's innocence mounted to conviction point. There were others, slanderers in friendly masks, who chuckled at Rab's successful off-come as the crown and glory of his exploit. Clever dog (so they seemed to say): to do it and to save his skin! Robin was upon them in an instant, giving them the lie in their teeth, but they laughed at him.

"Who are you, old hot-blood?"

"The lad's father."

"He's a credit to you!"

And Robin wondered. His belief in Rab was down near to doubting.

Fresh from this warfare, Robin reached the crowd about Rab in time to hear Eben's words.

"What means Eben?" he cried.

"Just what he says," answered Rab. "He's short o' work for me."

Down the stream, in which he was bobbing, Eben cried back—

"Your laddie's lying, Robin."

"I want a word with you," says Rab to his father, walking into the causeway, where Robin joined him. "Step in with me to the National here, for peace."

The National stood hard by, and Rab led the way by the close door into the parlour. Rolland and a crony or two were just coming out.

"By Gad!" he cries, "here's the rascal himself. We were just saying——"

"This is Mr. Cook, my father," says Rab, disengaging the lawyer from his friends, and leading the way into the room.

"I congratulate you, sir," says the impertinent Rolland.

"And I thank you," answered Robin with a rustic courtesy, "for your helping hand to Rab."

"Just a formality, Mr. Cook, a formality. You have a son, as doubtless you're aware, that never gets into a hole that he doesn't ken a road out of."

"I've newly got an inkling of it," Robin answered, his doubting heart in his mouth.

"Mr. Rolland is not the man to act in a case without the surety of his client having right on his side," suggested Rab.

"Mr. Rollard's an unco of a lawyer, then," Robin answered, trying to throw the dust of his own humoursomeness in the eyes of his doubts. "But I'm

glad to ken," he added, looking at the lawyer with a wistful eye—"I'm glad to ken that Mr. Rolland is satisfied, as we are, o' his client's innocence."

"Of his client's evidence. Gad! it was a clever stroke of you, Rab, to bring that lass here," the lawyer chuckled.

"Begging your pardon, sir," says Robin, "that's not the way to speak of it—or I hope it is not. If it was a stroke, in your meaning, the skin it saved covers the meanest soul of all God's creatures. As an honest accident, it's still a misfortune. The parade of that lassie's sensibility, or of any lassie's, is a heavy price, if you think of it, for the declaration of the best o' men's innocence,—and that Rab, I'm feared, is not you."

"Your sentiments are nobly spoken, sir; they do credit to your own sensibility," says Rolland.

"The sensibility of the natural musician," cooed Rab.

"To be sure," Rolland caught him up. "I had forgotten—or nearly—all you have told me about your father's gift. The taste even better than the practice, I think I've heard you say?"

"Not so bad, not so bad," cried old Robin, crowing. "Fingers not so supple as once they were, but the feeling for't as quick as ever. Do you fiddle yourself, Mr. Rolland? No? I'm sorry for that, for we might have had a tear at it together at the Bowes one night. A gift! a gift! And one you can pass on," he added brightly, nodding in Rab's direction.

"Ah! Rab's talent all the country kens," says Rolland.

The sneer in the praise, like rime in the air, chilled Robin again.

"I maun be stepping," he said.

"And I go with you," said Rab. "I have a matter to speak of that will beguile the brae."

"If you should see Miss Seton," says Rolland, in giving Robin his hand, "present her with my respects."

"'Deed! I'll do nothing of the kind," answers Robin; and Rab laughed in glee.

"I mean no offence to you," Robin explained, "but just that she'll not wish to be reminded of a sore subject."

"If the witness is so very touchy, better leave my gentleman, here, behind you," Rolland said, nettled, although he waved a laughing adieu.

Robin flashed a troubled eye between the two men, and "Good day to you, sir," cried to Rolland stiffly, and with a doubting heart again took the Bowes road.

Nothing was said during the climb to Cluny; but when Robin quickened his step on the flat road beyond it, Rab hummed into his ears the news of his dismissal from Eben's shop.

"Eben, you see, is one of your small philosophers and damned clever men who condemn with a 'He hadn't been shot had he not been among the crows,' and turn their back on the unfortunate bird."

"And maybe he's right," says Robin bitterly, doubt become the conviction of doubt now.

Rab was not to be put off his tune.

"In this case, as it happens, the bird was a tailor, which means that there's eight more of him left, and

Eben will find it out to his loss. Moreover, he should not have forgot that, though all nine came to grief and were fathered on his shop, he could only lose the reputation of a tailor at best."

"A tailor at best!" cried Robin, answering the only thing in Rab's speech that he understood. "A tailor at best! You forget, sir, that your father's a tailor."

"But not at best," Rab replied. "I don't forget that he's more and better,—a humane man and a generous, not to mention a fiddler."

Robin gave a doubtful snort, and walked on again.

"The Bowes is a back-going place, lad," he said, presently, turning over a plan in his head.

"Huts! father," laughed Rab. "I'm not a broken man because Eben Smith has paid me off. I've no ambition to sew Back Bowes rents all my days."

Robin stood to look at him for a moment.

"You're not the laddie you were when you went to St. Brise three years ago," he said, when he fell into step again.

"And that's true," said Rab, speaking more persuasively, "and is it not only natural? Three years' acquaintance wi' the world."

"Bah!" interrupted Robin. "A man never again makes so rapid an acquaintance wi' the world as he does in the first three years of his life."

"Good! good!" cries Rab. "He finds his legs then. Later he has only to find a footing. That's what I've been doing in these three years in St. Brise. I have learned a trade, and I've made friends —friends among some of the big folk in the town.

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"I maun be stepping," he said.

"And I go with you," said Rab. "I have a matter to speak of that will beguile the brae."

"If you should see Miss Seton," says Rolland, in giving Robin his hand, "present her with my respects."

"'Deed! I'll do nothing of the kind," answers Robin; and Rab laughed in glee.

"I mean no offence to you," Robin explained, "but just that she'll not wish to be reminded of a sore subject."

"If the witness is so very touchy, better leave my gentleman, here, behind you," Rolland said, nettled, although he waved a laughing adieu.

Robin flashed a troubled eye between the two men, and "Good day to you, sir," cried to Rolland stiffly, and with a doubting heart again took the Bowes road.

Nothing was said during the climb to Cluny; but when Robin quickened his step on the flat road beyond it, Rab hummed into his ears the news of his dismissal from Eben's shop.

"Eben, you see, is one of your small philosophers and damned clever men who condemn with a 'He hadn't been shot had he not been among the crows,' and turn their back on the unfortunate bird."

"And maybe he's right," says Robin bitterly, doubt become the conviction of doubt now.

Rab was not to be put off his tune.

"In this case, as it happens, the bird was a tailor, which means that there's eight more of him left, and

Eben will find it out to his loss. Moreover, he should not have forgot that, though all nine came to grief and were fathered on his shop, he could only lose the reputation of a tailor at best."

"A tailor at best!" cried Robin, answering the only thing in Rab's speech that he understood. "A tailor at best! You forget, sir, that your father's a tailor."

"But not at best," Rab replied. "I don't forget that he's more and better,—a humane man and a generous, not to mention a fiddler."

Robin gave a doubtful snort, and walked on again.

"The Bowes is a back-going place, lad," he said, presently, turning over a plan in his head.

"Huts! father," laughed Rab. "I'm not a broken man because Eben Smith has paid me off. I've no ambition to sew Back Bowes rents all my days."

Robin stood to look at him for a moment.

"You're not the laddie you were when you went to St. Brise three years ago," he said, when he fell into step again.

"And that's true," said Rab, speaking more persuasively, "and is it not only natural? Three years' acquaintance wi' the world."

"Bah!" interrupted Robin. "A man never again makes so rapid an acquaintance wi' the world as he does in the first three years of his life."

"Good! good!" cries Rab. "He finds his legs then. Later he has only to find a footing. That's what I've been doing in these three years in St. Brise. I have learned a trade, and I've made friends —friends among some of the big folk in the town.

Fiddle and sang and a jokey tongue, and little things o' that kind—they've taken a fancy to me. That's all. Yet, though you wouldn't believe it, and it's a story too long to tell, that's the cause of this—persecution, I might call it, that you've seen this day."

The volatile fiddler was once more scattering the jealous detractors of his boy Rab.

"Well, putting aside this ridiculous story of Black Veitch, which Eben makes an excuse for ridding him of a man worth a bigger wage, I've saved a little money, not much, but enough, with my credit and the backing of my big friends, for a beginning. And I could aye start a pack. I doubt not that with the bit gift of tongue folk credit me with, we could keep a roof above us."

"Us!" cried Robin, turning upon Rab.

"Three years in a lifetime work wonders," says Rab.

"Back you go to St. Brise, sir," cried Robin. "Now I understand it! So Rab Cuick's a married man as well as a smuggler! How daured you," cried the little man, flourishing his staff, "how daured you allow a respectable lassie like Charlotte Seton be named with you as she was this day!"

"You haven't asked the name of the leddy," says Rab.

"Leddy!" sneered Robin. "Dochter of one o' your big friends, doubtless. I talk of an honest lass. Answer me, did Charlotte know you were married?"

"To be married."

"To be married—did Charlotte know that, before you brought her forward as a witness?"

"Oh! she came forward."

"Did she? Did she? And did she ken this before she came forrit?"

"I fancy she had a notion of it."

"Never! or she had never been with you in the Sil'er Wood. Man, that was a plain tale of sweethearting you unravelled to-day, and you've disgraced her. A notion of't? Did you tell her, I say?"

"Troth! That's my present errand. Father, you are overly hasty. What if it were Charlotte herself that's to . . ."

"Marry Charlotte!" cried Robin. "Charlotte and you to be married. There's a secretive young hussy for you—to tell me everything and not to tell me that. Rab, Rab, you are a lucky lad!"

Robin was leading the step abreast the Silver Wood now, his feet winged with joy. Suddenly he came to ground.

"Rab," he said, with a face gone white. "Are you worthy o' her?"

There were folks on the road advancing towards them.

"I'm going in here," said Rab; and Robin took his arm and led him into the wood.

"Rab," he cried, "before I leave you here for her to find you, you maun swear that you are innocent of this charge laid against you the day."

"Lord! How long have you walked out together?" the mercurial man went on.

"Walked out!" cried Rab, laughing. "It'll be a matter, now, of just eighteen years. You'll be inquiring next when I asked her. I never asked her. It's predestined. The little old man i' the moon has

bound us with his silver thread. And now I'm going to tell her the time has come for a stronger tie, and I'm not afraid that she won't agree with me."

"You're confident," says Robin, looking at him with these sharp eyes which took their brightness from an inward glow, and not from any light they penetrated to, for they saw shallowly.

"You're confident," he said.

"I ken Charlotte," says Rab, in a jubilant note,—"I ken Charlotte to the farthest ben corner of her mind."

"There's nothing in that to crow about," cried Robin in heat, and turned on his heel, and left him.

And so, with all his fears rising, Robin came to Aunt Janet for comfort.

I do not say that all this happened exactly as it is set down here. This, remember, is only a legacy of family history, my many legacies, pieced into a story. My father and my mother told me many things; and, in my presence, they told each other many more, thinking, as indeed was the case, that as yet there was no road from my hearing to my understanding. But now their words, and many others never intended for my ears, which I caught flying in the scandalous gossip of Aunt Sarah's drawing-room, start up in my memory, and take their place in the pattern of this tale. Charlotte Seton, too, contributed to the story. I have read a whole chapter of it sometimes in a look on her face; and the younger Charlotte, mine, was deep in her mother's heart. Above all, there was this rascally Rab himself, who could see ben, as he boasted, to

the farthermost corner of folk, and oftentimes would tell what he saw there.

Rab had, as no man else whom I have ever known had it, the trick of painting people and things in such a crux and attitude that you never could see them again in any other. When the high land of houses was being built on the site of the old Custom House in St. Brise High Street, there was a scaffold accident, which Rab witnessed from his windows. Two men, or maybe it was three, were killed outright, and some had narrow escapes, George Baldy, the hunchback, among them.

"When the stour lifted," said Rab, describing the affair, "I saw Hunchie Baldy hanging from the cross-beam, for all the world like a stable lantern." Many a time since then I have had dealings with this man Baldy, set firm on his feet on the solid earth, and yet for me he hangs eternally, stable-lantern-wise, from that cross-beam.

That is an example of Rab's talent in painting vividly the appearances of men and of things, and he exercised it equally in getting at the moral nature of folks, and holding it up for a spectacle. I tell you the dead and gone persons of my story,—some of them his kith and kin, his own wife Charlotte is among them,—have had their hearts plucked out of them and exposed to view by Rab as callously as if they had been the hearts of traitors and Rab the common hangman.

So, although I cannot remember old Robin Cook in the flesh, I have derived from his graceless son a picture, the completest, of that little bow-legged tailor, so hot and honest. I can picture him trotting

up the brae when he left Rab in the wood that afternoon, all in a flutter between anger and affection; yet when he came to the Bowes, though he was seeking support and solace from Aunt Janet, still the jokey man would come uppermost, and he had to greet her with a jaunty word.

It was a jaunty word, of course, about Rab's acquittal. James had told her, Janet answered. She was glad for Robin's sake, she said; for all their sakes. Were not they all involved?

"Ay! ay! James told you," said Robin, his assurance wavering before Janet's bitterness. "And what, now, did James think of it?"

She told him what James had recounted: just that Charlotte made a good appearance, and that Rab got clean off.

"She got him off," whispered Robin, doubt clouding his briskness, and enveloping it.

Janet knew that. James had not said so, but she had guessed it.

"And Charlotte?"

"And Charlotte?" he repeated, when there was no answer to his question.

"What have you done with the girl down in St. Brise?" she broke out with temper. "She's come back another woman."

"James had been too hard on her, maybe," suggested Robin.

"Not James, but the thing itself was too hard on her," Janet answered more hotly.

"A proud lass! A proud lass!"

"She's been publicly held up."

"Tuts! I came to you for heartening, Janet Seton," cried Robin, in vexation.

"You don't believe he was in this smuggling affair?" she went on, not heeding him.

"No, no. Certainly not, else how should the bailies let him off. And yet I won't say he was not capable of it, such is his love of a ploy and bothering folks."

"You have your doubts, Robin Cook," she turned on him fiercely—"you and all of you. None but had doubts, James told me."

"Yes, yes. Till Charlotte stepped into the box. She made his innocence patent."

"Are you so sure she's clear on that point," insisted Janet.

"What!" cried the little man aghast. "Janet, I'd have given my fiddle to save her this."

"Oh! I ken you are fond of the girl. Are we not all fond o' her—fond o' her? What about it? Affection's but a nest from which the fledglings fly. Which should go quicker than the cuckoo-bird dropped into it. You mind that Sabbath night, Robin, eighteen—nigh nineteen years ago?"

"Fine."

"The night that brought me a treasure. And since then—I'll tell you. Since then I've been living in a sinful hope—that's the truth. I thought to myself, I said to myself, and I thought that I thought it: 'It's the Lord's will that she comes to me.' It's not that I have not wondered often, and looked at her and made guesses. . . . 'But it's the Lord's will,' I ever said to myself, 'and it's the

Lord's will that she came unbeknown and unchristened.' All the time, it is to keep her to myself that I have been silent. To keep her, to have her for my very own—there's an avarice for affection as well as for siller—that's what has been in my heart. Sometimes I have seen the doubt in her eye, and deceived myself into thinking it was not there; and as she never worded her questionings, I have shut my eyes to them, persuading myself that to her I would never be other than her own mother, and she own daughter to me. But it has come at last today. Rab, or Rab's misdoing or misfortune, has put it into her head to ask it."

"Rab!" cried his father.

"Oh! I do not know that Rab knows much, or anything. If he knew it, he would not say it in so many words. That's not Rab's way. It's enough for him to get a hint, and having a hint, to weave a story, and to weave it so fine and gossamer that when you catch it, it breaks and vanishes in your hand."

"The rascal!" cries Robin.

"Not that," says Janet, going white. "Just a strange laddie—no more—as we love Charlotte. A strange lad and a strange lass."

"Ah!" cried Robin. "Trust a woman's eyes. I see you guessed they had an understanding between them. Lad and lass—so the world goes round. Why should we begrudge them leaving the nest? The past is by with it. The world's before them. Rab has got his foot in to it, I verily believe, and they'll be happy, woman."

"Say you so, too?" said Janet. "Listen. Here's

something no one in the Bowes save myself knew of till this day. Three years after Charlotte's coming I got a letter. It might have shown me my own heart. It is lying in the patch-box upstairs, and I know every word of it. It was from her mother, or it purported to be; I doubt not it was from her, the poor woman. She said she had heard I was acting a mother to her child. 'I leave her in your hands,' she wrote. 'The God who clouds the sky makes the sun to shine. He is not so cruel as men and women. He made the past, and He opens out a future. Were she, my child, to come into my life now, it would bring back the past, to her and to me, and spoil her future and mine. Give her this message, from her mother, if ever she inquires after me. It will be no grief to her to know that she will never know me. Love feeds on the living, not on the dead. Tell her, then, from me, if ever she can understand it: God is good. He will blot out the past and open a new future to broken hearts.' That was all the letter, Robin—a voice out of the dark."

"Had you no guess at the writer?"

"Supposing I had, I did not wish to know. Like the woman who wrote it, I was reading God's will into my own inclinations. There was her message, and I delivered it to Charlotte to-day."

"And how does she take it?" asked Robin, all inquisitive.

"It hasn't time to reach her heart yet. She's away out wi' it in her head."

"Where?"

"The Sil'er Wood."

"I left Rab there."

"Ah!" cried Janet.

I gather that it was then that Charlotte came in. It was dark, I suppose, for she did not seem to notice Robin's presence, but stole up behind Aunt Janet, and put her hands round her eyes.

"Guess!" she cried.

"Charlotte Seton," said Janet.

"More!" cried Charlotte, and bending to Janet's ear, she whispered into it.

The little tailor slipped up from his corner behind Charlotte, and in turn clapped his hands over her eyes, and—

"Guess!" he cried also.

"Robin," Charlotte replied, and faltered.

"More!" cried the merry man.

"Let me go, and I'll tell you," says Charlotte.

He released his hands, and she kissed Aunt Janet before she turned to him. Then she bent to the proud little tailor, and kissed him.

"I can call you father," she said, and kissed him again, and Robin crowed "I know."

"Ha!" he cried in his glee. "Your pride will be hurt no more—as Janet here was persuading me, at being publicly named with Rab."

"Rab says we had forgot to tell ourselves what everybody knew," answered Charlotte with a smile.

"It was my fault, at any rate," she went on uneasily, "and Rab has lost his job in Eben's shop because of me. But he'll start afresh; with me to help him he'll start afresh. Mother, what that message says . . ."

She stopped short; but Janet said, "Robin knows."

"And I have told Rab," Charlotte continued, "and Rab says . . ."

She faltered again, and did not tell what Rab had said. But I know what he said. Charlotte told him the story of the letter which Janet had told her. "It's a voice out of the dark," she had said, quoting Janet. "It's a voice out of a passing blink of light," Rab had answered. She did not understand him, or not then; but he was right. Where did he learn that strange command of the heart of men and women? But Charlotte said nothing of this now.

"That message is for us. It is true. There's a future lying before us."

"It's not true, not true!" cried Janet in a sudden great temper. "It's not true in that way. Would you then leave us? Is it so lightly done to root out all your affections and transplant them into a new plot of life, and forget the auld?"

And then, as suddenly calm, "Forgive me," she said; "we are all of us selfish."

"Nay, mother," said Charlotte. "Mother. I maun leave you and Uncle and Mr. Cook that I may be with Rab and help him in St. Brise. But I'll never leave you for long, and I'll never forget."

Janet took her in her arms.

"May you never have a past that you would fain forget," she said.

A flood of revelation rose to Charlotte's cheeks. Her eyes flooded with sudden tears.

"Oh! mother, mother," she cried, and Janet re-

leased her from her arms. With a grip of the heart, she realised that she held her no longer as before.

"Oh! mother," cried the girl, "you maun have been unhappy! and I, so happy!"

Robin went home that night through the paddock, slashing the hedges with his stick, once more routing, if he could, the crowd of Rab's detractors on the St. Brise street. At his own garden end Rab emerged from the darkening to meet him, and before Robin could say a word in congratulation,

"So, so, father, what's all the excitement?" Rab cries.

"Will I tell you, Rab!" says the tailor, plumped suddenly into doubt by a note in Rab's voice.

"Will I tell you! Your mother, the woman that bore you, and none should know you better,—your mother used to say to me, 'Robin, we've gotten a laddie, I doubt, that will either mak' a spoon or spoil a horn.' And, by God, sir, I'm trying to persuade myself that you have not already spoiled the horn."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MACKEREL ELECTION.

THE eight or ten years that follow until I reach my own assured recollections of Rab and his household are the twilight of memory. Some of my knowledge of them came in my legacy of family history, some of it was of my own imperfect gleaning. Which is which I cannot clearly distinguish, nor shall I vouch for the true order of the incidents now to be set forth. But they are true. They are running in the blood of my Charlotte still, to speak for their truth.

In these ten years fifty came to a fruition. The generation to which belonged the old people of my acquaintance in the Bowes ripened to the harvest, and Death, putting in his sickle, reaped them one by one. Absolutely forgotten, they are, now—or recalled, if ever, because of their association with a living rascal! My grandfather, Provost Trail, also was of that generation, and went to his place with a great flourish of trumpets; and even I, who inherit from him, remember him only because of Rab, whose day of dying, like our own, is still to come. This great Conspiracy of the Living, in which the very mourners are joined to depose dead men from their thrones in living hearts!

Early in these years Rab and his wife Charlotte

had started life together in a house at the east end of St. Brise, towards the harbour. Rab ostensibly was a tailor, and he took as well to doing something with a pack—to keep his legs out of that humiliating crook, he said. "Even a tailor is the waur for getting into a sameness of seam"—that was one of his flying jokes. Clearly he was thriving, spite of my father's eye upon him.

That earlier affair of the smuggling had given a wider notoriety to his talent, which had spread its wings now and engrossed the bigger affairs of the county. These were the days when the Panacea was proclaimed, and the fate of the country was thought to be whirling on ten shillings upon the quarter of wheat. Rab was a citizen of fortune, ready to crack a jest on any principle. Stories filter down to us still of sayings and doings of his at men's parties of both colours of politics. He was introduced with the port at Trail and Clephane boards, and mellowed the bitterness of the agriculturists against Sir Robert Peel by gibes upon Lord Kinnaird up in the Carse, and the guano notions of Dr. Buckland. A little later his foot was frequent on the shore-road leading to the house of the Whig member, Sir Ralph Inch, and Sir Ralph himself, when he was at home after Parliament rose, on many a morning took his horse exercise along the sands as far as the brae in front of Rab's door—as far as Rab's door, even, some said; which is quite likely, seeing the handsome woman who opened it when one knocked.

Between his old patron, the Provost, and his new, Sir Ralph,—implacable enemies,—Rab played his

cards with entertainment to himself and to the town. His introduction to the esteem of Sir Ralph appears to have been a jest, delicately flattering to both. My grandfather Trail was Conservative even to his dress: he was the last gentleman in the county, I have heard, to wear his hair in queue. Sir Ralph, a handsome bachelor, who left behind him handsome sons and daughters by various mothers, doing his duty thus by his good looks, affected the newer fashions. He appeared one autumn in St. Brise with a shapely white hat, a new thing in London, under the sweep of which his curly brindled hair looked boyishly rakish—the note of his gallantries. Adelaide Lord met him on the steps of her father's bank, and had to be packed off to her grandmother in Stonehaven, to be cured of her languishings. From the following winter dated the great Muskatt scandal, which flamed through the Westminister Courts a year or two later. Some have derived both from the white hat which played its part also in the humbler fortunes I am narrating.

When Sir Ralph had returned to London, one or two young bucks in St. Brise swaggered it in a headgear of the same colour and mould; to the indignation of the Provost, whose modish antiquity, in truth, they rather threw into the shade. But one market-day they were joined by still another white hat, upon the head of a dirty, dishevelled character, one "Schlatcherfeet" by by-name. There was a deal of laughter and trotting through the market with the story, while the dandies bolted to their houses, with a flash of white like rabbits to

their holes, as Blelach described it not too delicately in his newspaper,—and that was the end of white hats for a generation in St. Brise. It was known that Rab had commissioned and launched the wastrel upon the High Street, which won him fresh favour with the Provost, and Sir Ralph was reported to have roared at the jest when he read of it in the "St. Brise Journal."

It may be, I say, that this gave Sir Ralph his first hint of Rab's quality, and was the beginning of dealings between them. I am misty about the order of events. But it was the Mackerel Election (as it came to be called) that brought to an end Rab's running with the hare and hunting with the hound. He had to make a choice, and he chose Sir Ralph. Why, I cannot say. If a fortune out of contraband was still his bull's-eye, he would get no help from Sir Ralph in hitting it, come of the election what might; whereas, of course, the Provost—You have seen what my grandfather was! Undoubtedly, in his own interest, it was Provost Trail whom Rab ought to have stood by. Maybe he could not resist the flattery of joining the company at Sir Ralph's; maybe he enjoyed the company too much to forego it: there is no denying that he had a big mind for the world. Or, perhaps, it was mischief only. Sometimes I have thought that the man was at the mercy of every imp of fancy; at others, that he ordered himself like a machine, inscrutable to people like myself only because we are not so devilishly clever as he. It is possible, then, that he made the opportunity of slipping his partner the Provost from a traffic the

profits of which could bear division no longer. It is possible even—Huts! if you knew the man you would scarce doubt it—the opportunity was made by him for that discovery of which the clue was first given him in stray words of the man Tullis long ago in the Bowes woods.

With his cognisance of my grandfather's smuggling transactions, of course, Rab could snap his fingers at my grandfather's wrath. The Provost never did admit that the involuntary voyage across the North Sea which he made in Rab's company was other than accidental. Of that you shall judge. But after that event he had no more dealings with Rab in any business, and none in smuggling with anybody, so far as I have heard. And my father was allowed to carry off his daughter Grace by the front door instead of by the back, as (so 'tis said) had already been planned.

That hot election, when Mr. Clephane of Clephane attacked Sir Ralph's seat in the Tory interest, came off in the early autumn, and on an afternoon shortly before it Rab and the Provost went out for the first mackerel. There was nothing in it to cause folks to wonder, save that it was near the poll for so keen a politician as Mr. Trail to spare an hour or two for sport.

"Ho! ho! mackerel!" Rab cried, when he told me the story years after, saying, as plain as if he had spoken it, "it was brandy and Geneva he was after."

"Your grandfather, Dauvid"—the Rascal was always familiar—"your grandfather never forgave me that unskilful bit of navigation,—and, to be

sure, it had an awkward consequence. He took me with him to his grave, Dauvid, and, mark me! that's a queer thing to think of. There were reasons—not to mention them—why he should not publicly blame me for it, and all the more on that account, the thing, and me, stupid man, that did it, were propagating maggots in his brain. If you had opened him up—though 'twould have been a pity to spoil so dainty an atomy—I believe you would have found Rab Cuick in his very tissues. You're a scholar, and'll ken all about it to name the philosophy which says we have no existence save in other folks' minds.... Gad! there's truth in that! And here's a bit of me lying up in the kirk-yard wi' Provost Trail, and no end o' bits o' our neighbours lying somewhere in other folks' graves, more or less decomposed. And when I'm—so to say—gathered to my fathers, I'll maybe take wi' me a portion o' you, Dauvid—a leavening portion, to be sure. You never thought of that, laird! Yet it's worth pondering.... Just in connection wi' this Provost Trail bit of me, I put the problem to the Back Bowes minister. 'What's your opinion, Mr. Borrowman,' says I, 'when it comes to the last trump and the Resurrection Morn, and by a wondrous alchemy, as Shakespeare would say, dust will fly to its dust, to which body will those stray bits belong, think you?' 'Robin Cook,' says he—I could see he didn't comprehend the question—'you'll best mind the bit o' yoursel' that your Maker's intrusted to your own keeping, for assuredly, Robin Cook, you'll burn in hell if you don't mend your ways. Take my words to heart,'

says he; and says I, 'I wull: and then, if that's true that you say, Mr. Borrowman, there'll be a bit o' yourself that'll fizzle.'...

"So you see, laird, you may be laying up an uncomfortable time of it for yourself if you harbour a poor opinion o' my future state."...

An ill-conditioned, irreverent rascal!

They ran down by Torrie Town under half-sail, dibbing as they went with a bit of white rag; and by-and-by, lifting their lines, stood the cutter out for the Firth mouth. They ran down the coast—"just for the sail, it was sic a lown and bonny night," said the Provost, whose likely tale it is that I am telling: and at this point in it his listeners would change their legs uneasily, or steal a wink at one another, according as they were sensitive to a plain lie. The gloaming fell about the time the May was reached, and when they were tacking to return something happened—the Provost never was certain what it was, but if it hadn't been that that Dutchman was lying handy (the Provost spoke like a landsman, though by title "Admiral of the Firth") God kens what would have become of them.

Though the Provost told the story otherwise, their errand was to bespeak the Dutch herring *jager* which they had trysted for the gloaming at the back of the May. She was the "Mijntje" of Maassluis,—150 tons, owned by a man called Dunlop, which, it appears, is a Dutch name, and this voyage Dunlop was on board her. I forget, now, the adventure he marked by his visit to the herring-fleet, which in this late season still lay off

the Doggers' Bank; but, slipping through them in the morning, he cruised in the offing awaiting the Provost's tryst. He was hanging over the side when the cutter brought up alongside the "Mijntje" and flung out a rope which Rab caught cleverly. His skipper, Tromp, was beside him to give a hand in getting the Provost over the bulwark, and the four, exchanging the greetings of old friends, moved at once to the little cabin.

The Provost and Rab knew no Dutch, and Tromp denied any but the slightest English; so the talk passed by way of Dunlop, who could converse in half-a-dozen European tongues. Tromp and the Provost went down first, speaking simplicities; Rab following, with a foot on the hatch, turned to raise a finger and eye to Dunlop, and pressed an urgent story into his ear. When they came below the Provost was already set down to brandy. The spirit was in a bottle of heavy French glass, with a case of silver curiously chased, and the Provost had it up in his hands inspecting and fingering it in the dim light of the lamp.

"A fine case," said he, tapping it.

"And a soul to match the body," answered Dunlop. "Pour."

"I have, and pree'd," the Provost said. "A bonny bottle, all ways."

"One of a pair my father brought out of Rostock. The neighbour, finer still, is at the English widow's."

"The——?" said Rab.

"My brother's widow—Dirk's."

"I maun have a glass o' *that* bottle," said Rab,

with a chirrup under his breath. At the same time he poured a bumper and drank. The Provost looked at him curiously, for he was always a sparing drinker.

"You're in great spirits," he said.

"There's great spirits in me," answers Rab with a smack and a laugh.

On the table were Leiden cheese and white bread, and Tromp had ladled himself a bowl from the coffee-pot. He scraped the cheese on slices of bread, and handed them round. The sea-air had sharpened the Provost's appetite, and he ate with a relish, on which he remarked.

"Replenish, replenish," cried Rab. "We have a gey journey in front of us," and winked at Dunlop.

"So we have, so we have. We had best get on," says the Provost innocently.

The Dutchmen lit their pipes. Rab and the Provost sipped their brandy, and the Provost more of it. Then it was to business: a matter of accompt and reckoning on some past traffic, over which the Provost and Dunlop haggled, and the question of an autumn run. The Provost counted out the guineas, and replaced the bag in his pocket.

"Now we maun be off," he said, rising and leading the way above.

His tongue was loosened with the spirit, and he kept them clustered on the steps to tell a story of the election. Tromp, understanding nothing of the Provost's humour, pushed forward, and presently was back bawling for Dunlop.

The Provost was left with Rab looking for the wind.

"How long will it tak' to make St. Brise, Rab?"

"We'll be back before the folks are done remarking on your absence."

The Provost looked round sharply, and Dunlop was at his elbow to answer his inquiry.

"Here is misfortune for you," he said. "The cutter's broken away, for certain."

"The cutter!" cried Rab, and ran forward.

The Provost spoke jocularly to Dunlop.

"Never mind, Dunlop," said he: "you maun just carry me back to St. Brise. Any story will do of how you picked us up....Huts! man, we'll concoct a likely one by my fire over a bottle o' the best that ever came out o' Willem Dunlop's cellars at Veere."

"A big word. And the air of St. Brise doesn't suit me."

"Ho! My ain town," says Mr. Trail, cocking his head.

"I carry a cargo I doubt you couldn't *visé*, Provost—even in your ain town."

"A cargo that has got to be run quick, moreover, if it's run at all," continued Mr. Dunlop. "I like not the look of it," jerking a thumb in the West.

"Dunlop, this is fair ridiculous."

"Persuade Tromp o' that, if you can. He's the skipper here. And there comes a gentleman may have a say in the matter. Discuss it wi' him."

He went forward as Rab joined Mr. Trail.

"We're in a hole, Provost, a hole; the cutter's gone, beyond recall, and here Tromp swears if

we're to win home it maun be round by Vlaardingen."

"Pooh! They look for dirty weather from the sou'-west.... Tell the man Rab," says the Provost eagerly, "there's just a ripple o' wind."

"But it'll whistle through the night before long. I heard the swell as we passed the Longshots—a certain sign. Moist and warm upon a falling glass, too.... Hark ye! that's the anchor!"

"This is by-ord'nar conduct!"

"You're powerful against Routine yourself, Mister Trail," says Rab with a grin.

"It's a job," groaned the Provost lurching forward as the *jager* dipped under the great black sail flung up upon the main-mast.

"Holland awa'!" cries Rab. "It's a place I've aye had a fancy to see, and the folk in it—some folk.... 'Faith, I might promise a queer outcome o' this adventure, Mister Trail."

"You're in the pay o' the Whigs!" cries the Provost, dancing.

"Gently, if you please, Provost, gently. Whigs and Tories are all one to a tailyer with a wife and a rising family—the last no' christened.... I'm sorry for the Misses, your dochters: they'll be anxious. Steady.... And the election, as you would remind me—unfortunate, tho', for me, I've little gust for politics. Other folks' illicit traffic is a big enough load o' outside interest for me to carry."

"At any rate, you'll be free of that burden, henceforth."

"That's all very well," says Rab; "but see whaur

it has landed me—here, not to speak o' henceforth, on a rascally Dutch smuggler, and a storm brewing, with a cargo to run on a coast as shifty as a lawyer's plea (begging your pardon)—even if we make land in safety six days to a moral before I'm restored to a sorrowing family. And the election six days from now! . . . By, she's racing! That Tromp's a devil. . . .'Twouldn't surprise me," says Rab, "were he to hoist a besom mast-high."

"A what!"

"It's not every day they run awa' wi' an Audmiral," Rab grinned again.

The Provost turned away in despair.

The sun had set behind copper bars, a vaporous veil fell round them, and an eager wind ran through the night.

"*Allemachtig,* as the Dutchman says," said Rab, putting a hand on Mr. Trail's shoulder and pointing to where they left St. Brise behind them. "What a town yon'll be the morn when the news o' this spreads!"

"You're a damned rogue, Rab Cuick, a clever, damned clever rascal," cries the Provost, throwing him off, and goes below without another word.

I have observed already that my grandfather Trail was in his own way a very siccar man, and now he forbore to display further his anger and chagrin. Doubtless he played the best card that was left to him. For the remainder of the voyage he was to appearance gay and unruffled. Indeed, ere it ended, he and Dunlop had sailed into a very serene friendliness, so that when they landed at Vlaardingen the

Dutchman helped him to a vessel sailing for Leith within the hour, whence after all he might arrive home in time for the poll. To that Rab made no objection. It may be the compact ended on Dutch ground. In any case Rab was the last man to spoil a good finish.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE MACKEREL ELECTION

(*continued*).

LIFE for the Rascal was like a rubber of whist: with each fresh deal came a fresh combine, with nothing carried forward from the last save the score and the ambition to better it. He spoke of it so: "I'm sat down to an inter*est*ing hand," he would say of his adventures. By the kidnapping of the Provost he was sat down to a master hand, and from the other side of the North Sea could read the cards the others held and gloat over their playing of them.

When my grandfather disappeared, the Conservative cause in the burgh ran down like a clock that has its mainspring broken. The two parties were left equal, or as nearly so as man could tell, and the situation was the better spiced because neither knew how to take it. Everything lay in the fate of the Provost, and whether he was drowned, departed for ever from his native pavement, or whether he might reappear before the poll to rout Sir Ralph and carry Mr. Richard Clephane to the Commons, none could tell. It is true that the Provost's cutter was found keel uppermost on the rocks west of Crail the next day after it had

set sail for mackerel; but even that news—such was the Rascal's repute in the town—was able to persuade few that Rab and the Provost were at the bottom of the Firth. It is not to be supposed that Rab went unrewarded for the kidnapping (though I never heard the figure he was paid, or out of whose pocket it came); but it would seem that concerning the manner of the exploit he had not taken counsel with a soul in St. Brise. He was a man who derived all his pleasure in life from his own contemplation of it. There had grown up about him, thus, an air of expectancy, which gradually became, after a manner, authority; the tailor, with a disreputable standing in the town, could still challenge its reason, and make it doubt the conclusions to be drawn from the upturned boat and all common-sense.

The comedy of the Mackerel Election is enshrined in the file of the "St. Brise Journal" of that day. It was at this time that its proprietor, Blelach, unmasked the full armoury of his impudence with which he scourged the town for half a century. The "Journal" was Sir Ralph's organ, but still more, in Blelach's ambition, a burgh institution; and to make it that, the lash had to be applied (discriminatingly, of course) all round. The picture in the file, therefore, is marvellously complete. The Clephane men professed a hope that the Provost might return, for on his return depended their success; yet, lest laughter and ridicule at the idea of their being tricked should overwhelm them, they were constrained to play condolence with the Provost's family and with Charlotte. Sir Ralph's party, on

the other hand, dared not countenance the story of a trick for fear that they should be credited with inspiring it, and gave out their belief that the Provost was irrevocably drowned; but even as they said it their tongue was in their cheek in a chuckle at the bare thought of their opponents being dished by Rab. Blelach brought out his paper without a mourning border, and gravely announced within that he did so in deference to what seemed to be the feelings of both parties, but that such as wished it with the black band could have it so by calling at the office. He offered his condolence to the leddies, the Provost's daughters, wrapping it up in a figure in which the Clephane hope for their father's reappearance was a silver lining to their black cloud. In a gibe, for such as could read it, he alluded to the woman, who might, or might not, be widowed, as Rab's derelict. On the day the cutter was found, Mr. Clephane and Sir Ralph met, for the first time in the contest, on Charlotte's doorstep, where she held them very haughtily while Mr. Clephane stammered over his sympathetic inquiry. Sir Ralph, slipping from the boy's health to her own, expressed concern that she should stand on her feet so long. She answered with her thanks, and would they excuse her—and there was nothing for them to do but to clap on their hats and come down the stairs and into the street together. Sir Ralph looked into the other's eye in parting, and laughed; finding Mr. Clephane shy at this confidence, "deucedly handsome woman," he rapped out, and rode off with his hat ajee on the brindled curls. When he called at Rab's again, two days

later, the door was opened by old Robin Cook, whom Charlotte had summoned from the Bowes to bear her company.

The situation, so sappy for discussion over a bottle in after-years, was one a man might well laugh at who forgot, or had never known, Charlotte's share in it. If it set out St. Brise like a problem, what did it do for her! How much better than her neighbours had she learned to expect Rab's tricky hand behind every adventure that befell him! "I have a husband," she might have echoed Rolland, the lawyer, "who never gets into a hole that he does not know a way out of." The thought of a husband playing this trick upon the world and upon her—and she suckling a child not five weeks old—was not less bitter than to mourn a husband at the bottom of the sea.

Of the battle of pride and love fought within her heart at this time, the legacy holds proof. Old Robin, established in the house, was a sounding-board for all the gossip of St. Brise. He was out and about in the fermented town, everywhere, at all times of the day, not so supple on his legs as once, but still keeping time with his oaken staff to the rise and fall of his spirits. In this manner all the shameful play with Rab's name and repute came to Charlotte's ears, till she could have cried out at the sound of it. Now it was certain that he and the Provost were drowned irrevocably; again, there was a hope that they had been picked up, else had the bodies come ashore with the boat. When Robin stumped up the stairs with confirmation of the find west of Crail, he marvelled that her

tears did not seem all of grief but were mingled with self-reproaches. Within an hour he was back again with a story that the town did not believe in the upturned boat: it was part of Rab's devilment; then he had to wonder that the news did not console her. Some one who knew more than his fellows, or saw farther, set afloat an explanation about Rab and the Provost running cargoes together.

"Might it not be true?" demanded Robin of Charlotte. "Think. There was that old story—of the cast shoe. Was there truth, think you, in that story? Was there? Was there? Was Rab a rascal?"

Charlotte bent her head lower upon her babe.

"If I but had him here," cried Robin, brandishing his staff.

"If," she answered.

"To be sure," cried Robin. "Poor Rab, gone, drowned—and the lad so fond of the sea, too."

Then pride revolted against the dominance of love.

The Provost's daughter, Grace, my mother, was one of the few who from the first gave up the mackerel-fishers for lost. She must have been a sweet and tender heart; for me, alas! only a memory, but fragrant like that of the roses and sweet flowers in the Back Bowes garden. She was along at Charlotte's the next morning after the mishap, and all unsubtle and guileless found the tears that had run for her father come afresh at thought of losing a husband, as had Charlotte. She was thinking of my father, Mr. Shirra, between whom

and her filial affection her heart had been wavering for years. What Charlotte said to her I do not know, but she returned in a manner comforted by the sight, as she thought, of a greater sorrow. Her sister Sarah was a woman of a different temper, sour and suspicious, and deep in her father's mind, though he believed that for his daughters at least he had drawn curtains over all its windows. She had never despaired of her father; but at the report of the finding of the boat an uneasiness crept over her, and she came along in the dark to feel Charlotte's mind on the news. She was full of a Christian resignation, if the worst really had come, and she fished for any secret hope that Charlotte might derive from her own knowledge of her husband's rascality. Her talk ran on many texts that proved the Provost, her father, to have died, if drowned he was, the death of a just man, and that the Lord's hand was in all events, howsoever strange to the eyes of poor mortals it might seem that the good and the evil should suffer together. For if Rab had gone down, it was indeed a dispensation, and the lesson for us all, Mrs. Cook, was to walk uprightly and ready for the day and the hour we wot not the exact coming of. I know Aunt Sarah's way. At the same time, God gives the evil man a long rope, and was it not possible that even now Rab was hanging on by it? I know, I say, Aunt Sarah's way. And when that drew nothing from Charlotte there was an exhortation to confess and repent.

"Woman! woman!" cried Charlotte in sudden

desperate anger, "bide at home and leave me to mysel'."

At home, Aunt Sarah found her minister in the house comforting her sister, and sent him straightway to the unregenerate woman in the east end, whom she had found so hard of heart. The minister came to Charlotte, and, surely enough, his words seemed to beat upon a rock. A priest must be a by-ordinarily wise man. This one prayed next that the heavenly Father would be a Protector to the widow and the fatherless. And in the midst of it Charlotte stopped him vehemently, in a storm of tears....

"Pray for his return—for his safety," she cried. That was the only prayer she would hear in that house.

The Thursday of the election (as Blelach records) was the first day of frost that autumn, with a sharp, keen edge on the air, though a golden mist of exceeding fineness lay in the wynds, at the sea ends of them, and the fresh sky was flaked with light and tawny clouds. It was weather to bring the whole town early into the High Street, converging upon the Tolbooth, where the hustings were and the poll; and Mr. Clephane, riding in from the eastwards, had to dismount thirty yards short of the National, and shoulder the distance to his rooms there through a crowd still good-humoured. Sir Ralph watched his arrival from his quarters at the Bell, which was westwards from the town-house, and had windows commanding it. The National looked to the sea through the narrow vista of the

town-house wynd, to the eastwards of the Bell, by a dozen shuttered shop-fronts.

In an article exuberant with the potations of victory, Blelach describes the intervening market-place as a battlefield where all forenoon Mr. Clephane rallied the Tories with the courage of despair in the absence of his gallant ally the Admiral. If that party had a hope that the Provost held some winning card up his sleeve and would appear on this day to play it, they were disillusioned now. Provost there was none. Further to embitter their temper came the news that some votes pledged under private pressure of the Provost were likely to fail them now that it was removed. Nicky Frew, the dog, put up his shutters and bolted his door, and gave no sign of life when Tory emissaries demanded him forth. Captain John Barker, late of the whaling ship Unity, parleyed with them from an upper-storey window. In language that smelled of the sea he called down a murrain upon their Whigs and Tories, Free-traders and Protectionists, lubberly scoundrels all. "Hadn't he promised his vote?" "Hadn't the Provost promised?—Well, he would say no more about that, save only this: 'Grippy-for-grippy' was his adage," said he. "Produce your Provost;" and clapped to the window.

All the forenoon the battle went on, the Tories growing sullen and desperate, Sir Ralph's men crowing. By three o'clock in the afternoon every man who could be persuaded to walk or to be carried had voted, and Sir Ralph stood one ahead. He had polled the last man on his list: the issue de-

pended on the ability of the enemy to wile forth their recalcitrant pledges. The Whigs threw a strong posse into the street eastwards to block the town-house steps. Against this the Tories held a reserve in the National yard ready to rush them, if need be. The windows of the Bell and the National glared at one another, and underneath their partisans stood ready to fly at each other's throats at the first word of temper flung across their heads. The market hummed in suspense.

On the Torrie-Town road dwelled a bedridden and comatose ten-pounder, notable Provost's man in his day, but now wisely giving his sensible moments to reflections on salvation in the next world instead of the chances of Protection in this. Rumour had it that this morning he was showing unusual signs of liveliness, particularly in apostrophising the broth served for his dinner. News reached the National breathless that Captain Barker seemed wavering under offer of a salve to be substituted for the Provost's against the Captain's vote. A desperate hope turned towards the Torrie-Town invalid, and a gig, slipped from the National, raced by a back way on this forlorn rally. It must have been about the same moment that a smack drew through the fine mist in the Firth, and, sailing up the trinket, landed Provost Trail on the east pierhead.

So far as I have heard, none save the smack's crew saw him step ashore. The first to whom he appeared were two or three decrepit bodies in shawls and overcoats still venturing the air forenent the sun at the house-doors of the Fish Wynd.

They touched their hats by instinct; and he returned the salute so gravely, with so much of dignity, that it scarce seemed he was in a hurry, though in reality he was trotting hard as Fanny Jenks. Before they could utter "Michty me! There's the Provost!" he was out of sight.

Farther along the shore he picked up the town's officer, Trickie Morton, airing his cocked hat in a sequestered spot at the salt-pans, wisely retired from the rabble whom it was his nominal duty to keep in order. Trickie shook in his knee-breeches at the sight of the Provost's ghost advancing at a run, but the Provost's word of authority stiffened his backbone, and he trotted by the Provost's side, discovering the situation as they went.

Near the foot of Rab Cuick's Wynd a cadger's cart was standing, the horse yoked and tied to the stable-door. "Up!" says the Provost, and in a trice they were on board, and skelping along the the shore-road. Above the seawall at one of the garden-ends a little cloud of tobacco-smoke floated.

"That's Nicky!" says the Provost, laying his hand on the rope-reins and bringing the galloping horse up splarging, rump in air. My grandfather was a particularly acute man. Nicky's red, ferrety face appears over the wall, and remains transfixed in a wondering stare.

"I'll give you a lift," says Mr. Trail quietly.

"Is that you back, Provost!" gasps Nicky.

"Did you think I would forget!"

"I'm coming!" cries Nicky; and next minute he was out of the garden-door and up beside them.

"I was enjoying a quiet smoke, prepauratory to

recording my vote," he said, as casually as he could, as they went bumping among the ruts.

"Cutting it rather fine!" snapped the Provost, anxiously watching Trickie manœuvre the corner of the town-house wynd.

Up in the market-place is Babel. The town-bell is churning for the stroke of four. Sir Ralph has had a brass band in hiding in the stables of the Bell, regaling the inner man on pies and porter, victorious fare! and now they are slipped into the street, with conquering strains bursting from their pursed lips. A groan goes up from the Tories at the National. They, too, have their musicians, already under orders to get home as best they may, for that their tooters are not needed. A base thing, a mercenary—most of all when found useless after his hire is paid! The day is lost, and they know it. Captain Barker still holds back, and even he cannot save them now. Let Mr. Clephane mount his nag, and ride away into private life before rotten eggs pursue him. Plague on the Provost who has dashed this golden opportunity! Dead! Drowned! Little fear! Yet if not, then where the devil is he? Rab Cuick! Ha! a job! This is beyond the bearing strain of temper. A fist leaps out of the National window, shaken towards the Bell. The Bell jeers back at the National, and you could swear that the lips are forming "dished." An egg flies from inn to inn; a meteoric flash of yellow-green, signalling chaos. Blue and yellow fly at one another. A roar goes up between the houses. "Sir Ralph! Sir Ralph! Reform for ever!"

In the uproar it is not observed that the fist at the National, ceasing to menace, has loosened and is pointing a finger down the town-house wynd. The cadger's cart is now in the straight of it, bumping over the cobbles, Trickie aloft, with weather-beaten face and yellow hair like a young Patroclus. Is it the Torrie-Town ten-pounder? An even poll, then! Trickie is drawing nearer, scattering the crowd in the wynd. See! see! It's the—the Provost! the Provost! And Nicky Frew! The Provost and Nicky! A pair, a pair! Race, Trickie, race! Dismount, Mr Clephane, M.P. for St. Brise. Rally the band now. A cornet, a drum, and a bomberdon,—all that fall in.... Marshal the three, then; and out into the street with them. Beat and blow; swell lungs, stretch muscles, and proclaim Tory victory! Clephane! Clephane!

It is only those at the National who can see the situation. Before they at the Bell can grasp it, Trickie has drawn up at the corner, and the Provost and Nicky, flanked by the Tory reserves, are battling for the town-house steps. "Over your heads, men!" The Provost is lifted above the crowd, but will not release hold of Nicky's coat-collar. "Both, then." Up goes Nicky, also, and the two are bundled to the town-house door. "Down with you, now, and run!" The Provost and Nicky fly upstairs, but the clock strikes as they reach the landing, and the door is clapped to in their faces ere they can record their votes.

Before it is well understood what has happened, and with all the town still yelling for him, the Provost has slipped out of the town-house by a back

doorway, and has reached the arms of his daughters. Their anxiety exempts him from a public appearance, it is explained; and doubtless the story he has to tell sticks in his throat. That land-lubber story—of the bonny night and the Dutchman lying handy—was told many times that night, nevertheless, as one after another of the Clephane party found his way into Mr. Trail's dining-room; and in the excitement of the day's work and the miraculous reappearance of the lost magistrate, it passed as a likely narrative. It was only in the light of the morning's reason that the North Sea Bubble (as Blelach called it) caused winks and sly kicks under the table. To-night the whereabouts of Rab are forgotten. It is known that he has not returned to St. Brise, but whether he is in Holland or in Leith these chagrined politicians do not stop to inquire.

Well on in the evening, however, towards nine o'clock, the party was broken in upon by the announcement of Mr. Robin Cook, and on the back of it walked in the mercurial tailor.

The Provost advanced and shook him by the hand.

"My son is Rab Cook," says the tailor.

"The companion of my surprising adventure," answers the Provost. "I owe you an apology—'tis to you I should have first brought the news of his safety."

The complacent greeting shook the little tailor's mixed feelings.

"Me, sir! Not I! It's him that owes the apology for going. Rab was aye a—ahem! But his

wife and bairns—they are anxious, Provost. Is't true the lad is safe?"

The Provost coughed. Heroic measures were necessary.

"Safe, I am glad to say, sir, and thank you: for in a measure I owe my own escape from drowning to him, although, to be sure, in a measure, I have to thank him for my ill adventure as well. It was he persuaded me, 'gainst my better judgment, to sail so far that night."

"Sirs," he continued, "you must excuse me a while; I have a duty with this gentleman. There are glasses and the bottle. Ring for what you want.... A word with you, Mr. Cook," and he and the tailor went out together.

The news that the Provost paid a visit to Charlotte that night with Robin Cook, by a circuitous way, was over the town next morning, and it was counted to him for a feeling heart as well as for corroboration of his story, which, doubtless, was as he wished. What passed between Charlotte and him was far above Robin's intelligence, though the echo of it, poor man, had a meaning in it, or so it seemed, that consoled him with a better opinion of Rab. Charlotte knew the Provost now; but he braced her, as he had done that far-off day in court.

"I should have been here ere now," he said, "but for these political doings, which are the only serious results of this adventure of your husband and mine, saving a more serious still, that you, Mem, and Sarah and Grace, my daughters, have been kept in suspense. But you've heard, I hope, that your

husband, though he hasn't hastened back wi' me,—for, unlike me, he has no interest in politics,—is safe and sound, and by this time, doubtless, embarked for home."

"It's kind of you to think of me, Provost, and to come, when your own daughters must be jealous of every minute you're away from them. We have all had a sad time of anxiety."

"But it's over now. You must not take this regrettable accident to heart."

"I am sure, Mr. Trail, none took it more to heart than yourself."

"One thing certain: your husband and me will never have another misfortune of the same kind."

"Of my husband I cannot speak," says Charlotte; "Rab is aye in unlucky company."

And with that Robin saw him to the door.

A few mornings later, St. Brise, in the words of the "Journal," "was thrown into a pleasant commotion of rejoicing by the return of the other shipwrecked mariner. He received a boisterous welcome." I am surprised that Rab forgave Blelach that last word. That he did proves the affinity between these two heartless men.

With the same pride that had given the Provost word for word—with a harder, indeed, because of the truth discovered in that interview, and the surety of Rab's safety and certain return when it suited himself—Charlotte met Sir Ralph when he rode along on the forenoon after the election to present his compliments to her. He called up his servant at her door, and throwing his rein to him,

mounted Rab's stairs. It was Robin Cook who opened to him, heard his story, and ushered him into the room on the sea, where Charlotte joined them presently.

She was a handsome woman, and his eye brightened to meet her. He had a way with him, though it wasn't the Provost's, and he had a repute, and her blood ran with a healthy inspiration at contact with both. Robin could not understand her gay mood, and accompanied Sir Ralph down to his horse in a wonder.

Over the parapet of the sailors' walk an old salt leant with his glass pointed to the east pier. He took his eye from it, and running up to Robin, "My eyes are not what they were," says he, "if that's not Rab Cuick that's stepped off that smack."

He ran back to his glass, now that he remembered whom he was addressing, Robin at his heels.

"It is! it is," cries Robin, and flew to Charlotte.

"It's him, it's Rab," said Charlotte as the two looked from the seaward windows.

"Boy, boy," she cried in ecstasy to the babe in her arms. "Here's your father, boy, your father."

The little tailor was flying out of the door to meet Rab.

Half-way down the stair something made him think better of it, and he returned to the house.

In the front room Charlotte was on her knees, crying over the child.

"Oh! God!" she was saying, "permit him to grow up a good man—no' like his father."

Once more Robin went flying down the stairs to meet Rab.

He found him at the harbour-head chatting with Sir Ralph and whistling in his cheek. He was specially jaunty and assured, like a man who had won his goal in the world.

"I'm back again, you see, father," he cried, when Robin approached. "My father, Sir Ralph."

"We have met," Sir Ralph answered, "several times. He keeps your house for you in your absence," says he: "when I have called on your wife for news of you I was never allowed a word for her ear alone. He looks well after her."

Something hot burned in Robin's throat.

"Now that you are back again, and high time," he cried, "better you go home and look after her....Man, there's not a soul in the town would care whether you were back or away for ever if it weren't for that woman that you've the privilege of calling a wife."

Rab reddened at the gills, but whistled more cleanly than ever. He had won his present goal in the world.

"We are plain folk," he laughed to Sir Ralph.

"And plain folk keep a plain stick," cries Robin in a sudden heat, and brought his oak staff down on Rab's shoulders.

That was Rab's boisterous welcome; and with it my legacy of family history is ended.

PART II

The Happy Islands

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RASCAL CLAIMS ME FOR A BROTHER.

So far I have been writing of Rab as, in a manner, a historical character; now I come to a man of my own day and acquaintance.

It seems to me that since I have known anything, I have known his name and reputation. Getting back to the farthest point to which my memory will take me, Rab's personality impinges upon my consciousness much as a familiar in a fog might upon my vision: from the moment of recognising a figure I knew that it was Rab; but Rab in a mist of scandal and small-talk, and, it may very well be, of prejudice also.

He was clouded, when first I remember him, by the contempt for a tailor which I have never found absent in any one, not even in a tailor himself. Nevertheless, out of this mist of contempt for the tailor race, Rab shone by virtue of accomplishments which, as a rule, it does not possess: a skill in bringing music out of cat-gut, and a sharp, biting sense out of as simple words; and a voice of

rare quality, never or seldom used in public, but charming all who happened upon it in the woods and lanes.

My first knowledge of these gifts came from the repetition of their praises on the lips of persons of would-be cultivated and catholic taste. Rab's gift of music was surprising—ridiculous even—for a tailor; and they sought by the proclamation of it to discover another of judgment in themselves almost equally surprising. "Rab Cuick, the tailor: yes. And what a gift!" "A gift, really?" "A divine gift, I assure you. Of course, I am of your mind about the waste of it. To whom much is given, much shall be required." And so on; until you came to believe that the marvel lay, not in the gift itself, but in their discovery of it.

The tailor-musician was now living with his wife and children, on the north side of St. Brise High Street, a little farther west than his old house, in a high tenement, the topmost windows of which —Rab's windows—looked out over a two-storied house on the south side, upon the North Sea.

"If you would cut a gentleman's breeks, you maun have the higher air."

That was one of the sayings with which he sparkled to me in the mist. There was another: I mention it here because, though of a later date, it was with me at that time just a thumb pressure, as it were, modelling the clay-figure in my mind. He was sitting in the shop of a respectable merchant, a grave man with humorous lurkings, listening to a lecture upon his evil ways, and the hope still held out of amending them....

"Aweel, Mister, I'll just away hame—and kill the wife."

"Better than that," says the other, with a hand on his smile—"kill yourself."

"Hech! It would be just a deid tailor when dune."...

From stories of that kind, it grew upon me that Rab's gifts had to cancel more than his trade—a failure and decline, and a wit nourished on want of self-respect, involving wife and children.

By-and-by his wife's indignities began to be the chief cloud upon him for me, she being a connection of my own, Charlotte Seton. It was never said that he beat her, or even threatened to: had he struck her, he should have suffered in repute just to the point he deserved; for that she was a singularly superior woman would really have made his kick more brutal. But possibly the ne'er-do-weel, arraigned at the bar of his wife's virtue, suffers undeserved scrimp justice.

Being callow, and a long way off having a passion of my own, I fell into the attitude towards Rab of those whose passion had been harried, and was inclined to revolt from common opinion when, in the absence of direct charges against him, people merely bespattered him in digging for the precious thing, his wife. Once I crowed a little in this strain—not touching the particular case—before my father, a plain man, and surprised him into a tentative like crow. His had a different note; but I imagined that I recognised my sentiment....

"Ay, laddie; you're liable always to have your wife cuist in your teeth."

"And why should Rab Cuick——?"

But he cut me short. "That'll do, sir," he said, as hot as a coal. We had been thinking of different cases, he of his own; and to be compared to Rab Cuick was beyond any man's philosophy....

I think that twice I met Charlotte at this stage. Both times she and I were visiting some far-off cousins from the East Coast, who took up summer quarters in the cottage at the Back Bowes. The second time was crucial, for it gave me my first glimpse in the flesh of Rab, who drove up from St. Brise to fetch his wife.

We were set down to tea. With Charlotte were two of her children, a boy and the girl. The girl, another Charlotte, was the younger, fair, and fair-haired, with strands of gold in each wisp, imaging her mother, and tall for her age, for she beat me by a full inch when they set us, back to back, to compare her eleven years with my thirteen. I have mentioned a likeness to her mother; but, of course, the likeness could not extend to the mother's chief characteristics—chiselling of feature, large roundness of limb and contours. It lay, rather, as I think of it now, and must have observed then without comment, even to myself, in the matching of their eyes, practised in sympathetic language.

The boy, Robin, was older, and black and coarse. You could not have believed the two to be of the same brood. The incongruity must have been very plain, for I noticed it with my thirteen-year-old eye. That was long before Mr. Michael Trail, the Provost's son, strung the bairns on a string of reason, with his, "It didn't require her children to

tell you that Charlotte Cook was a found child. Fine threids and coarse threids, and a mixture. A queer wab."

We had not been sat down long when, looking out of the window upon the sound of wheels on the road, we saw Rab arrive. He was not over middle height, and thin and supple, with an acute and delicately graven face; not so much quick as clean in his actions, so that he was in beside us before we could well get to the door to greet him, and sitting down and cracking as if he had been in the room for hours. This assured and commanding way which was his was the second thing that I observed. The first was Charlotte's welcome of him. She simply surged to the man. It was the first time I ever saw a woman in love, and the thing struck me as unlike anything that had ever come under my notice: my father and mother behaved differently, I remember thinking. I remember thinking also, with a sudden inward fire, that the neighbours were right in anything they said of this man; for he let this woman's love beat on him, and was as indifferent to it as the Vous rocks. And this was my first personal observation, I believe, on the ways of men and women.

Rab had sent Robin to stand at his horse's head. He just said, "Tak' her heid," and Robin went: that was the greeting between the boy and his father. When his wife flew to him to kiss him, he gave her a kind of brush aside, but would have kissed the daughter, I believe. At any rate he made a motion thereto; and then I saw the girl's fair face go white,

and even when he had bent to her she timidly withdrew behind her mother.

I saw the boy go to a bidding, the wife overflow against that hard man, and the man get soft to the young girl who recoiled from him: four peepholes into the interior of that family if only I had been old enough to see through them.

After that we fell into the plain roads of conversation for a few minutes, the girl and I keeping glancing out of the window watching Robin at the horse's head from where he made faces back to us. All of a sudden Charlotte says to me—

"Who's that man speaking to Robin? There's two of them!"

"Oh," said I (for I knew them when they came about my father's house), "that's Mr. Paton and Mr. Dalton in the Excise."

The room was full of our tongues, every tongue in the house wagging at once; but, above them all I heard Rab's voice to his wife, and then it was as if he had laid a sudden hand upon my shoulder and on every shoulder in the room—

"Who's this laddie?"

He had got up, and was looking out upon Robin, to whom now the officers were speaking.

"It's David Shirra's son, David in the Excise," I heard Charlotte answer him.

"Ay," says Rab, as if he had known it. With that he claps his hat upon his head and my hat upon mine, and not saying a word, or catching my eye even, leads me to the door. And when we were without, "Remember me to your father," he said loud out to me, wondering.

"Oh, you would like a ride," he goes on; and now I had nodded to the officers, and before I could say Yea or Nay he lifted me among the straw in the cart.

"Let go her head, Robin," he calls out. "I'm going to give Dauvid Shirra a turn up the road and back while your mother's getting on her things. Tell her to hasten, for I'll be back i' the now, and we maun start for home."

At this the officers had stood aside, and Rab and I were birling along the road.

Remember I had set out on this drive with an awe for the man in the cart beside me, and at the back of that a very bad prejudice against him because of the way in which he had treated his wife, yet I never enjoyed a quarter of an hour so much in my life. The man simply whirled me up in his gaiety. Between the house and the head of the den he learned that I was fond of music, and fifty things about my father and the officers which he never asked me, but seemed to draw from my lips of their own accord. The mare laid back her ears when he talked to her, and he talked to her as he talked to me, in a clatter of musical sounds; and he whittled and laughed to himself, and I declare it was like a flute played delicately. I have never forgotten the sound of it.

Now at the head of the den, some little distance back from the main road where it debouches upon Clephane, there is a small farm-steading without any name that I know of save "Jock's Toon." Here dwelt one Myles, of whom I had often heard my father speak as a ne'er-do-weel, who

gave him and his brother officers great suspicion. At the end of the road to this man's door Rab begins to drive cannily, and he says to me—

"Who lives in here, Dauvid, my man?"

"Jock Myles."

"Well," he says, "we'll see if Jock Myles can do me a favour."

"He's a queer one," my tongue ran on, for I was proud of my knowledge. "He poaches, and he smuggles, and I don't know all what. He's a right bad one, my father says."

And then, noticing that the mare had turned into the yard,—and Rab never urged her there that I could see, "You're not going into Jock Myles's?" I said.

"Out o' the eater cam' forth meat," says Rab. "The worst o' men have their uses," and laughed.

In the middle of the yard, with his arms over the barrier of the reed, was Jock; and he turned at our coming.

"Are you Jock Myles?" cries Rab in a loud voice before the man could fix his eyes on us.

"Awa' wi' ye, Rab Cuick!" says Jock.

"Man, Mister Shirra," Rab says, addressing me: "all the folk in the country-side seem to ken me, although I could swear I never seen them between the een afore."

"Mister Jock Myles," he says, turning to the man again, "you appear to ken me. I dinna ken you; but I have got a by-ord'nar fine character o' you from Dauvid Shirra here, who's a son o' Mister Shirra in the Excise—whom ye may have heard o'. Whom ye may have heard o',"

he repeated, as if he were honouring my father by the double mention.

"Now," says he, "I've come up to the Bowes for my wife, to take her back to St. Brise, and the stray in my cart is hard for a nice woman like her to sit in,. . .and, in a word, can ye give me a pickle fresh stuff in its place?"

"The auld'll do brawly for your reed," says he; "an' I'll neiver wi' ye—a pickle fresh stray for a cairt-load o' auld,—and, it may be, the best o' the bargain's with you all the same."

With that, and without by-your-leave of Jock, he lets down the back of the cart, and would have begun to unload it. I bent to help, but he stopped me in a moment.

"Nay," he says, "you maun watch the mare." He gave me the reins. "Can you manage, think you?"

"Huts! It's not so easy. She tak's a power o' watching, though ye wouldna think it to see me drive her; so you maun not let your eyes off her lugs."

So saying he backed the cart against the reed dyke, and I sat and watched the mare's lugs; and in a minute the cart was empty of the old straw and Jock was pitchforking into it a fine layer of new. Then Rab gets up beside me, and takes the reins.

"Good day to ye, and thank ye," he says to Jock Myles; and Jock was red in the face with laughing, though what he got to laugh at I could not tell. "Good day to ye, and thank ye," and drives off.

"Mr. Myles, or whatsoever they call you," he cries, looking back over his shoulder, "I'm greatly

obliged to you for your stray; but I cannot help saying that ye keep a deplorable dirty reed, and the quicker ye get it turned over the better. The quicker the better—for you and all other kye. I wouldna demean myself by bringing another pickly o' dirty stray to that reed o' yours—no' if I had it on a fortnight come Thursday when I'm back at the Bowes—if ye didna get it redd up."

And with that he gives a cackle and a low whistle, like a bird that laughs in a whistle, and drives out of Jock Myles's.

"I'm not sure, Mister Dauvid, if I've done right in being obliged to that man," he said to me by-and-by.

"I told ye what like he was," I answered, "and 'out o' the eater,' says you."

"Ay, man," he says, looking at me very queerly, "and, by the same authority, there's a power o' mischief in the jawbone of an ass."

It may very well be that but for the downsetting I got when I made the unlucky mention of Rab at a time when my father was feeling the sting of having married above him, I should have spoken at home of this visit to Jock Myles; and it may be that, had I done so, the result would have been the discovery of something more than hard straw in the reed, and a supervisorship at the least for my father. As it was, I held my tongue, cherishing the recollection of Rab's wonderful spirits on that drive, and a high opinion of the man which the general, vague character he held could not affect now. I do not say that, away from him, I had any

respect for him: he tickled a natural curiosity, and all they said against him did that; but when I was with him, I know, he held me by a spell.

I am certain that nothing save the thought of seeing something of Rab reconciled me to the idea of a session at Mr. Foster's school in St. Brise, and a year's lodging with my mother's sister, Miss Sarah Trail. The school had a reputation for discipline, if I can call that a reputation which was an experience through which most folks in St. Brise had passed or were passing; and when my Aunt Sarah condescended to call upon us in Town of Tarvit, to discuss the terms of my board, she was particular in dwelling upon the rigorous methods of herself and Mr. Foster in contradistinction to the spoiled manner in which, she was good enough to explain, I had been brought up by my widowed father. But for Rab's face on the horizon, the prospect had not been very welcome.

One day at the end of August, then, my father brought me to St. Brise, and left me in lee of my Aunt Sarah. He had not been gone three hours when I slipped her convoy, and set out on a voyage of discovery of Rab. He dwelt, I had it, at the harbour end of the long street of St. Brise, and thither I directed my steps; and I had traversed two hundred yards or so only, and emerged from a dark passage of the causeway upon a more open space, with houses set back upon one side, when I ran fairly in the face of the man whom I was seeking.

To this day I cannot determine whether he saw me as soon as I saw him. He was coming jauntily

along, whistling lowly within himself, as his manner was, so that it was not until you were close upon him that you heard any sound, and then it was round and full. If he did not see me (of which I am not so assured as I was at the time), I can only say that it was not like him: there was not much that he passed over. If he did see me, he let me pluck his coat, which I did timidly, before he bent his eyes in my way. Even then he appeared not to remember me (and, indeed, I may have grown away from his recollection in these two years) until I said—

"Don't you remember driving me to Jock Myles's, at the Back Bowes, Mr. Cook?"

He had a trick or habit (derived from his tailoring, maybe) of straightening himself up and blinking his eye, like one who has been awakened from sleep to urgent business; and he played it now.

"And whaur have you dropped from, Mr. Dauvid Shirra?" he asked, laying a hand upon my shoulder, which was almost as high as his own now.

"I am newly come down from Tower of Tarvit—this very day," I answered. "I am going to Foster's school."

"Ay, ay!" says he. "And living?"

"With my Aunt Sarah."

"Oh, ho! oh, ho! Genteel!"

"You have a good memory to mind me," he says next.

"I'll never forget that ride," I answered.

"No," he says; "I haven't forgot it myself. And

yon man—Jock—Jock—Jock what was't? Is he still about the Bowes?"

"I believe so. I haven't seen him myself, but my father tells me he's aye there and at his old tricks."

"Poaching, wasn't it?"

"Smuggling," says I.

"Dearie me! And was not your father angry wi' me for taking ye to Jock Myles—to change my stray?"

"Oh, I never tell'd him about the ride," I said.

"No: and how was that?"

Now the reason for my not telling was as I have explained; and I grew red and confused when he asked for it. It seemed to me that even although I did not speak of it, he must have an inkling of its drift: he must count me ungrateful, I felt, for even knowing it. And I was far from ungrateful.

"It was the grandest ride I ever had," I was forced to splutter out.

"Mister Dauvid," he said—and this is the speech I can least forgive him—"I should not have asked you that question, for it was too delicate for answering. I see ye have heard ill o' me; and I see, as weel, that you have not found me so ill as my repute."

"I have found you..." I cried, my heart welling up with a pity for the man, and still more with pride at these strange relations with him; but he broke in again—

"I thank you for your friendship," says he, with a working of his lips. "I thank you for your

friendship—long may I merit it! And, now, there's just one thing I will say about that," says he. "I ken the big heart that's in ye—an odd thing to be found joined with so much gumption" —and his lips worked and twisted more than ever,—"and it's as like as not you'll be for declaring this friendship to all and sundry. Dauvid," he says, "it's not one that'll raise you in public esteem, and the only service the declaration o't 'll do to me is to have it broken off. So, Dauvid my man, the soul o' me is knit unto your soul, like the soul o' Jonathan to his Dauvid—but under the thoomb, lad, under the thoomb.... Is't a compack?"

I felt (as doubtless he intended that I should feel) that all this proceeded from his delicacy, and from a desire, as well, to retain me as a friend, which, I knew well, he could not do if our being acquainted came to Aunt Sarah's ears. And, besides that this tickled my pride very nicely, something in it made bubble up in me a pity at which I was very apt at this time. So it was with some emotion that I seized his hand to shake it over our compact; and Rab's lips themselves were shaking violently.

"So, so, but we'll not fall on each other's necks after the manner of old: not just here," he says, looking east and west the street. "But come, ye maun call on Charlotte."

And with that he turns, and brings me to his own door.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLAYGROUND OF ROMANCE.

RAB'S house stood, as I have said, at the harbour end of St. Brise, on the north side of the High Street, at a point where there were no houses to speak of on the south side, but a clear slope to the sea, whereby, from the windows of the tenements opposite, and especially from Rab's windows at the very sky-line, you get a wide sweep of the Firth mouth. From where he met me to his house was a step only, and we made it without further interchange of words. With a light hand on my shoulder he turned me into a close, and again, half-way down it, upon a steep and winding stone stair, at the very top of which, when we reached it, a flat brown door faced us. Into this he let us with a latch, and, still with his light and friendly touch upon my shoulder, set me on a sofa in a room overlooking the sea.

In passing through the lobby on our way thither he had called his wife, and now she came on his summons.

"An auld friend, Charlotte," he said in the same tone of voice as when he was charming me; but, I declare, at sight of the woman, just in presence of honest folk, I seemed to detect a false ring in his words.

"David Shirra, Janet Seton's cuisin in the Bowes," she said, giving me a hand of recognition with a fine grace.

"And yours, if I may count our cousinship," I answered, emboldened by some heat of affection for the woman.

(For all my delight in Rab I had never counted my connection with him.)

"And that's well minded," he cried, ". . . although . . . my wife's coming to the Setons, in the manner of it allowed me to forget."

It was plainly meant for a buffet to the woman, and she took it without shrinking. It made my blood run quicker in me; the tremor in her eye sent the last of my regard for him flying.

With a flash of intuition I burst out, "We are all very proud of our cousin."

I suppose it was a thing as strange for me to say as it was untrue, and very uncomfortable for them to hear; but I felt it, and did not know how to hide my feeling or the wisdom of doing so. At any rate, they took their eyes off each other to look at me: Charlotte with a surprised smile, and Rab with that diabolical twitter of his.

"Whaur's the lassie?" he cried, suddenly; and then, clearly between his teeth, "She's more o' an age"—meaning for me to show affection for, I suppose, my affection for the elder Charlotte showing itself plainly now.

"Charlotte!" he cried, going to the door.

And upon his bidding came my Charlotte.

I have told already how I met her at the Back Bowes, and was measured with her back to back to

my humiliation. But now she was changed and I was changed. For whereas at the Back Bowes she came to me with a shyness from behind her mother, with a look to her mother's face half of inquiry and half only of sympathetic knowing, and edged off from her father more from instinctive prejudice than from reasoned contempt, now it was a woman almost who filled the doorway, so greatly had she grown, and she brushed aside Rab with scarce a glance at him, shook me by the hand, and then taking her mother's arm, kept it while she sat beside her on the sofa. And I too was changed, and in more than my years, as a burst in my blood discovered for me. For beyond the look in the two women's eyes, less furtive and doubtful than that which arrested me at the Bowes, I saw the girl's great beauty. The salt bloom of the sea was on her cheek, on which her grey and profound eye lay like a window into an other world. She was taller than I by half a head now and longer limbed, and in that as in all things, save the gently swelling bust, like her mother. Only to me who noted these things then, although not fully conscious of them until long afterwards, it seemed as if upon the sunburnt face and the grey eyes there lay a cloud not shadowing the mother's. Yet her mother's bore the marks of Rab's buffeting as clearly as if he had raised a hand against her, which he never did. . . .

There, his eye on them and on me, and on the bay beyond as well, was this little supple man, with the wind in his cheek, making his low twittering. Remember, I was young, a mere boy, like any chick that has broken his shell, emerged from my plain and

even nursery of life, and susceptible to every appeal of beauty or of joy or pain!

It was almost with a sob that I stepped to the side of the elder Charlotte, and "I am glad to meet you" said to both of them.

From that day to this, I can swear, the memory of that moment has scarce ever left me, or the thought of Charlotte, my Charlotte, been absent from my mind. . . .

"Your hat, Chat," says Rab, "and take the cuisin who's so glad to meet you down to see the shore."

"Yes, . . . go," said her mother. And when the girl was gone for her hat,

"Are you staying here some time?"

I told her for a year or more.

"Then maybe you'll come along——" she stopped short, glancing uneasily at Rab.

"Tuts, ay," he said, looking round; but his wife in a sudden heat and pain quitted the room.

Of this encounter, the meaning of which was made plainer to me later, as it will be to you, I thought no more; nor of anything save the girl, who had returned dressed to go out, and took me under her wing very frankly when, having descended to the street and crossed it, we came out upon the beach, and I looked for the first time upon the broad expanse of the ocean.

Thus it fell out that it was Charlotte who sped me forward upon my happy boyhood's season spent on that grey shore. Inland from where Aunt Sarah dwelt, upon the bluff that rose sheer from the breaking waves, were fields and woods; burns that babbled

of quiet and uneventful life; billowy lands, comfortable in a regular succession of the seasons,—summer played against the winter, spring against the autumn; farm towns entrenched for the winter within full stackyards (their savings-banks against the evil day), and in the spring's displenishment flanked with credit, their fortunes out at no venture save the hazard of the total and complete default of Nature, to be thought of only with the end of all things.

For us boys, or most of us, at Foster's school, set high on the landward side of the town, that was our environment for six days of the week, counted by us in Jewish style; but on the first and holiday, how different! On the morning of that day, as on other mornings, we awoke upon a falling glass: the pressure of the daily round, enforced by a very stinging cane, lay somewhat heavily upon our spirits. The verity of our freedom did not steal upon us like the dawn athwart the eastern headlands, but plumped into our consciousness with tropic wonder. The day peeped through the striped blinds upon our unwillingness, and suddenly some associate quality in it proclaimed a holiday, sending a stound of joy to the heart. If it happened that no adventure was on hand, we lay abed in ecstatical luxury, and curling up afresh chewed the cud of our freedom. But that was seldom. More often the tryst was awaiting us: the paraphernalia of the day's doings, prepared overnight, called aloud from the abuse of the housemaid; and we scorned our bed as unbecoming heroes. I remember that if the sun shone doubtfully, I pulled aside the blind with my heart in my mouth at

fear of the raincloud; shine the sun never so surely, I would pull it aside with a simulated dread. In the grip of the imagination, I cherished the fear of foul weather, and in default of good cause for looking at the sun said, as I looked, that all adventurers keep an eye upon the heavens.

I had gone to bed, maybe, with a purpose of putting on in the morning a garb harvested from many fields of enterprise. In a little pile at my bed-foot, ready against my awakening, were a busby, a broidered cartouche-box, a cutlass, and an ancient pruning-knife stuck through the pocket of a sporran that was to hang with the hairy side against my thigh. These were placed conspicuously under the eye of my Aunt Sarah (when she came to hear me say my prayers), hostages for her approval of a more comprehensively piratical garb I had in view, which included a pair of the late Provost Trail's blucher boots (to be worn without stockings), his special-constable baton, and a hard and weather-stained cape in which he was used to go loch-fishing. Even Aunt Sarah, however, had the wisdom to say nothing, knowing that in the morning, of my own accord, I should discard all save the baton and the pruning-knife. The other villains whom I met at the tryst also were singularly moulted of the feathers announced for the occasion. All of us wore the uniform of a certain diabolical air; our only agreement otherwise was the plenitude of candles we carried. There was, too, a crouch in our gait, borrowed from Red Indians on the trail. On that shore we might fall in with treasure and virtue from the South Seas to Lake Huron, and in consequence our bloody in-

tentions and methods ranged from the Iroquois to the Atchinese. To declare these to the townsfolk, no badge or ensign was required: any man who had been a St. Brise boy (and no other counted) could read the meaning of the circlings and cawings of our flock upon the shore. How many greybeards have not followed us with rejuvenescent eyes from high overlooking windows as we turned our backs on the landward parts, and set our faces to the sea; now blue and shimmering, now rough-ridden with white horses; at times breaking good-humouredly with the spring-tide, at others lashing the rocks and the outlying breakwater and the piles (the second line of defence) and even the storm gables that on the swelling breast of the shore withstood it; once more, at ebb, beating itself out far down the beach, like an angry child, with no force behind its passion, or rippling sweetly,—always the plaything of circumstance, uncontrolled apparently, yet strictly controlled by hidden laws, and so for me now the figure and token of life!

The grey shore was stretched like a slack line at the mercy of the wind between three harbours as poles, that of St. Brise in the centre. It stretched outwards, beyond Torrie Town in the east and the Ferry on the west, girding a romantic country, and gathered up at close and irregular intervals at other similar stakes; but the portion between these two harbours was our holiday ground. I daresay, could I bring myself to think of it as an ordinary piece of earth, I could calculate within a hundred yards of its extent. Prick it off upon the Ordnance Survey to a boat's length, if you care! I do not: for me it

defies computation by the ordinary means of reckoning. You cannot pace it, or account its size by the time it takes to traverse it. As we covered it then, a forenoon saw us barely on our way from St. Brise to one or other harbour. We never compassed Torrie Town but we returned in the dusk; and then, somewhat ignominiously, by the safer highroad, upon which we contrived to cast romantic beams from two inches of tallow set in a yellow turnip head of grinning countenance. . . . In St. Brise harbour there lay considerable craft—timber brigs for America, and a whaler or two, besides dirty smacks and sloops bedaubed with merchandise. The eastern and more picturesque basin at Torrie always held, I know not why, vessels of a cleaner, more foreign and more romantic aspect. So Torrie was our chief goal; yet turning our backs upon the bustle of St. Brise was a tardy business. Between the two, on this side the bay where Charlotte Seton met the blackavised man, was set a brown and hoary ruin, to be reached, as Charlotte reached it, by way of a deep sandy inlet fringed with trees. Save when the tide was full back, access to this castle from any but the landward side was barred by the rocky ridge on which it stood. This ridge, running with a slow gradient from the water, barred the way always for dry feet, for the tail of it was never quite uncovered by the tide; it barred the way straitly when the sea came up under the castle walls. In that case, the climb or scramble, always stiff, became an adventure; once accomplished, and the castle stormed, the height of glory was reached. The musty tunnels, once living rooms perchance of the lovely Rosa-

belle, held no treasure for us. We forgot Rosabelle *in* the ascent of the rocks which she descended. Not *that* we were untouched by historic memories. They were in our blood. In some dim way we knew our inheritance from the grim, boisterous, big, daft race that had lived and fought on this shore. They were more intimate than our father and mother and their generation: too intimate we felt, with the pride and instinct for reserve of youth, for curious reminiscence. There was a quality in their associations that kept them unspoken—kept them for mention in later and less sensitive days, as here, when the memory of the reminiscence gives it an air. The common shared romances of these days were such as we took visible part in—the meeting of waves (which scarce could wet our knees) with a desperate front, as if, but for that, they had swept us off our feet; the storming of rocks, twice our own height, maybe, become mountains by our resolute bearing; the exploration of caves, where 'deed were no caves, but candles only wherewith to explore such: selfish perils, selfish joys, created on this rocky coast each seventh day of our existence in this unromantic town of St. Brise.

And yet, not entirely devoid of romance. I have spoken of the dull, colourless villa-quarter on the bluff, living whereon was not of our own determination but of our fathers' (or of our fathers' sisters), who had damped down their romantic furnaces. I have often praised their lives. Often since then, I confess it, I have been tempted to account them the wisest; and, but for one woman, had made them my world. Nay, they may have been the

best and the wisest: yet I would, if I could, for her sake forget their pattern. . . . That one fantastic day in seven was feeble antidote to the mortal moderation of the remaining six. Still, even for us who lived upon the bluff, there was saving grace. The harbours were inviolable sanctuaries of Romance. In the cluster of buildings around them the smell of ships remained: hanging with a marked fishy flavour about the doors and closes in the wynds; lying incrusted on the storm gables with the brine from the North Sea. It seems to me now that that smell, and a smack of seafaring in the pavement gossip, and the glimpse of masts and rigging at the far ends of the wynds and closes, and especially the greeting of one decrepit sea-captain, who flung it at you as if in the teeth of a blustering gale, did redeem the little town. . . . They were the meanest doors in it that opened for us upon the big, wide world. You went down a close, as down Rab's, and ascended tall winding stairs to the top of the land, and there entry was given upon a floor whose front windows looked upon the basin, and over the ships in it to the Firth's mouth beyond. Such were the homes of women, for the most part; of mothers and sisters grown old in single faithfulness to those whose drownings are unchronicled. I can hear them now talk wonderfully of the "boys" at 'Frisco or in the China Seas. Dear souls! They thought we wearied at their tales, yet they prattled on, to please themselves, not dreaming of the wonderful visions raised by their words, nor dreaming either of the awe with which, when their ships came home, we

shook hands with the "boys" themselves—grey sea-dogs, red of face, bluff of speech, and tender of heart as I read them in the regard of their womankind.

These were the portals under which on occasion we passed to the glorious unknown. Sometimes it was discussed for us on the Bluff Genteel (God forgive Aunt Sarah!) whether it were right to condescend under them. The Provost's grandson was somebody, though his mother had thrown herself away upon an exciseman. . . . Pity me! Were I to speak truth, there was not in most dwellers on shore or on Bluff one romantic attribute to cast into the scale against the commonplace of both. No native attribute, at any rate, but Circumstance only, gilded the life in these harbour tenements. No longer adventure, but the dingiest commerce, stuffed their heads. Yet, such their happy circumstance, the palaver they wrapped about their bits of bargainings ran on far-off terrifying coasts and sunny island harbourages; their ledgers and "books" came home to rest beside ship-models. In the corners of their living-rooms, museums of their fathers' and a by-gone day, there lay wonderful trophies: an emu's egg (so it was declared), Chinese junks fashioned in white ivory, cabinets of sweet-smelling woods mounted with arabesque design, a lump of crystal of strange properties of destruction, and many more, retaining for them and for us, poor land-locked grubbers, the echo of Romance, like the shells on landward mantelpieces giving back the song of the sea.

That first sight of the sea, with Charlotte, went a little to my head, giddy already with unaccustomed sensations.

"Charlotte!" I cried. "I wish that I lived in a house of the High Street, high up like you, and could look out here always."

She gave me a quick glance.

"We see plenty of the sea," she said, and was quiet.

By-and-by, however, her silent mood broke in a brisk patter of words. She had not yet found her fine voice: that discovery was made years later by Richard Clephane's friend, Mr. Parabo; but even as a girl she had her father's other gift of talk. Before we turned at the west of the town, I seemed to have been at Foster's school already. In her company I felt as if St. Brise had been my home, as if I was one of the Cook family. I should have known her brothers, even those whom I had never seen, had I met them: the black boy, Robin, whom I had seen at the Bowes, who was to be a sailor, and never was out of a boat, between here and Torrie Town; and Dave, who was her own particular brother; and James, the best scholar, who was to be a minister when he grew up; and Tam, the cleverest company, who kept rabbits and guinea-pigs, and was the image of his father. I saw them all in that dark saying of Mr. Trail about fine threads and coarse threads making a queer web, which she lit up by her talk.

And when we had turned, and faced the Firth mouth, and I was gasping almost at losing the firm boundary of the world about me at that point, she

told me about the magic of the sky-line. Her talk, I know now, was made up of bits of Rab's glamorous conversation, polished by the friction of her own fancy. . . . The sea, she said, was a witch, and her wand was the vanishing sky-line she held in her hand. And if you looked at her too long, she would cast a spell over you with this wand, and from that minute you could never be happy out of sight of her. Her father said he was bewitched by her one half-moon night when he was a laddie in Eben Smith's shop, . . . "and that's why he's never happy at the Bowes." . . . And if the sea wave her wand for you to come, you maun go, though you never rest by a fireside again.

"I've heard father tell," she said, "of shepherds leaving their hills, and gay young lads their fathers' bein houses i' the heart o' Fife, because the sea called them. There was a kind of cousin of his own, a young lassie, he said, who sat looking at the sea on her road to the kirk, and was bewitched, and had to walk by the kirk and into the sea, for it made her; but what happened to her I cannot tell, for mother heard father telling us the story and bade him stop, for it was over sad for my ears. . . . Our Robin's bewitched: he's just waiting till Cocked-Hat Nicholson's ship is ready, and he'll be off. Mother will not hear of it, but father says you might as well try to stop a swallow when it's restless in the back-end of the year. . . . When that wonderful boat of Nicholson's is ready, we're all going to sail together with Robin to the Happy Islands."

"Where are the Happy Islands?" I asked her.

"Where were they? Nobody knew, save those who

were bewitched by the sea. But they, sometimes, would see them, always at the setting of the sun; and if once you sailed for them you never come back, but must keep sailing, sailing till you find them, . . . and once you find them, you live on in them for ever, and never think of leaving, for the sea is always blue, and the sun is always shining. . . . Tam said that in the Happy Islands it was always like a Saturday on the St. Brise shore, but James thought it maun be finer than that even, for he had read of it in the Revelations, and St. Brise isn't mentioned there." . . .

In this cloud of magic nonsense we returned along the shore. When we reached the street, near her own close-door, Charlotte suddenly relapsed into her quiet and matter-of-fact mood, and so bade me good-night; but my mind, that ever worked more slowly than hers, was still groping its way to an issue.

"Charlotte," I said, "I would like to go up with you to your windows and look for the Happy Islands."

Without a word she led the way.

"Mother," she cried, "I've brought David Shirra back with me. He wants to look for the Happy Islands, . . . as if he could ever see them!"

"Maybe not," says the elder Charlotte, "very likely not, but there's pleasure in the looking for them."

The three of us were standing by the window, against which the mast-tops in the harbour were coming close in the waning light; and they were

pointing out to me the landmarks on the coast, when Rab slipped in like a cold wind.

"You on the look-out like me," he said to Aunt Charlotte (as I got to call her from about this time); and as she interposed suddenly with "Here's David Shirra——"

"Huts! I saw him," he went on. "Helping you to watch for my ship coming home?"

Aunt Charlotte said nothing.

"A ship of your own, maybe," he continued, drumming on the pane; and I, not knowing the poison in that stab, says—

"The Happy Islands!"

"Mr. Cook," I cried, "the Firth mouth points to the North Sea, does it not?"

"Straight as a crow flies to Norway," he says.

"Then how can there be islands out there? . . . Charlotte says you told her there were islands there, but that cannot be, for they're not on the map."

Rab laughed.

"Did Charlotte tell you, when she was at it, if any one ever found them? No. Then how could they be on the map, Mr. Scholard? Eh! . . . And yet they're there, Dauvid, if you have the eyes to see them. It all depends on that. On that. It happens we are a family with particular fine eyes. I can see things out there that many folk that you ken well would give their all to see, but cannot—and yet it is their business. You'll notice about our family, if you condescend to keep up an acquaintance so auspiciously started this day,—you'll notice a habit of ours of always looking out to sea. . . . I

have a laddie, Robin, now, who at this moment is keeping a very bright watch on that same Firth mouth that leads to Norway, but likewise leads to some braw ports in France and the Low Countries if you take it the winning way."

My eyes were glued on the man, fascinated. His talk was like a balloon, always straining upwards, and always tied to earth.

Aunt Charlotte gave a little scared look out of the window.

"Rab," said she, warningly.

"As dull as a peat," answered Rab.

"Is it Cocked-Hat Nicholson's ship he is looking for?" I asked. "Charlotte told me about it."

"Charlotte told you a great deal in a short time," he said very sharply. And then he fell back on his soft patter again.

"No, Dauvid," he said, "when I speak of our straining our eyes from this housetop watching for our ship, I am speaking in parables, and with parables it's aye safest to leave the explanation of them to choice. . . . If ever you hear o' my ship coming home, you'll ken it's not Charlotte's here"—he nodded towards his wife. . . . "Mine sails deep in the waist. Her's is of a more flee-away, phantom kind."

"David," Aunt Charlotte calls suddenly, "it's time you were away home."

"Maybe that's true," says Rab with a laugh, turning a spy-glass out to sea; and Aunt Charlotte and the girl saw me to the door.

On my road homewards, with the sun setting in my face, I looked down the sea-wynds to catch, if I

could, a glimpse of the Happy Islands. They were not to be seen; but that night in my dreams the sea-witch waved her wand, and Charlotte and Robin and I stood out in the Firth mouth for them in Cocked-Hat Nicholson's boat.

CHAPTER X.

SCHOOLS OF CONDUCT.

If any one supposes from this that we St. Brise boys and girls dwelled in sentimental hothouses, he never was at Foster's school. In St. Brise everywhere the air is sharp and caller; at Foster's it was stinging. In St. Brise, it is when you have fought the sea-winds to a place of shelter that you taste the salt they have left upon your lips; and it was only later, at quiet anchorages like Mr. Michael Trail's law-office, that we were conscious of a romantic bloom upon our tempestuous school-days. The boy-and-girl stuff brought to Foster's mill was for the most part very sound and ordinary, able to bear the rough polishing it got. When there was put through it any of a more delicate, softer fibre, it was spoiled for ever in the passage. I do not say that that was not a pity; but I know that in the main Foster's school was a fine manufactory of men and women. The master had a cane, and it discriminated broadly. We might study or we might idle; we did the one or the other, counting the cost. In the hand of that small, wiry, ironical man, the rod was scarce a moral instrument. Justice, I believe, entered little into its exercise, whereas the humours of the master did greatly. Nevertheless it was moral

in its effect, making for righteousness in the community. Those who escaped it were studious, by nature or from fear, and to such only was application to learning of great use. Most of us were to pass into the affairs of life in which some sharpness of wits, a sound discernment, and not too sensitive hearts and hands, were to be of more avail than the learning of the schools; and all these came to us from the cane or the avoidance of it. I can imagine no more virtuous training than that of taking that casual cane as the type of all the ills of life, meted out to us by circumstance, and not in proportion to our merit; to be cheerfully borne, and as cheerfully ignored. . . . A stranger to the town, I remember, hailed David Cook, one of Charlotte's brothers, and pointing to the school, asked, "Is this the Town Hall?" "Nay, sir," David answered, "it is the slaughter-house." In that mood we took it, save, now and then, when an unusual pith in the master's elbow or a touch of frost in the air drove the very last speck of its gaiety from our finger-bones. And in some such gay mood, to be just, the master gave it, unless it were meant to arrest the spoiling of a lad with possibilities of Latinity in front of him. In any case it was good training for a man.

Such was the factory to which Aunt Sarah brought me—a very raw piece of material—on the day succeeding my walk on the St. Brise shore. Charlotte's chatter, then, had I heard it with understanding, would have prepared me for the kind of working-up that was before me; and might have discovered for me, too, that a hardy discipline was engendered in the girls, as well as a healthy senti-

ment in both, by making the boys their vicarious whipping-posts. But, in truth, Aunt Sarah must have driven that discovery out of my head, if ever it had been in it, for she marched me up to the school in a skirl of moral maxims that filled me with a poor spirit for the encounter.

The outer aspect of the building, I remember, was singularly gracious; within the portico the sun was playing sweetly, and there was a twittering of swallows about a nest high up in the entablature. In the inner porch everything was still. No hum came from beyond the brown door where we stood now, and a more enlightened scholar than myself must have found the silence ominous. Ignorant as I was, however, the sound that broke it presently would have carried conviction to my finger-tips, even had I not happened upon a way of conviction by the evidence of my eyes. Aunt Sarah was smoothing her gloves before knocking, and preening herself with various dainty motions, and in that moment of relaxation I discovered that a knot had been removed from the door-panel, affording me, just at the level of my nose, a peep-hole upon the mysteries I was about to enter. To this I warily applied an eye of natural curiosity, endeavouring the while to keep another eye upon Aunt Sarah—for I was quite conscious of the "unlady-like" nature of the enterprise. In this uneasy focus, I was wonderfully successful. The flash of the cane, indeed, beat me, but I caught a glimpse of a ragged head bent upon a flinching shoulder, and a dirty paw held up for its punishment —all so appealing, as it seemed to me, that the sound of the contact reached my ears with the poign-

ant conviction to which I have referred. Aunt Sarah was one of those silly-talking, heartless women whom men in a heat are apt to call by a hot word. The sound, if she heard it, did not interrupt her titivations for a second; on observing which, I returned to my spy-hole. What I saw now was a body of ragged coat and hair doubled up in an access of agony, which I came to know later was one of the most finished exhibitions of the art known to that generation at Foster's.

Its effect upon me was so fascinating that it glued my eye to the peep-hole; and not a motion of the whole diorama escaped me. The three or four rows of heads between me and the principal performers appeared to be fixed in an attitude of awed fascination like my own; only there was a cock of the ears which I did not understand then, but now know to have been critical. The performance was played somewhat in the fashion of a mill—not that I knew much about a mill; but there are natural instincts, and by one of them I guessed that here, too, were breathing spaces between the short sharp work of the rounds, and by another that the combatant in the gown, with the cane in his hand and the cold amusement on his face, had the calling of time at his own discretion, and that the bundle would have to come up to it, willy-nilly. Indeed, I was aware that he had called it, when Aunt Sarah, her titivations over, observed what I was doing, and made so sudden a descent upon me that my head gave the double rap upon the door for which she had been all the time smoothing her knuckles. "David!" she cried; but her reproachful piping was drowned in

a roar of "Door!" that rolled up on the other side of it, and already the step of the executioner was approaching. Aunt Sarah fell back upon smoothing her ruffled feathers. I, on the other hand, was still in a vain flurry when I found myself face to face with Mr. Foster, not knowing very well whether I stood upon my head or upon my feet, but conscious that in the opening and shutting of the door I had seen the lately agonised bundle playing a tarradoodle behind the Master's back, with ten fingers extended in front of the swarthy features that were none other than those of my old acquaintance of the Back Bowes, young Robin Cuick.

A pair of bright eyes shot down on me through spectacles set upon a fine, sensitive nose. The mouth was firm and shrewd. The head was well-poised upon shoulders that had the student's stoop, and from them fell a black gown enveloping the short slim figure. The little cloth cap upon the bald brows crowned the Master with awe in my eyes. Such a figure was new to me. Mr. Butler, whose school I attended at Town-of-Tarvit, was, I have heard since, a more precise Latinist, but he hobnobbed in inns and elsewhere with wags and broken men, and was a battered coin in the currency of Town-of-Tarvit conversation. Mr. Foster looked a gentleman and a scholar; and Aunt Sarah, I remember, rose in my regard through the easy familiarity of her interview with him. Aunt Sarah was a siccar, clever woman.

The Master opened the door of the schoolroom, upon which a sudden hush had fallen, and led us through it to a little room, in which a table still

stood, ready for the receipting of fees and the like.

"Our poor Grace's child" was still on her lips: that damned refrain which I was to hear on them for years.

"He's been lost in Town-o'-Tarvit. He needs your treatment."

She said this with a snigger, an indecent snigger, towards the schoolroom.

"Madam," answered he, "It's one that has been well-tried. The Roman schoolmaster had his disciplinary sign at his door. . . . Manured with beating like a walnut-tree, . . . we'll make a man of him," said the Dominie, patting my shoulder.

"And a gentleman," says Aunt Sarah.

"That, madam, is in God's hands," he answered, clipping his words, as his way was, that I hear in my ears still.

"I tell him he must not forget his grandfather," Aunt Sarah continued.

"I am sure, madam, that you will not allow him to forget him."

There was, I could have been certain, a ring of sarcasm in the words, but there was no correspondence to it in his looks when I met his eye.

Aunt Sarah picked my fees from her purse, and there was some talk of a whist-party at which they had met recently, or were to meet, and she was shown out of the schoolroom, and I to my seat in the class. Young Robin Cook had disappeared from his place in the centre of the floor, and by-and-by, when my eye wandered from the map on the blackboard from which the Dominie had resumed his

lesson in geography, it fell upon Robin's face some seats off, grinning at me in the lee of his neighbour's shoulder in the most hideous contortions to which he could attain with his fingers and thumbs in mouth and eye-sockets. At first he showed circumspection in shooting his grimaces at me; but finding that he was successful in arresting me he gave himself up to an abandonment of distortion.

"Roberte? what was the last word?"

At the Master's word, Robertus eased his head into its proper place, his face assuming a look of unconscious attention.

"The last word, Roberte!"

Robertus did not appear to hear.

The Master was round at him with his cane poised.

"Didn't you hear me ask you the last word?" he said.

"Roberte isn't my name. My name's Robin."

"Then Robin, kindly step out here till I have a few words with you."

There was a little affair of six rounds on the matter of the last word.

That over: "I think, Robin," he said, "we weren't quite finished with our interview when I was called to the door to receive Mr. David Shirra, here."

There were a few more rounds to rectify that.

In returning to his seat, Robin, blowing his hands fiercely, passed me, and set me in a flutter with a hoarse whisper—

"My man, wait till I get you outside."

The lesson proceeded, with me in a state of cold trepidation. I stole furtive glances at Robin. He

was too wary now, in his stalking of the last word, to divert his eye upon me; but he seemed to feel mine fall upon him, and met it behind his neighbour with a clenched fist that worked up and down with so purposeful a menace that I almost felt it already about my ribs.

The lesson was in geography, but I knew little more than that; only the echo of the Master's words about the Antilles may have lingered in my brain, petrified by Robin's intimidation.

"What was I speaking about, David Shirra?" came the Master's sharp voice.

The sound of my name and the thought of the retribution that seemed to follow here the missing of the last word, thawed my petrifaction, and in a rush of ideas I blurted out—

"The Happy Islands."

It was, as I know now, a happy hit, and surprised the Master into a delight.

> *"Nos manet Oceanus circumvagus: arva, beata*
> *Petamus arva, divites et insulas;*
> *Reddit ubi Cererem tellus inarata quotannis*
> *Et imputata floret usque vinea,*
> *Germinat et nunquam fallentis termes olivæ*
> *Suamque pulla ficus ornat arborem."**

he quoted.

"Who told you of the Happy Islands?" he asked, with a curiosity, I think, for the Town-of-Tarvit

*"To these fair lands, those blissful lands, the rich and happy Isles!
Where Ceres year by year crowns all the untilled land with sheaves,
And the vine with purple clusters droops, unpruned of all her leaves!"

tutor who had instructed me so well. So I understand now, but then, being delicate and green.

"If you please, sir, it was Charlotte Cook: Charlotte Cook told me about them last night on the sands."

A twinkle shone in Mr. Foster's eye as he sought out Charlotte, where she hung a rosy face under all eyes.

"I didn't know Dame Cook was such a scholar," he said.

That sudden flash of poetry in Mr. Foster, illumining the sordid round of his schoolmastering, was like the crimson burst at long years' interval upon the cactus-plant, charging his prickliness for me with incipient tenderness. It was my first glimpse of the Humanities. In all that afternoon's experience there was some thrilling quality that graved it on my memory. I suppose that the encounter of the previous night and the mere novelty of being entered at Foster's had shaken me, and to my consequent elevation of spirit the ornament of Life made its appeal.

The school was dismissed, and from that high moment my spirit fell to the earth. Instinct had warned me already that by that public association with a girl in a day-dream I was lowered in the eyes of my fellows: and so it was. Robin Cook issued no more provocative challenges from that minute, but passed me by like a mastiff that is content to sniff at a cur, and his complacence hurt me as his fists about my features could not have done. I was wounded in spirit, and I was not given by active

contumely any of the consolations of self-pity for which I felt myself craving. In the playground, that one true democracy, there are no circumstantial distinctions, good or ill, but those only which the citizen wins by the slow impress of character. Young Charlotte stood, in my eyes, for this playground world, robbed of its rough corners: she was the true essence of its healthy temper. I shrank ashamed from facing her, and when that was inevitable she doubled my confusion by her haughty indifference. At home at least, I thought, Aunt Sarah must hear of Charlotte and the Happy Islands, and rouse me to self-respect by her comment on them; but Mr. Foster, if he remembered them, knew better than recall them for her ears; and in the school itself the horizon, shutting out these rich and happy lands, closed in upon the range of his ironic eye and the consequences of the "last word."

Between the golden moment and the plain earth my spirit was shaken like a bean in a castor. It was in this way that Foster's mill worked us up.

The school was a common into which all the parents in the town turned their children, and from these hardy pastures I came home at night to Aunt Sarah's unsalted company. Here was a different toughening process. Aunt Sarah and her friends sat—"the Tabbies," Uncle Michael called them—rapping out scandal over their lean knuckles; their hearts, withered like peas, rattling inside of them. Over the tea-cups, until I should make my escape, they caged their stories, but some of the foul birds got out and nested in my memory. Faugh! . . . Into my particular ear Aunt Sarah ran a

thin trickle of story about the Trails of the East Coast—of Michael who was wounded at Krotzka, and became one of the knights of the Beggars' Benison; and another Michael, the old sea-lion, a captain who was at Copenhagen; and sometimes—if she was bent on filling the platter—of his son who sailed an East Indiaman and died of cholera before he could feather the ancestral nest,—a mellow bit of family history, by the tail of which I was to be educated to hang.

"Your mother was a Trail"—that was the refrain piped for me all day long, and never so shrilly as when my father was in the house.

At the sound of it my father would shake a nose in the air and essay to protest, like Rab Cuick's lurcher at a barrel-organ; and the sight of him taking it so badly gave me a distaste for the tune. Moreover, Rab Cuick, when I happened on him, or he on me, would play some variations on it for my benefit. . . . With one of these, in a moment of irritation, I capped Aunt Sarah's performance. I think it was the Copenhagen captain her tongue ran on. . . .

"Was it his son," I asked, "that was such a billy among the lassies?" . . .

"What!" she cried sharply, though I could see that her fingers were smoothing her thin lips out of a laugh.

"He fled the country to America," I said stoutly.

"Who told you such a tale?" she cried, with no laugh now.

"Ho!" said I. "It doesn't matter. Our branch"

—I was proving her teaching with a vengeance—"we are only their cousin at the twelfth remove."

At this, Aunt Sarah fell into a passion. Conscious of having been too bold, I tried to pass off my gossip as the whole town's possession, but she did not rest until she had drawn from me that Rab Cuick was my informant.

"That man! That tailyer! A parcel of—of . . ." She spat out her venom at the whole family, at which my temper took fire.

"If all tales be true," said I, my heat fusing for the first time Rab's hints and scraps of story into a sequence—"if all tales be true, he was very thick with my grandfather."

Aunt Sarah flung up her hands.

"The man's voice and accent, his very manner o' speech," she cried. "You don't come by this in a day, young gentleman! You have been consorting on the quiet wi' him and his folk. It's pack you deserve to go back to your father this night. The Cuicks, indeed! . . . Tell me, how come you to know so much about the Cuicks?"

"They are at the school," I said, more persuasively.

I knew very well that a championship of Rab Cuick would not be welcome to my father. Moreover, this sudden light that had broken into my accumulated store of hint and story illuminated Rab as well as Provost Trail and the other figures in it.

"Dave and Charlotte and James," I said, therefore, more conciliatory, mentioning the most presentable of the family. . . . "And it's not their

fault that their father is—is—is all that. As for Cousin Charlotte, she's" . . .

"Cousin!"

"A distant cousin."

"Hum! Of your father's."

"At least," cried I, stung beyond endurance, and inspired again with that affectionate admiration with which the elder Charlotte filled me, "at least, no better woman ever walked the High Street."

Aunt Sarah looked at me for a moment, and then laughed.

"Glamoured you as well, has she?"

I shrank under the stab of her words, though she could not know wherein they wounded me. It was not that I feared she might withhold me from this family in which something, the most felicitous in me, found an answering note. I knew that she could not lay an embargo upon my intimacy with the Cooks: our play-ground equality was an institution as firm as the Bass Rock. It happened, too, that this would have been an unfortunate moment (had she entertained the idea) for approaching Mr. Foster with an assay of Cooks and Trails. The Trail stock did not grow scholars, even on the youngest collateral wood (as I was there to prove), whereas the lad, James Cook, promised to be the finest bloom Mr. Foster had raised in all his years of scholar-culture. Rab and his wife, with their different motives, were eager to venture him at college, which raised them high in Mr. Foster's esteem, and already James had justified their resolve, and flown his teacher's scholarship in the world, by being bracketed First with the son of a lord o' Session in the

matriculation in Edinburgh. That was a notable triumph for Mr. Foster—there are few in this world so unselfish for a man to be proud of; and the little gentleman would have handled Aunt Sarah roughly (and me, through her) had she threatened to stick a pin into his vauntingness about it.

I saw as much as ever then, and after all it was not much, of Rab's household; but I never saw it again the same. Aunt Sarah's words fell like a blight upon it. They were drops of poison injected into the ardent body of my affection for the elder Charlotte. "Glamoured you, has she?" That saying rose like a cloud ever afterwards between Cousin Charlotte and me. I knew it to be only the exhalation of a sour and envious nature. My affection for the woman at the east end—for it was affection—never wavered, and I strained the eyes of my affection desperately to pierce the slanderous fume and to see her as of old. It could not be. There was truth in Aunt Sarah's words: that was it. I had been glamoured. And now my eyes were opened. I could hear the bones of a skeleton rattle in that family's cupboard. I was conscious of a ghost in that household, a disreputable ghost, ever uneasily on the brink of discovering itself. And, 'spite of my aversion from Aunt Sarah, she had toughened me: toughened me, if you will, to plain usefulness in the world,—still, toughened me. . . . The light and enlarged spirit thrills to every mystery of sense and fortune; but see me, against the sense of something hidden and dubious, something not entirely respectable, in this family which assailed me, intrenched

behind the superiority of descent from the Provost and a line of East Coast Trails!

In truth, it was with the perplexity of the world that I was at this time in callow conflict; and, standing on a gentility at which I had so often scoffed, I had little feeling of security. Moreover, Aunt Sarah was brisk to remind me that one who was as much a Shirra as a Trail had a doubtful title to it. But youth is Nature's concern. Old age is the grown man's own problem: he must solve it unaided as best he may. Into youth's veins is poured the spirit of all the generations of men, and it is strange if it do not uplift him.

The Revivals were passing over the country, the aftermath of the great crop ten years earlier. In due time they were in every St. Brise mouth; but I heard of them in advance from James Cook one week-end that he crossed the Firth from Edinburgh, where they were full-blown. He was in debate between pious approval of the evangel and distaste of its prophets. At a meeting (as he confided to me innocently) he had heard one of these, as he stepped down from the rostrum, whisper as he passed to the brother taking his place, "Nicked them that time!" James told me this with a red wave in his face, as if he were repeating a doubtful story. His disgust had become a case of conscience.

So much he revealed to me by the way: he was too fine a lad, too much of the pattern of his mother, to expose a spiritual experience shamelessly. He spoke of the matter, indeed, generally, a little high-flyingly even, with a kind of professional enthusiasm: his own great gifts—joint-First of his year

with the lord of Session's prodigy—were dedicated to the ministry. Being a Scotch boy, with theology bred in the bone, I made an encouraging listener doubtless, and beguiled him out of his reserve. I could feel vaguely that the mood on which his talk was rising and falling was one of uneasiness at the inconsistencies of professing Christians. This was a sympathetic view to me who had Aunt Sarah always in mind. James Cook's soliloquies presented me with another view—the possibility of Christians who did not profess. He showed so apt a desire to admit that possibility, that I jumped to the conclusion that he was thinking of his mother, the elder Charlotte; and up rose Aunt Sarah's words, "Glamoured you, has she?" My own father, again, was not a strongly professing Christian. I had a doubt, though I could not admit it to myself, that he was not a Christian at all. Such was my ravelled mind. The matter was with me still only one of a touchstone applied (so far not very successfully) to friends and acquaintance. I ought to have found assurance in the case of Rab; he, at least, was neither Christian nor professing Christian. But, truth to say, Rab was so aloof from any such common experience as this conversion of which a whole town could chatter, that he threw doubt upon the value of the touchstone itself. "A new man" was the phrase—but Rab always was a new and strange man! My application of the formula to Rab only convinced me the more of the rascal's native wonderfulness.

I was still gnawing these bones of perplexity when the Revivals crossed the Firth and reached St. Brise.

Aunt Sarah, among others, took them under her wing: she was a woman always solicitous for the "weaker brethren." That I was one of these she did not permit me to doubt, as she trotted me nightly to the meeting in the church. This of itself was to chafe the old sore which I sat nursing gloomily in the deep pew. The humble and contrite heart was not mine; but the wounded spirit was. That, indeed, was my sore. The perplexity of the world arose less from my inability to understand it than from its inability to understand me. Neither playground nor elders understood me. So I sat in the deep pew apart from the full tide of emotion flowing round me, nursing this slight, brooding the world's incompatibility.

One night there rose a man who had explored the desert at the heart of the continent of emotion and brought back a message for the lonely soul. . . . Man, said he, had a need deeper than a Christ for the next world—a Christ for this. His Christ was a friend, a brother, all allowing, all comprehending. Brought to His presence, the incompatibility of the world fell away. He could understand. He could sympathise. . . . It is a message that has fallen refreshingly on many a sick soul down in the valleys of life; it fell on me in that deep pew like balm. The same rain that waters the corn causes the tares to spring. A friend, a counsellor, One who could understand and approve, and above all, know the fine fellow whom the world ignored! Despite the emotion that melted me, I went home that night with a cock-sure step beside Aunt Sarah. The perplexity of the world had fallen away.

If it did not remain fallen away, that was chiefly because Mr. Foster would not permit it to. My newly-acquired ease of mind, I had a feeling, would not be proof against the salt and penetrating temper of the little gentleman, should he search me; as undoubtedly he would, I was convinced, should he guess the assurance I carried about with me. So it fell out. Mr. Foster was a bachelor, but even without a wife the domestic wind may shift into a stormy quarter. He arrived at the school one afternoon "with the storm-cone up," as we passed the word, being skilled in reading the signs of dirty weather. It was the earliest warm day that spring; some of the boys had ventured a dip among the grey rollers, and the heel of a loaf—a discarded chittering bite —lay in the master's way to his desk. He picked it up and held it aloft, preaching us a homily on wastry, and demanding the owner. The culprit did not move, and a sudden inscrutable virtuous motion brought me to my feet.

"Yours, David?"

I shook my head.

His keen eyes searched mine.

"Then you know whose it is?"

"Yes."

"Sir! Sit down!"

The sharp crack of his voice warned me that my assurance was to be brought to the test.

He delivered afresh his sermon against waste, and with a face of yellow disgust ate the bit of bread before our abashed eyes. Knowing the nice man he was, I count him a hero for that.

The famous Mr. Ord had arrived in the town the

day before with his horses; and this afternoon the school was dismissed early, to see them perform in the ring on the flat sands at the back of the harbour. A word from Mr. Foster stayed me behind. The sounds of the retreating scholars died quickly away through the open windows, and I was left in the schoolroom alone, nerving myself against the coming trial with the resolution of a Christian martyr. When at length Mr. Foster came to me he was ready to go home. He dressed for the street with care, and always managed to put off with the day's work the air of his workshop. Something in his dress as in his demeanour confirmed me in the sense of fighting a holy war against the world. . . .

"You had intended to inform against one of your fellow scholars," he said, stopping opposite me.

"And you would have persuaded yourself that that was a virtuous action?" he continued, when I did not answer.

"My conscience tells me that it is," said I, levelling my voice and eyes to his.

"Sir!" said he, "a man must be an extraordinarily good man before he may be guided by his conscience," and pointed to the door.

Never puppy, with tail between his legs, stole away from a whipping so crestfallen as was Master David Shirra, when he issued upon the town from Mr. Foster's words. All his assurance was reduced to a heap of ashes; in which, however, smouldered resentment, defiance, pride, self-pity,—all quick still, and ready to burst into flame. He resolutely beat them down, smothered them, smothering at the same time the assurance which they would have stirred

into life with them. His instinct to hide himself from himself, as it were! I can still feel his naked humiliation; so keenly, that I am tempted to set it down as the experience of a young gentleman whose skin I never inhabited.

Under drastic discipline youth shoots up buoyant. I had been whipped, had whipped myself, down one slope of confidence, only to acquire an impetus to mount another. By the time I reached the High Street I was already lifting my eyes to look the world more squarely in the face, with a philosophy of life which had no truck with conscience. The unusual quiet of the street brought to mind Mr. Ord's performance, which all the town was attending. Thither I turned my steps also, recollecting the ticket, price twopence, which Aunt Sarah had purchased for me in the morning. A giddy equestrian art chimed with my reacted mood. The desire to witness Mr. Ord's famous barebacked lightning-change feat proved healthy nature to be reasserting itself; though the morbid emotions of the last few months still coloured it by excusing the use of the two-penny pass by a reference to Mr. Foster's homily on wastefulness. Mr. Foster's, truly, was proving a conveniently all-embracing creed, and I was living up to it wonderfully.

The performance was over before I reached the harbour. I met the westward stream of people from it. On the sands the boys still lingered, with straws in their mouths, round a bunch of Shetlands and piebalds, waiting to trail at their tails and see them stabled for the night. Piebalds were a temptation to myself, but I was not sure how my fellows would

receive me. Once more in human communion, I felt less assured about everything. Skirting these amateurs of horse-flesh, therefore, I made along the shore eastwards, towards Torrie Town. Spring lay piping in this sheltered bay—Cousin Charlotte's bay, though I did not so think of it as yet—calling forth even the elders to listen. Her note ran in my blood with a healthy inspiration. I rushed right to the summit of the opposite slope, and looked out upon the goodness of this good world.

Along at the rocks I came upon the girl Charlotte. Her complaisance which hitherto had piqued me did not trouble me now. Occupied with my new vision, I had no eyes for her, and passed her by. It was a challenge. She withdrew herself from her fellows and joined me on the rocks. It was a challenge, I see now, which she accepted without deliberation, urged thereto by some dim unconscious impulse. This was the first day in spring: no fever in the air as yet, no flame of summer blood, only the first delicate white flush of spring. Even so with Charlotte and myself. The indifference and the challenge we rounded off in a bright communication, wherein boy and girl scarce appeared. Her talk ran on the performances at the harbour. In her words I saw them on the golden circus against the rose-grey background of sea and sky. Miss Josephine and Miss Juanetta, tinsel goddesses, pirouetted and genuflected on their ambling creams. Little Miss Angela flashed through silver worlds from her black pony Glaucus. The baggy clown crackled. Old Ord himself, with supple angularity,

bravely contested with the rigour of years. I saw them all. Her recital, broken by slip and fall and scramble on the sea-weed rocks, the hunt for primrose in the sheltered wood-clumps skirting them, the Hark! for the cuckoo's note, ended in view of Torrie Town. So far we had wandered, heedless of the hour. The golden thread had been drawn out of the day, leaving it grey, with gloom on the landward and bitter white on the seaward border. Home by road would take us round by Torrie Town: too long. Back over the rocks was an adventure through which each of us cut our own way. We met again where the trail led down at the tail of the rocks. The sea was lapping them a foot deep. Nothing for it save to wade. Boots off, we waded to the dry sand, and then together, by understood consent without word spoken, barefoot still along the deserted shore, across the ring half blotted out by the incoming tide, to the shelter of the town.

We sat down to put on our boots on a flat buttressing stone at the back of the harbour wall. Two causewayed roads from east and west the High Street converged upon the pier immediately above us. I, sitting on the seaward edge of the stone, commanded the eastward of the two; and my heart gave a sudden leap at sight of Rab making down it under its twinkling lamps. I looked to Charlotte. She also, it appeared, was arrested by some sight, and following her glance I saw Aunt Sarah picking her way over the cobbles on the road from the west. Charlotte turned towards me, and we looked into each other's eyes a moment. The next we let them

fall. The cloud sprang up between our spirits, as, instinctively, we drew closer together within the shadow of the harbour wall.

They met immediately above us: Rab timed his steps. We could not see them now, but every word they spoke was distinct in our ears.

"Mem!" Rab said, "it's we elders' privilege to wait on the young folk."

He had seen us together on the shore, and even if he had not, he would have guessed Aunt Sarah's business from the blue woollen muffler which hung upon her arm. Aunt Sarah knew only that he had divined her purpose, had in an instant leapt to the back of her mind, as it were, and she wavered in her resolution. She awaited more light before she attacked him.

"I'm sent out on a like errand to yours," he continued. "Wild bairns . . . And yet . . . I needn't complain."

She, seeking the conciliatory way to an advantage, followed up his reservation by mumbling something about his boy's success.

"Yes, yes," cried Rab. "If he keep his wind. . . . He's made a prodigious start."

A note of pride, an unaccustomed note of a genuine feeling, in Rab's voice gave her an opening, which she took.

"It runs in the family," she said.

"Ho! ho!" cried Rab, back on his guard. "Spear-half or spindle-half?"

"Both!" answered Aunt Sarah, with a bitter flash at his meaning.

"Pardon me, mem, you're sharp-sighted, . . .

and that, too, runs in the family. Now, spite a' . . . I'd lay odds on young Dauvid." . . .

I could feel in sympathy her fling of anger.

"Ah! He'll quicken after his fallow. Ho! ho! I've had my eye on him, . . . a notable bud, that some day will burst wi 'a report like the Talipot palm."

I could swear that Charlotte laughed, though when I stole a glance at her she was hot and angry.

"He takes much after you, Rab Cuick," cried my Aunt, with threatening shrillness.

"Hey! Trails, Shirras, . . . and Rab Cuick. . . . A distinguished auncestry! . . . And yet, mem, there's your sharp-sightedness again: there maun be some link or bond, some common denominator to account for the patent reciprocity between the young gentleman and us."

"Link . . . bond of . . . I'll not stand it, Rab Cuick; I'll not have it," cried Aunt Sarah, in high passion now. "I know you well, . . . the reciprocity's patent enough. You colour him as cochineal colours whipped cream . . . He's another lad by consorting with you, . . . ill-tongued, ill-minded, strange, not . . . not." . . .

"Ho! mem, you're prejudiced. A drunk man's a guid enough prop—if he's set at the right angle. I wouldn't wonder—mark my words!—if I could extract some latent high qualities from the laddie's nature that otherwise were dormant. . . . You're prejudiced, mem. Though, as you weel ken I ken, there was infirm human nature in your ain round o' experience that might have taught you to mak' allowances. . . . But . . . but . . . it's the ex-

alted nature o' woman—you cannot palter wi' frailty. And, let me assure you, it's the exalted, female side of our family that young Mister Dauvid leans to. . . . My gude wife . . ."

"I ken your gude wife. . . . I ken the whole nest. . . . I ken her. She's . . . she's . . ."

"What is she?" cooed Rab.

Charlotte leapt to her feet. I caught her skirt.

"She's . . ." cried the angry, shrill voice above us. "Exalted female side! leans he to it?"

"He does that," says Rab. "Tak a step this way, mem."

Before I could comprehend his meaning he and Aunt Sarah were peering down into the gloom on our side of the wall.

"Let go, David Shirra," Charlotte cried aloud now, snatching her skirt from my hold and standing off, in blazing anger, out upon the sands.

I think of her out there now as I dimly understood her to be then—a protest against all that Aunt Sarah represented as she commanded me up beside her. "Come up here, David Shirra,—instanter!"

Rab bent farther over towards me irresolute.

"Hey, my man! you're learning experience, eh?"

Everything in me stood beside the girl out on the sands; but I climbed the steps to Aunt Sarah.

"Don't be overly hard on him for his little aberration," Rab said mockingly. Aunt Sarah was tying the muffler round my neck. "He'll soon be fu' orderly."

"Bad, ungrateful," she piped shrilly. "Bring me to my death o' cold. . . . Out with that hussy, too. . . . Home—home with you!"

"Curiosity . . . that's youth's jewel;" Rab's words sounded after us.

"If you don't mind me, your conscience at any rate should tell you." . . .

"Ho!" said I, halting in the ignominious road on which she was driving me,—"it takes a fine good man to be guided safely by his conscience!"

"That's that man Rab," she cried; "did ever you hear the like?"

"You're wrong," cried I. "It's not Rab, it's Mister Fos——"

But she was buffeting me about the ears, and driving me home before her.

In this manner the mills of St. Brise worked us up.

CHAPTER XI.

WITHIN THE JAWBONES.

THE doorways set deep in the garden sea-walls of St. Brise afford easy access to the shore: to loungers or to sea-bathers by day, and by night to any whose enterprise requires a clandestine coming and going. One of these doorways gives upon a garden of a romantic and old-world character, from which a pend, or close, gripped at the throat by a massive main-door, leads out upon the High Street. Over against this close on the opposite side of the street is another, which in turn admits to the well of a staircase, and on the back or landward side of this in my school-days there lay a garden sloping upwards to the inner wall of a workyard, wherein the principal industries were the sawing of wood and the fashioning of cart-wheels. In this wall was a door, always kept locked upon the workyard side. I have dwelled on these particulars that you might understand the rapid passage, inland from the sea, thus afforded to Rab Cuick in those pursuits of his to which my silly eyes had been shut and now were to be opened.

The woodyard belonged to the man Nicholson, who owned also the boat-building yard at the back of the harbour. This Nicholson was an elderly

crazy kind of fellow, who for years had spent his time in an attempt to perfect a boat of a new build which, as you have heard, was known in St. Brise as "Cocked-hat Nicholson's ship." The invention was to come to a lamentable end; but it seems that there was sense in it. Possibly Nicholson had heard or read some imperfect story of the centre-board which the American yacht-builders were using; at any rate, the notion working in his head was that smarter and safer tacks could be made in the choppy seas in the Firth by a boat with a keel shaped like a cocked hat. And I am told that in the bay at this day there lies a yacht with a keel which could not be described better than by the figure that won for the crazy boat-builder the name of "Cocked-hat Nicholson."

So immersed in this invention was Nicholson that he left the management of his woodyard to a foreman, Tam Cornfoot by name, a fellow of such slender wit that I cannot conceive a business not too heavy for it to support. Had they rested on none other than Tam, the woodyard affairs, including as they did speculations in timber (delicate matter always), must have fallen to the ground. As it was, they were directed to the most fruitful ends by one whose title to put a little finger upon them did not exist. This, of course, was Rab Cuick; and, needless to say, self-interest, though it might never discover itself, was Rab's sure and only title for doing anything. The peculiarly dense nature of Tam Cornfoot, his independent responsibility, and especially the depth of his sawpit and its advantageous situation, inland on the hill, yet within easy

flight from the shore,—all these came so happily to Rab's hand in his illegal enterprises that it suited him to conserve them in their present fruitful way of going.

See the rascal in this affair! The boat-builder to whom the yard belonged dallied with his vanity at the back of the harbour, while his bank account grew all the bigger. Tam Cornfoot, with always a crown in his pocket now, fell into the tippling ways from which a straitness of means had kept him hitherto. Rab Cuick might have stepped into the feckless Tam's shoes, and from them into the feckless master's, had he cared. But no! I do not say that he did not pocket a penny of the profit he made for the woodyard. Yet, later, in my office of accountant, I had placed in my hands papers connected with Cocked-hat Nicholson's estate, and my scrutiny of them showed that the main share of the profit went to the owner. Rab Cuick mastered the business (for him an easy task) and was at pains to guide it to a fortune. . . . Was it all for the sake of a little advantage it gave him in his dirty, illpaid, trafficking? I cannot be sure of him!

"Man, Rab," I said to him years afterwards, when I had discovered the extent of the business he had handled, "you missed a chance of a lifetime. If you had just held on steadily, and watched yourself, you might have been at the head of a fine business."

We were standing on this St. Brise shore when I said it. I had run down to St. Brise on business, and before returning home sought a sniff of the caller seas; and on the brae beside it I found Rab Cuick, pacing back and forwards with his

hands in his pockets, three steps and a turn like a Cellardyke fisherman; not, with him, because of the habit of walking a short deck, but because of the consuming restlessness within him.

"You're a bit from home to-day," I hailed him (for he was living in the Back Bowes then).

"And you?" he whistled back. "Though, to be sure, it's nothing wonderful for a man of affairs like you to have business call you from your own door."

I told him how it was with myself. "Just a thought," I explained, "to seek again a glimpse of the happy islands; or maybe the sea-witch calling, as your Charlotte would say." (Though, in truth, Charlotte was the sea-witch).

He stepped closer to me, and with a frankness I had never seen in him before: "Aye, Dauvid, you feel it too?" he said. "I cannot bide away from it for long. I cannot sleep o' nights for thinking of the sea."

Strange to find this man coming down from the Bowes for no other errand (if indeed, he was speaking the truth) than to pace back and forward on the sea-shore, like the bear on a tether in Ord's menagerie!

It was then that I reminded him of the grand chance he had missed. "At the head of a fine business; and then, Rab, you need never have been away from the shore!"

"Haud your tongue, young man!" he cried, his face white with passion. "I might have known that you would not understand. What do you think I come down to St. Brise to hear the sea say to me?

To silver crowns add silver crowns—is that the burden of her sang? Would you, if you had a note o' music in you? . . . I've heard tell you play the fiddle; would you tune it to a melody o' six-and-eightpence? Country loves, country lives?—bits of airs to sing in the gloaming, or counting the till when the shop's shut o' nights. The fine music's the grand music; you cannot get away from it. A human soul's a human soul no doubt, in the Bowes wife that never saw beyond her bleaching green as in a king, and equally presentable to its Maker. I'm no judge o' that; but among men, I ken, place and power are the things that interest, the things that count. We're made so—or, by God, I'm made so at any rate—that only the big things in the world can tune all the strings of our being,—the pomp o' nature and the pomp o' man. What? Wife and weans, Robbie Burns sang, ye say? Man, man, d'ye not see he was just making the best of it. His heart was aye on the road to Jamaica, aye roving, and the shortness of his tether broke it. It's a fine thing to say, 'My mind to me a kingdom is.' That's a story for a man with a foot in the grave, affecting resignation. Look at the sea, man, look at it, look at it, think of all the roads upon it and where they lead to; and you would bid me be content cooped up in the narrow ways of Fife!"

"Content, or not content," said I, "even making the best of it, like Robbie Burns, or any of the lave of us."

"Ettling for half a lifetime to oust a man out of a woodyard, and dying fairly rich in it at the end. That's a way of living like anybody's singing.

Anybody can sing a sang: how many can vocalise it?"

That was how the specious rascal prided himself on his way of doing. He may have had cause. He must have had cause. I cannot be sure of him. Yet, spite of his fine speaking, Rab, I know, was the ruin of all connected with the woodyard in the end. One of my later recollections is of days when Rab and Tam Cornfoot were inseparable, in a very rapscallion condition; Rab, alert, agile, and cunning despite his breakdown, and Tam wooden and in all ways debased in accord with it. It was difficult to guess the bond that attached the creature to the rascal who had been his evil star. On the other hand, Rab's intention in the conjunction never was in doubt. Having fallen upon times when his wit was less eagerly sought after, and had to assault if it was to carry those whom he met, he kept the unfortunate wood-sawyer close to him as a foil.

"This is my friend, Mr. Tammas Cornfit; he's a little dirty and has a nasty smell" (Thomas had taken to cobbling as a last resource). "But he can't help it;" in some such manner he would accost you, to your indignation it is true, but also, be it confessed, to your entertainment as well. I remember that once, when Tam was arrested on some thieving charge, Rab protested his support of his *alibi* strenuously, causing no end of precognitions thereby; and it turned out to be more than a rascally joke as to his having caught a whiff of Tam in the Sillar Wood at the alleged moment of the theft—the Sillar Wood being more than a mile from the seat of the offence, and rather less from the Back Bowes

stables, where, Rab swore, he caught the aroma of him. And he proposed to put in as evidence some experiments to show that that aroma did not carry beyond the seventeen hundred and sixty yards with the wind coming off the sea.

While I was still a man in the making at Foster's, however, it suited Rab to cause Tam to appear before the world as the mainspring of the business, although he was no more than the indicating hand showing the working of Rab's brain. For the same reason also, because it suited Rab, the woodyard doors were closed against us. The main entrance was at the head of Dishington's Wynd, conspicuous by being surmounted by the jawbones of a stranded whale. I cannot remember that I was ever forbidden to enter; yet certainly there existed at the back of our minds an understanding imposed on us by Rab that we were never to do so. By some association of ideas, indeed, the jawbones had come to represent for me, in a dim uneasy manner, the mystery, the disreputable mystery, surrounding the Rascal. Thus, although Charlotte Cook and her brothers left us now and then to go in and out of the woodyard, we never accompanied them, but rather waited without until they rejoined us.

I had been at Foster's nearly three years, and it was well understood that when the summer vacation came round my school-days would be at an end. Mr. Michael Trail was to enter me at his law office at Town of Tarvit in the autumn. As it fell out, some months before that one of the clerks, being detected in pilfering the stamps, ran away to be a sailor, and his stool was offered my father for me if

he would undertake to bring me forthwith to sit upon it. One Saturday in April, therefore, Mr. Shirra arrived in St. Brise. There was lying at the moment close by the town a body of militia, and because of this and of a talk of volunteering and the like in the air, we boys at Foster's were filled with the martial spirit, and had raised a corps of our own, commanded by young David Cook. Colonel Dave was a stern disciplinarian (modelling his discipline, indeed, on Mr. Foster's), and there was fixed for this Saturday afternoon a full dress parade at which, it was understood, Harry Turbayne, the Provost's son, was to be lifted upon the triangle (if he could be inveigled to it), for deserting from a forced march to prove the strawberries in his grand-aunt's garden at Cluny. "Plated in habiliments of war," as the play says, therefore, I was going out of Aunt Sarah's gate as my father entered it, and I ran fair into his arms.

"Where are you going?" he said after a hurried greeting during which he had brought me round to the rear of the house.

"Parade at two," I answered with a salute.

"Huts!" he cried, looking me over. "Take off these things and come inside with me. I have news for you."

"But what will the colonel say?" I asked hesitating.

"What colonel?"

"Colonel Dave Cook," I answered. "He'll arrest me—maybe shoot me."

"Cooks, Cooks, damn the Cooks!" he cried in a fury. "Take these things off: you're too old for

that nonsense. You are to go back with me to-night. The place in your Uncle Michael's is waiting you."

This was news indeed. I threw my trappings into an outhouse and followed my father indoors.

When I entered the parlour, Aunt Sarah was already pecking at him—her usual reception. My father was thin-skinned, and generally suffered much from it; to-day, to my surprise, he took it with a callous spirit.

"So Michael has made a place for him," she was saying as I went in. "I knew he was to. We must do the best we can for poor Grace's boy."

He seemed with a tolerant motion of the hand to push her away from him.

"But if you are to deserve our concern, David," she addressed herself to me, "remember who you are on your mother's side. To that you owe your good fortune—see you do it no discredit in Mr. Trail's office."

My father heard, for he flushed slightly, but his thoughts were busy elsewhere. His face wore an eager and happy look, that I had learned to associate with each fresh forlorn attempt to wrestle with the fate that stood between him and a supervisorship. It said, "This time, for a certainty, I have the advantage, and will be equal to the occasion." And what could the occasion be but Rab Cuick himself?

I, to whom that thought brought no consolation, was all red-hot resentment at Aunt Sarah's speech. It wounded my self-respect to see my father so complacent.

"Uncle Michael 'll teach me his business himself," was my insolent retort.

"If David Shirra's teachable," she answered sourly.

"David!" cried my father, with reprimand in the accent, but not altogether ill-pleased, it was easy to see, at my heat.

"I have a letter for you to deliver," he continued. "For Mr. Stein in the Excise. You'll find him at his office; if not there, then at the bonded warehouses. You know them?"

"Close by Rab Cuick's," I answered.

My father made a movement of annoyance.

"The very next door," cried Aunt Sarah with a thin laugh; "and still they can't put salt on his tail."

"We'll see, we'll see!" my father answered in angry elation, and starting to pace the room. "And, Sarah," he went on, stopping to look at her meaningly, "there were some folks, you ought to remember, whose tails could have been salted, but weren't, for their family's sake."

"Ay! Grace was a better catch than her father," she said, giving him a contemptuous nod.

He turned his back on her and handed me the letter without a word. Evidently he had something in his mind that was a salve to that stroke.

"See that you deliver it soon, and are soon back," he said. "If Mr. Stein or any of the officers—anybody, in fact, should ask for me, remember, tell them I've just run down for you, and that we return home after tea."

"It isn't possible," said Aunt Sarah. "I can't pack the boy's things by then."

"Send them after him, then," he answered brusquely. "We make a start to-night." He spoke in great glee. "If you meet any companions, say good-bye to them; any sweetheart—bid your adieus; you may not see her again." He was moved indeed out of his usual reserve and decorum. "But, mind, come back soon. We make an early start."

So saying, my father accompanied me downstairs, and I left him smoking his pipe on the back-garden green.

I set out in search of Mr. Stein, elated at my change of fortune. My step was jaunty, as suited one who from henceforth was to take a man's place in the world; more than my step, I was to learn, had caught the trick of manhood. As I came within sight of the narrow neck of the High Street stretched eastwards to Rab Cuick's and the offices of the Excise, the younger Charlotte turned up Dishington's Wynd, destined, I was sure, for the woodyard. The beat of my heart to pursuit shook me with sudden dismay, and in that moment of panic the chance of cutting her off before the jawbones were reached was lost; then my father's saying, "Make your adieus; you may not meet her again," put the panic to flight, and I was pressing after Charlotte even within the forbidden precincts of the woodyard.

To follow her at all was an act of resolution,—so much was I a boy still; so strong was my awe of Rab, that to pass that forbidden portal was a deed of daring. Judge, then, my disappointment when, having scaled my Darien peak, no Pacific lay in view. I found myself alone in a large yard, well-

clothed and well-ordered, but dreary for want of Charlotte. By the high wall of Dishington's were stalks of winter-washed planks filling the air with woody flavour. Round the other three sides of the yard ran a broken fringe of sheds and outhouses; in the centre of these, over against me, was the workshop, the saw-pit near it. Above the line of buildings shook the trees of the neighbouring gardens. Beyond them the church tower stood gloomily on the hill, watching the town. Somewhere here without doubt was Charlotte; but where? That question, even more sharply than the failure to find her at once, pulled up my impetuous mood; and I retreated into the nearest shed to plan how to discover her, but first to fashion an excuse with which to meet her when discovered she was.

I was not a moment too soon if I was to escape observation. The sound of a voice in the yard followed me to my hiding-place immediately I had reached it, and looking out through a sprung seam I saw young Robin Cook upon the ladder rising from the saw-pit. He had turned upon it to address some one below; plainly (though I did not hear the words) in impish badinage. That would have told me that his companion could not be his father, Rab, had there been in my mind any thought save that it must be Charlotte who was there.

Walk to her across the yard, under the eyes of Robin, and under Rab's eyes also it might be, and come plump upon her with my story of following her to say farewell, I dared not; yet set eyes upon her at the least I must. Something told me that the sheds and houses would give one upon the other,

and so I found it. Thus I worked my way round the yard like a mole in the dirt and dark, Charlotte the daylight to which I was creeping. Evidently there was some kind of road through all the lumber, had I only had a light to cast upon it, but in the dark, as I was, I found it a trackless wilderness of benches and logs and ropes and barrels, and wheels and spokes slung from the rafters, side by side with floats and anchors. Even by the feel of his hands Mr. Shirra's son might have known that there was more here than the wheel-wright and wood-sawing business required.

At length, bruised and scratched and torn and dirty all over, I found myself in a more open space, into which there penetrated a glimmer of day. By it I saw that the way was barred by a wall of wood running right up to the beams of the shed, and then I discovered that the daylight came from over them, and that the roof on the hither side was higher than that under which I stood. I had reached the wheel-wright shed that rose above its neighbours and opened on the yard at the side nearest the saw-pit.

Having stood still for a space, and heard no movement on the other side of the wall, I began to grope along it carefully in search of an exit. Apparently there was none; but at the far end I came upon a ladder, and climbing quietly to the top stepped into a loft that evidently was an upper storey of the workshop. Here there was a window, looking out upon the yard, through which came the daylight that I had seen playing among the open rafters from the shed below, and to this I crept with a noiseless step.

The window, as I had judged, was one in the upper storey of the workshop. Without venturing too close upon it, I could command the whole yard, even the bottom of the pit, and to find no Charlotte there was like a bereavement. The boy Robin was standing now on the plank across the pit, in which a log had been brought into position, and was sawing vigorously; and down in the pit below, keeping time with him on the other end of the saw, was Tam Cornfoot himself. Every pane of glass in the window was broken, and the east wind sweeping round the yard flung the words they said into the loft where I stood. Tam was calling up to Robin to cease, but the young top-sawyer, with a grin and glow of devilment on his face, kept working briskly, until Tam, all perspiring, and become speechless from want of breath and the crick in his back, was shot up and down on his handle, flinging a look of rage at Robin every time the movement of the saw brought up his face to the light. For a moment, watching the farce, I forgot my search for Charlotte; when suddenly I heard a guffaw close by me, and at the same time a gust of wind swirled in at the window a wisp of strong smoke of tobacco. I slipped into the dim angle of the loft, and stood there listening with my hand on my breath.

"Back from the window!"—I recognised Rab's voice—"and not apprise suspicious folks of your whereabouts! There's one such come in about the town to-day, though he's not of much account. . . . It's well for you we Fifers haven't the noses of you Dutchmen—filling St. Brise with your foreign reek!"

The occupants of the adjoining loft, whosoever they were, had drawn back against the partition that separated me from them. I could hear them when they moved, and catch their talk in the intervals of the wind gusts.

"Neither the nose nor the tongue. *Myn hemel!* Not the tongue!" said a voice unfamiliar to me—a voice of high and hearty timbre. I had a mental picture of the speaker—fair, bold, open-eyed. I never saw him, but I know that the picture was true. He was running on about the dishes he had had at some inn before sailing. The Willem Barendsz was the name of the house I remember. He went through the dishes with the cooking of each, enjoying them afresh in his recital. Rab was chirrupping lowly: it flashed upon me that he also had recollections that he smacked his lips over, and the feast at the Willem Barendsz was honest by comparison with them.

"I have aye observed," I heard him, "that for the interests and pleasures of life that take no effort, commend me to a Dutchman. Yet I maun say this for your race, You can do a power o' fatigue sitting!"

"He!" cries the other, "you have the energy, you Scotch,—though you haven't the taste, as we say. . . ."

The wind swept through the yard again, searching every corner and drowning their words. The wind was rising. Then I caught the stranger's voice again. He was evidently pacing up and down the loft, for his words came to me with a rise and fall. . . . "Restless, restless! I know it myself.

Do you know what! When I was a boy in our summer home in Gelderland—it was a nest in the heart of the orchards,—when the wild geese drove above the trees at dusk something out of me went with them. In the blood, Uncle Willem used to say: *Een aap die broedt een aap.* My mother? Poor *Moeke!* He wasn't thinking of her. My grandfather Willem Dunlop. Bah! Who knows from what altars, of yesterday or of a thousand generations ago, our natures pluck their fires. . . ."

"You're getting a bit beyond me," laughed Rab.

". . . Well, I was to be settled, secure—a real Dutch aim. My mother was alone, and wished to have me beside her. I was sent to study at Utrecht, where lads grow into scholars as Goes girls become wenches. The bells never rang the quarters high up in the Dom, but the blood in me called out to be let. . . . And sometimes I went to Vlaardingen, to Oom Willem's—he wanted me to join him in his business even then. Mother wouldn't hear of it—was ill at ease if I went near him—jealous of each other for me they were. Laughed at her family—old Highland aristocracy, I understand, though died out. Laughed at them he did. We're the greatest Republicans in Europe, we Dutch—and correspondingly keen on genealogy, though we profess to like it without the noble taint."

"Scotch!" says Rab. "Save that we all claim the noble taint."

"But I went to see him often, and sometimes his tongue was loosened and I was aflame. You remember him—he! With his proverbs, as you say?

Old Father Cats! He had a copy of the poet that he used to read from end to end—a folio, as big as the dominie's Bible. It *was* his Bible, I believe. It's funny to think of him aye quote-quoting these musty old tags—leading the life he did, . . . and a poet himself, too, when once you thawed him."

"A poet, with a terrible sense of how many dubbeltjes make a guilder," says Rab. "Oh! I remember him—that day in Amsterdam, for instance."

"My first meeeting with you—ha! I'll never forget it. . . . I was a boy. . . . I'll never forget it. It was over that damned failure of a speculation—the Lutine. And then you came with me to see my mother."

"Wonderful woman. How is she?" I could hear Rab.

There was a pause, filled, it seemed to me, with an import—exactly the import for which there was a void in my understanding of this whole story.

Then the other answered with a half-laugh, "I believe she has a grudge against you."

"Eh!" cries Rab. "Says she ill of me?"

"I never heard her mention your name. Yet so it is, I think. 'Twas you who settled me for a roving life."

"Me!"

"Oh! I don't know. She thinks so, I believe. I don't know. It was in me, of course, and you just . . . just . . . He! Mr. Cook, you're just wonderful."

There was excitement in his voice. "Speak lower!" Rab cried, yet even as he warned him

against discovery, I could hear the chirrup in his voice. The other had stopped in his pacing, facing Rab I could tell.

"And here I am," he was saying with bitterness in his voice, "hiding in this hole, mewed, in a game that has ceased to be worth the candle. You know it for yourself. You know this game is played out. Yet where is there a better of its kind? Our Indies? Africa? Who knows? Oh! We have dreams, we Dutch, though you laugh at us for still-sitters. Some day perhaps we'll hatch out—who knows what? Och! what does it matter . . . whether you rove the world or make a hole in't for yourself. There was Oom Willem in the end—tied to his stoep with an ague—seventy thousand guilders in his chest, and lamenting there weren't more. It's true! Urging me to fresh enterprises to make it a hundred. It's better perhaps that I settle in the wine business, respectable, and aim—*God-doorie!* —to make it a hundred. Oh! there's money in *it* still, and—what would you call them?—perquisites, though you need not risk your skin for them. And we have money. We lost a fortune in that damned gold frigate—but it's not all gone. Mother's looking for me still to settle down by her, though she says nothing."

"Aye," says Rab, "she says nothing."

"Huts, man," he went on, after a minute, "I never bade you quit her. Who finds the world by wandering in it? God's mercy! What you've got to do is to bide at home and bring the world to you. I do that. Oh! It's difficult—but it can be done. At times it can be done. It's the idea that governs.

Bide young—keep the idea young—that's the secret of living."

I cannot describe the agitation with which I I listened to their words. Although I could not see this stranger, I could be sure he was still a man on the side of youth, and his confession of the unforgetableness of his first encounter with Rab, babbled in Rab's face as I had babbled mine of a similar experience, was a comment on my own relations with the Rascal. It was a gloss upon Rab. It stamped him with hall-mark of the by-ordinary. Here was a foreigner from the other side of the North Sea, and when he spoke of Rab it might have been myself who spoke. My fascination, my doubt, my resentment, even my condescension—they were all in his words. The Rascal, there was no doubt of it, was a world's wonder, not merely mine: a real, big wonder. And I was going to lay my hand on the secret of him. It was that thought which wound me up to the highest pitch of excitement. The events of the last hour had shaken me: the opening of a new door in life for me, my pursuit of Charlotte in farewell even within the forbidden gates, and now this desperate adventure in which I conceived myself to be engaged. In this fluid condition of spirit I was more than usually sensitive to the meaningness of their words. I was on the brink of a discovery; only this thin partition lay between me and it. I was to see the skeleton whose bones rattled in the Cook cupboard; the ghost that filled that household with uneasiness was to reveal itself.

So I imagined. Had I only known it, I was still

far off that discovery. The secret of Rab was to be for me as long a pursuit as his law-breaking was for my father. But something told me I was "hot," as the children say, and with all my senses acute with excitement I listened to their wonderful conversation.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WIDOW DUNLOP.

I was "hot," and I listened, and my eyes were wonderfully opened.

In a quarter of an hour I knew more of Rab's smuggling exploits, and the ins and outs of his traffickings, than did my father after a score of years spent in seeking a clue to them. Had my father been in my place in the loft he would have been all ears for the affair that had been planned for this very night, and he would have heard much to perfect the information which I was carrying from him to Mr. Stein in the letter in my pocket. But I . . . my eyes were fixed upon a bigger picture, the form and glow of which, as I looked, developed through the mystery still veiling it a more integral and cognent story. Among other patches that discovered a fuller meaning for me that day in the wood-loft was the incident of the Mackerel Election and Rab's journey across the North Sea. Precisely how much of it was made clear to me then, and how much later, I cannot determine. This, at any rate, is the proper place to set down all I know of it, or ever shall know.—

When the Mijntje of Maassluis put into Vlaar-

dingen with the Mackerel fishers, the Provost did not quit the quay, but stepped into a steam smack bound for Leith that very hour. Dunlop found him the ship and the passage. They parted in a wonderfully friendly manner.

"Good-bye, Mr. Dunlop," the Provost said. "It is good-bye for good this time."

"Don't say that," Dunlop answered. "In the way of business, it is good-bye, I can understand. But there are some years of the trade for me yet, and we may happen to meet in days to come. Nothing need be said but that our acquaintance was always for pleasure and never for business. I'll not let the monkey out of the sleeve, as you can imagine. I'll not forget that you are the Provost, with a duty to perform."

The Provost laughed.

"But," he said, with a touch of stateliness, and of irony as well, "I'll always remember you, Mr. Dunlop, as a particularly frank man," and shook his hand.

"And," said Rab, "I will be at the Provost's elbow, to jog him into going cannily, should he be tempted to perform his duty over assiduously."

"You, Mr. Cook," said the Provost testily, "I'm afraid I cannot say good-bye to."

And so they parted.

Two mornings later Dunlop and Rab were together in Amsterdam, and issuing from a tavern on the Sea Dyke ran against a youth, who brought them to a stand.

"Uncle Willem!" he cried.

"Ha! You here, Bolleboos?"

"Yes," answered the youth. "And in all the world you are the man I wished most to meet."

"Hullo!" cried Dunlop. "Made up your mind at last? The old stress of the blood in you?"

"Greater than ever, I think." The youth laughed. "But it's no case of running off to sea this time. I have a scheme."

"Then come in here," said Dunlop, grimly. "If that is your ailment, my friend, Mr. Cuick is the very physician for you."

They returned to the tavern and called for beer.

"A scheme," muttered the Uncle. "Aye! aye!"

"This young nephew o' mine, my brother Dirk's son, sufferers from too much of his great-grandfather," he said to Rab; and in turn introduced Rab to the nephew—"Mr. Rab Cuick, of the town of St. Brise, in Scotland."

Rab's eye was bright.

"Here on business?" said the youth.

"Partly, and partly to defeat other folks' business. I, too"—Rab laughed—"I am troubled with the same complaint as yourself."

"You know of my great-grandfather, Willem Dunlop? Some connection, maybe?"

"Only from your Uncle's lips here, and not very much from them. No—no connection, I think," he chirruped lowly. "Save only that the old Adam or the old Willem—it's all one."

The youth looked at him sharply, and they laughed into each other's eyes. The elder Dunlop had already begun to expand the tale of this wonderful grandfather of his. "You've started him," whispered the lad, with a rueful shrug of the shoul-

ders, and he and Rab raised their glasses silently across his Uncle's words.

Willem Dunlop (so his story ran) was a mariner of Dundee, a fine skipper, and the cleverest smuggler that ever cut across the Channel. On the 9th of July, the year 1766, the day the fifth Stadhouder came to office, he sailed in the Unicorn, 200 tons, out of Flushing with a cargo of wood for Montrose, and a thousand half-ankers of Schiedam for a port on the road. Three days out, he was wrecked at the back of the Texel: the bones of sailors toss as thick there as the plovers in the polders. But Willem Dunlop sleeps sound at Veere, where the Scheldt has a tryst with the North Sea. How he escaped is a mystery, save that he was a man of hellish spirit, and God is good to the devil's own. He was flung among the dunes at Cocksdorp, and for six weeks lay at a sheep-farm there, mending a broken leg and revolving his broken fortunes. When he got on his feet, he set his face south. He was a man of energy, but he couldn't squeeze the Texel folk—they are the driest of their kind. Besides, during these mending days, when lying with restless eyes on the sand-hills and his ill-fortune, and confident of the sea and success beyond, the sea no surer than success, he planned a wide adventure for his life, and the pivot of it was the widow Van Loon. He had met her first in the market-place of Middleburg with her man, the wine-seller of Veere, who was then alive; and maybe there were favours bestowed as well as ankers taken on board. So he crossed at Helder and worked his passage in a Schuit to Middleburg, and in three months' time he

was at the heart of the widow round whom the wheel of his fortune went spinning. He never set foot in Scotland again, and seldom outside of Zeeland, but when he died four sloops lost a master, and his five sons shared a brave pile of English guineas.

"Tea, chiefly?" asked Rab.

"Tea and Genevas and cognac and cinnamon, all the wealth of the East Indies—a roaring trade with the coast of Sussex, and chiefly with Rye, chiefly with Rye. But principally tea and Genevas. My father has told me that in one year he shipped a quarter of a million pounds of it, and he set up a son in Schiedam to distil Genevas for his English agents. And then there was the Lutine."

"The Lutine!" cried the younger Dunlop.

"Why not?" said his Uncle.

"Well, well," he answered, suddenly excited, and all ears. "Go on. I'll tell you something when you're done."

The lad sat drumming the table impatiently while his Uncle went on with his story.

"You have heard of the Lutine?" he said, addressing Rab. "She was a frigate of 32 guns—one of the best in Duncan's fleet, and sailed out of Yarmouth Roads one morning in October of 1799, bound for Cuxhaven, with two hundred souls on board and a million of bullion. The same night she was caught in a gale from the N.N.W., driven on a lee-tide upon a bank at the Izergat, between Terschelling and Vlieland, and sank with every man and her treasure. A million sterling, or more. So they said. Our fishermen salved the specie, and our Government—we were at war with you at the time

let them pocket their share. All save two-thirds, nich they kept for themselves. There were seven ndred thousand guilders of it minted at Dordrecht. That will show you! My grandfather had hand in that enterprise, and proposed to put it eper, when he was drowned off the Helder, and ft his sons his money, and a dream of lifting nother million out of the old frigate's hulk. ook you! The very storm that drowned him ried the Lutine under a shifting sand. Clean out f sight. She and her million, happed under the ank. Better she had remained there. . . ."

The lad made a motion to interrupt him, but Dunlop held on, and his nephew fell back on impatient drumming of the table.

"His sons were all sailors, or all in the trade at ny rate. Three of them went west. There's not name better known between Dunkirk and Roscoff han Piet and Hein Dunlop and the Goldfish and Eagle cutter. My father and another brother carried on the wine business, and had boats sailing to Portingale, and they too made a run now and then, and so did Dirk and I when we succeeded them . . . . Oh! I've seen the signal flash from the tower of St. Brise house—Mr. Adams's. . . . That was in Mr. Trail's time, though, not yours. . . . ."

"I wonder how that gentleman's faring," murmured Rab.

". . . And then came another storm and uncovered the Lutine. Dirk followed that will-o'-the-wisp, and wanted me to. *'Nering zonder verstand, Verlies, voor de hand,'* said I, but the wine business

would no longer please him, and I must buy him out. And then with him it was all salving-companies, and diving-bells, and syndicates of big folks, and deputations to London to plan with Lloyds for dividing the spoils. . . . Spoils that never were found. . . . Never were there to find, most likely. At any rate once more the sands had shifted over the frigate and hid the place where she lay."

"He! But my father wasn't the fool you think about the Lutine!" young Dirk broke in, crowing.

"No. It lost him fifty thousand guilders off and on, but it found him a wife." Dunlop was speaking bitterly. "She made another man of him. You know what Father Cats says, 'Where love comes in it makes a lamb of a lion.' 'Twas she kept him at home in safe hawking at fashionable game. . . . This lad's mother is English—or Scotch, is it? It was on one of Dirk's mad visits to Lloyds that he met her."

"Of a good Highland family," said young Dirk, with a touch of heat. "And between her and Oom Willem love's not lost. He thinks she won my father from the sea, and she thinks he'll win me back to it. . . . But, Uncle Willem, you say treasure-trove is folly—look at that!"

He had taken a gold piece from his pocket, and rapped it on the table.

His Uncle looked sharply from it to him.

"Aye!" cried the lad, "and I'll tell you more. The nor'west gales have cleared the Izergat again, and the Lutine's found! Found! And that came out of her!"

"Tush!" cried his Uncle. "Still building castles."

"What's a gold piece or two," he went on, but still scrutinising the coin.

"I don't know," Rab intervened, taking the coin from his hand. He span it rapidly on the table. "Many a fortune is built on a bawbee," he said.

"You're my man! A bawbee is?" cried young Dirk.

"Half of our penny. Worth the five-hundredth part of your louis d'or here."

"I see you know the piece Mr. Ku-Ku-Kuik-Cook is it? Pardon. . . . And let me tell you, Uncle, more have been found—many of them, and Spanish pistoles, besides cannon and shot. . . . Ay, and there are bars of gold and silver to come, Mr. Cook. Look now! There were thirty-one gold bars raised after the wreck, and thirteen of them were numbered . . . so . . . from 58 to . . ."

The lad had risen, and crossed to the little billiard table. Dunlop laid a hand on Rab's arm. Rab laughed in his face, which clouded with a suspicious scowl. Young Dunlop was back beside them immediately with a lump of coarse chalk, covering the table with figures and letters—the marks on the gold bars. "His father over again: *Een aap die broedt een aap, van uilen komen uilen,*" muttered his Uncle. Rab was following Dirk with a show of eagerness, asking an astute question here and there.

"Hut!" cried Dunlop. "I know that it has been proved on paper a hundred times over that there must be near six hundred bars left in the frigate still. But I wouldn't give the Mijntje for all that will ever see the light. . . . Tush, lad. Put these

dreams out o' your head. All smoke: and you know what Cats says, 'Leave smoke to princes; content yourself with common fare.' Join me, Dirk. My cellars will be yours, and my boats yours, and the sea is open to you."

"The North Sea," says Rab. "If this treasure's there—and it seems to be beyond a doubt—the wide world's open to you."

Rab was blowing Dirk's hot enthusiasm over the Lutine into a white heat. He sat glamouring the lad with a talk of millions of guilders lying in the frigate for his lifting. "Money's the key of the world," said he.

Suddenly the elder Dunlop leapt to his feet. "At your tricks, Rab Cuick!" he shouted. "I know them. I know them." Dirk looked up at him in wonder. "Go your own way!"—he turned his back on his nephew, and flung out of the room.

Rab made a little motion with his hand, as if deprecating the display of temper.

"Oh! He'll come all right," said Dirk. He laughed. "He's deep! Most likely he's away seeking news about the find. And it's there. As you say yourself, it's there." He checked his excitement. "But you are left alone," he said politely. "Through me," he added, with a happy smile. "Let me have the honour of entertaining you. Drink coffee with me? After that I'll find him for you." He motioned towards the door. "You'll drink coffee with my mother?"

"Willingly that!" cried Rab, leaping to his feet. There was a light in his eye, and he went down the street at Dirk's side chirrupping.

The Widow Dunlop lived in a tall house on the Heerengracht, to which her son and Rab were admitted upon a long and lofty hall. Along the cool vista of marble and whitewash the eye was led into a garden surrounded by high walls. Madam was at home, the maid had said, and young Dirk led the way to her parlour. It was a little room, *en suite* with the dining-room, and here they found the Widow seated at a table, with a sleek black terrier asleep against her skirt. She was somewhat beyond middle height, handsome and fair still, though in advanced middle age. The face was proud and composed. There was a pale glow on the cold features in welcoming Dirk; but at sight of the visitor beyond the spark of affection was blown out, and Rab on his part looked into the face she turned upon him with eyes that scarcely hid their excitement.

The maid who had followed them in opened the *porte brisée,* and announced that coffee was ready.

"You are just in time," his mother said. "And your friend!"

"Mr. Cook," Dirk said. "A gentleman whom I met to-day, . . . he is interested in the Lutine. Ah! mother, I've great news for you! And I brought Mr. Cook to drink coffee with us, for I thought you would like to meet him. He is from Scotland."

She spoke a word of welcome to Rab, and led the way into the dining-room. They sat down at a little round table, she with her back to the windows, Dirk and Rab facing her in the circle. The maid had not remained to wait on them. The Widow

poured out the coffee, her white lace gauntlets flashing delicately over the silver and Delft, as she busied herself with the nice preparations. Dirk meantime was running on in Dutch about the discovery of treasure at the Izergat. At a word from his mother he stopped. "Pardon me," he said to Rab in English.

"Is it not a mad enterprise?" she said, addressing Rab directly for the first time.

"Very likely it is, mem," he answered. "But a daft purpose ballasts venturesome impulses."

His little complacent smile hovered between Dirk and his mother. She took his meaning, and swept the confidence aside. "How did he like their country," she asked him, hastily.

"Holland?" said he. "'Deed, mem, it's not like ours."

"It's queer, and beautiful, and folks no doubt get attached to it," he continued. "I daursay a body can be happy here—spite o' the damp," he added with a laugh. "But I never knew the beauty of my own country till I left it. Give me the Lomond slopes and the rolling fields clean to the edges, and the den—the den, and the burn linking between its green banks, keeping the denhead houses merry a' night and day with its sang. . . . I couldn't understand any one changing it for any other in the world."

"I have lived so long out of it," said the Widow, in a tone of quiet defiance, "so long here, that my husband's country has become my own."

"And yet, mem," said Rab, "I can detect a known sound in your voice. . . . You ken Fife?"

Her eyes dropped a moment, but the next she rallied them. "Who has not heard of it?" said she, briskly. "Come you from Fife?"

"Mr. Cook has had a mishap—we owe his visit to an accident," Dirk interposed. "You went fishing, did you say?"

"Down by the May," says Rab, his eyes still hovering over the Widow.

"Went out fishing, he and a companion, and their boat was swamped, and—and a Maassluis smack rescued them and brought them on here."

"Strange, madam," said Rab, "that it should have brought me straight, as it were, to your door. But the world's small!"

"It's not a place to hide in," he said with a little laugh. I can imagine that laugh.

"It's like the Lutine," he went on.

"Ay!" said Dirk, catching at a part of his meaning. "Is it not strange that that wreck should be hidden by the sands for years, and discovered by an accident now?"

The Widow quivered at her son's words as at a cruel blow, but she did not flinch. She played the hostess with a steady voice. The meal finished, she rose and led the way into her room. Rab stopped before an ebony bureau, a fine old French piece with marquetry of tortoise-shell. He examined it with a delighted appreciative eye, running a thumb along the inlay. "Braw work!" he said, and looked round him. The room was lofty, and its rich harmonious scheme, light and glowing and the fine pieces of furniture ordered with so much repose, surprised him into a genuine pleasure.

"Perhaps Mr. Cook will have a *borrel,*" said Dirk, going into the dining-room. He took a bottle and glasses from a cupboard in the wall, and presently he returned with them. The Widow and Rab were looking at a picture—a street scene, a Van der Heyden, or so it was claimed. Rab's eye fell on the bottle, and he laughed lowly to himself.

"There!" said Dirk. "Perhaps you will help Mr. Cook till I come back."

She crossed to him. "Dirk, you're not leaving us?" she said low, in alarm.

"Why, yes. A moment only—an appointment close by—about the Lutine." He looked at Rab, signalling with his eyes that he would find Dunlop. He took her in his arms and kissed her. "You will entertain Mr. Cook against my return. He will be interested in these things." He waved a hand towards the walls. "Besides, it will be pleasant for you to have a talk about your old country."

She bent a cold white face to Rab. "But I am afraid," she said, "that Mr. Cook must entertain me. I have forgotten it all."

"I think that maybe I can bring some things to mind," he said, and blanched her face again.

"You must try." And she kissed Dirk an *au revoir.*

A maid was busy clearing away the things in the other room. Dirk had left the sliding-doors ajar.

"You have beautiful things here," said Rab, still moving round the room.

"My husband was a collector of old beautiful things," she answered.

"Old—beautiful things," murmured Rab.

The Widow caught the words. Her hand went to her heart, and a spasm of pain and fright and fierce anger shot over her face. But Rab was bent over a fire-screen. The sewed-work panel represented De Ruyter as a boy standing at the wheel, and was surmounted by a model of an old Dutch ship of the line in gilt bronze. Rab was looking at the model appreciatively. As he rose from examining it his eye fell upon the bottle upon the table. She saw, and invited him to help himself.

"I've seen the neighbour to this," he said, pausing in the act of pouring himself out some of the spirits.

"Ah! You know him, then?"

"Who?"

The blood ran into her face in chagrin, but she answered him.

"My brother-in-law. He owns the other."

"Why, yes," he said, looking into her eyes. "Is not he the venturesome impulse that the Lutine maun ballast?"

Again she swept aside the invited confidence.

"Do you make a long stay among us?" she asked him, leading the way to a seat near the window.

"I sail for home to-morrow," he answered her, still standing. "I've found all I was looking for here—more. And now—

> 'Hame, hame, hame, hame, fain wad I be;
> O hame, hame, hame, to my ain countrie.'"

He was half humming, half speaking the song.

"Ah!" She interrupted him. "And your home?"

"A little port—I daresay you have heard of it—

St. Brise. What part do you come from, may I ask?"

"From farther north," she answered, "farther north."

"I come from farther north myself," Rab said, "though my home is in St. Brise now. From nearer the heart of the county—a place they call the Bowes."

"You know the Bowes, maybe?" he asked, answering a sharp "Ah!" he had surprised from the woman.

"Long ago," she said, "long ago. In holiday times."

"And your friends?" persisted Rab.

"All dead."

"All dead," said Rab, meditatively. "Maybe," he continued gently, seating himself near her, "maybe you kent the MacNabs?"

"The MacNabs? Yes, I knew them—slightly."

"The MacNabs, in the Den House," he said, looking out of the window.

"Did you know them?"

"Me? No," he said. "Yet one I can mind—a daughter, Mirrin,—she has married to Clephane, do you know? A silent woman. But I have heard tell of others. There was a son, Hector MacNab. There was a story about him. I've heard it from Robert Tullis when he was auld and dottered: he was gabby to me, though quiet to most folk. A queer story. It was a queer story, and I am interested in it somewhat for my wife's sake."

"Ah! You are married," said the woman. "Have you children?"

"Four so far," says Rab, still looking out of the window, as if finding something to interest him there. "Three sons and a daughter. There is one of my sons not christened yet—I maun get home for the christening. I married a Bowes lass. It may be you have heard of her—Charlotte Seton."

He had turned to look at her again.

"Charlotte Seton. Seton was her foster parent's name, Charlotte the name they gave her. After the auld leddy in the Den, I believe. She was a foundling."

If there was a question in her eye, she failed to speak it. "What are you, Mr. Cook?" she asked instead.

"What am I?" says Rab, getting to his feet, and standing by the window facing her. "I'faith, that's a difficult question, men. There are some who say that I'm a tailor who does a bit of smuggling; others, that I'm a smuggler who does a bit of tailoring; and all of them, I believe, honour me with the title of a Rascal. For myself, I should call me a tailor wi' an inquisitive mind."

"Oh, yes," he went on, as if answering some word of hers. "I admit it is hard upon my family. The inquisitive mind is not held in much account in our countryside, and a tailor is held in still less. But we manage, we manage. Charlotte's a woman of a high spirit, which may or may not be accounted for by her ancestry; and I am a man to whom nothing in this world fails of interest."

He had turned away from her again as he spoke, and was looking out of the window. Through the

lines bordering the canal he could see Dirk on the opposite side making for the bridge.

"Here comes the scholar," he said, "who can tell us what ancient poet it was who forestalled me in that saying—for you, I take it, born and bred in Scotland, were not nurtured on the classics any more than myself. Yet in my small reading of them I've found a world o' consolation for a troubled and by-ordinar' life—a world o' self-respecting consolation. In Fife they haud by the Bible for comfort. Lord ha' mercy, some o' them find a broken and a contrite heart easy over there. . . . . Give me the man—or the woman for that matter—who holds his head up to his own conduct. A tender mouth is for such as were meant to be driven. I take it that as God wouldn't have troubled to create folks just that they might conform to the standards of a wheen of the luckiest among them, so He'll have the highest respect, howsoe'er He maun whup them, for those who take the bit between their teeth and run away. . . . Believe me, mem, *I* have the highest respect for them."

He chuckled at the conjunction; but for the moment she was absorbed in her own thoughts.

"It is not easy to run away from God," she said lowly.

Rab laughed.

"We feel that most when we realise how difficult it is to slip away from our neighbours," he said, holding her with his meaning eye.

"And they have less mercy," she burst out.

"Ho! That's just as it may be," he answered, getting on his feet again. "I have heard o' folk

laying stress upon the goodness of God, and His power of opening up a future as He made a past. I don't doubt it. But in the more important work of letting the past be forgotten—in that, I'm thinking, the neighbours have a considerable say. Yet I would beg you to believe that I'm a merciful man. Particularly to them that I have at my mercy," he added with a laugh.

She was white under his cruel words, but her courage did not forsake her. Her son had come back, and was claiming Rab. "If you have finished your talk," he said.

"We have wandered far from Fife," his mother told him, rallying a laugh.

"'Deed, madam, on the contrar," said Rab, "I think I've brought you wonderfully back to it."

"A wonderful woman!" cried Rab, as he and Dirk set forth from the house.

"Ha!" said the lad in delight.

"I forgot to inquire of her, in our crack, her maiden name."

"She was a Miss Christian Tullis."

"Thank you."

Rab set off down the street by Dirk's side with that assured and vaunting step which folks observed when he returned to St. Brise.

CHAPTER XIII.

COCKED-HAT NICHOLSON'S BOAT.

THE wind had risen to half a gale and ranged throatily round the coast. The afternoon was falling stone-grey. The woodsawyers left the yard, still bickering, Tam pursuing Robin in futile little rushes to which the impish lad invited him. Rab and Dirk Dunlop watched their departure from the window, and then made to go down to the workshop. With my head in a swirl I descended the ladder on my side of the loft, and dived into the dark tunnel by which I had crept from the gate. Just within the mouth of it stood the younger Charlotte.

Even in that pitch dark (to me, coming from the glimmer of light) I knew her; and I was filled with a sudden sense of loss because she had not stood by my side in the loft, and heard all that I had heard.

"Oh! why do you only come here now?" I said.

"Why do you come here at all, David Shirra?" she answered.

"Hush!" I cried, recollecting where we were, and put out my hand to stop her; but now, in the deep shadow, the feeling which I had when I saw her going up Dishington's an hour earlier, new and disconcertingly piercing, held me back from touching her.

"Charlotte," I said—I spoke in a whisper—"Charlotte, do you know—do you know——"

When I sought to give it form in words, my discovery seemed only vapour.

"You heard what they said—you have been listening," she cried. She spoke in lower tones, and, my sight now accustomed to the gloom, I could see the glow in her eyes and cheeks.

"Do you know them, then?" I asked wonderingly. "Who are they? What does it mean?"

"Sneak!" she cried in girlish petulance.

"I am no sneak, Charlotte Cook," I said angrily. And yet, somehow, to suffer that taunt from her seemed only in accord with that new and searching emotion which the presence and very sight of her filled me with. I found myself feeling lifted within myself into a new authority, facing with more pride of equality the whole world—save Charlotte; and even to her I spoke more like a man.

"I came here," I said, "to seek you. My father has come for me—to be a lawyer in Uncle Michael's office at Town of Tarvit, . . . and I wanted to say good-bye."

Charlotte spoke no word.

"Let us go back to the gate: if you know a shorter road than the way through the sheds I crawled here by, show it me. Then I'll tell you—I'll tell you all I can."

"Through the sheds is the only way," she answered, and turned and went on in front of me; but she led me by an easy road through all this lumber and *débris*.

She brought me to the gateway, just hanging back within the shelter of the shed beside it.

"Here is the door: I'll let you out." She ordered me forth, with a wave of her arm, as if in her action she would disdain the note of inquiry in her speech.

"Do you believe me, Charlotte?" I said. "I wouldn't have been here, save to say 'good-bye' to you. I followed you up Dishington's Wynd, and when I came in you were gone, and I went through the shed to look for you. It's true!"

On her cheek next the light I could see the blood rippling up. Outside the yard, in the wynd, there was a tramp of feet that ceased suddenly on a command in a voice I recognised. Colonel David Cook was halting his men near the gate.

"It's Dave; you must go out," Charlotte cried. But I held her arm—I held both her arms. She threw me off hotly, and then with a sudden frank impulse held out her hand to me.

"I believe you," she said.

The next thing I knew was that we were in the open doorway, and that Colonel Dave was coming to us with his claymore drawn. With another sudden impulse Charlotte stepped in front of me.

"You cannot bring your men in here," she said with a grave face, but defiance and a twinkle in her eye for Dave.

How these two understood each other!

"I would march them into the sanctuary," he answered, "if duty called me. I flogged Harry Turbayne half an hour ago on parade for deserting, and *this* man will hang for it."

His face was as grave as hers, but he met her hidden laugh with another. It is strange: there was a bit of Rab in every one of that family.

"Stand back, woman!" he cried. "Sergeant, there is your man!"

Ere I knew what was happening, I was in the grasp of a lanky ragamuffin, one Archy Coyle, who lived in the Torrie road.

"To the harbour: March!" cries Dave, and the company moved off with me as a prisoner.

It was then that I suddenly remembered my errand to Mr. Stein in the Excise.

"Dave!" I shouted, "you maun let me go. I have a message that maun be delivered."

I struggled with Sergeant Coyle.

"Let me get my letter," I said to him, so imperatively that he loosed his hold on my arm. I searched everywhere in my pockets for the letter. It was gone.

"Dave!" I called again. "Dave!"

"Halt!" commanded the colonel. I saw Provost Turbayne, a rubicund, round, pompous man, come bustling up the wynd, and Dave going out to meet him.

At my second shout he turned, and seeing the commotion in the ranks, where I was struggling to break through them, he ran back.

"What does the fellow want?" he cries: and I,

"Dave!"

"Silence!" he roared.

"I tell you, Dave Cook," I said, "this is no joke. This is no joke . . . I'm telling you. I'm away from the school now, and am one of your sodgers no

longer. I have a message to deliver, and you'll better not hinder me."

"Sergeant Coyle," cries Dave, turning on his heel. "I make you responsible for your prisoner with your head."

Provost Turbayne had followed him, boiling with anger.

"You young sc-sc-scoundrel!" he spluttered; "what have you da-do-done with our Herry?"

"Your Herry?" answered Dave, calmly looking him up and down. "I haven't seen your Herry since parade."

Charlotte had crept up to within a step or two of them, her face was beaming with glee. In my despair, a sudden thought struck me.

"Charlotte!" I called to her. "Charlotte!"

She waited a moment to hear the bickering between the Provost and the colonel, and reluctantly came to me; and because she was the colonel's sister, the stupid Coyle imagined that he might not refuse her speech with me.

"Charlotte! I've lost a letter. . . . Dropped it, . . . you know, . . . up in the loft . . . yonder . . ."

"Hush," she said.

"It's important. It must be delivered. . . . It *must*," I cried.

"Oh! I'll find it. I'll deliver it," she said, to quieten me, and ran back to laugh at the Provost.

He went off blustering down the wynd, turning at every third step to shake a fist at us, and threaten the power of a chief magistrate. Dave was back in front

of his men, and Coyle, seizing me by the nape of the neck, urged me forward with his knee.

"You'll remember," I cried to Charlotte over my back, which was involuntarily bent towards her.

"Huts! Yes, I'll remember," she answered, scarce looking at me; and she watched us down the wynd with a broad laugh.

Dave marched us along the hill to avoid the Saturday traffic of the High Street. We crossed it at the harbour. At the sight of the farmers' carts bumping homewards, the thought of my father fuming at Aunt Sarah's over my delay assailed me. I made an attempt to break away, but Coyle held me fast, and his knee, a bony knee, worked like a piston. Through the tap-room window of the "Sir Andrew Wood," as we passed, I caught a glimpse of Robin and Tam. Robin was paying his lawing for his afternoon's sport. A natural, disengaging himself from the loafers at the inn door, followed in our wake, playing us a step on an imaginary fife.

We were out upon the pier now, fair in the face of the wind which drenched us with the drift of the waves breaking against the sea-wall. Cocked-hat Nicholson's boat was bumping about at the foot of the stairs, and Dave, running down to it, returned with a coil of rope. He marched us up below one of the harbour lamps, fixed by an iron stanchion to the mason-work, and ordered Coyle to fall back. Coyle released me with a parting benediction.

"Three minutes to say your prayers!" cries Dave, with a little signal to his men to turn their faces away from me at my devotions,—a delicate atten-

tion. It maddened me. Sore, still rubbing the sore, I turned on him fiercely.

"Enough of this nonsense, Dave Cook," I cried. I sought to impress him with my exalted condition. No longer one of Foster's . . . a man . . . entered at the Law. I threatened him with my father's wrath, Michael Trail's, Provost Turbayne's. He cut in upon my ridiculous rigmarole.

"Up with him! The renegade maun die unshriven."

He climbed the stanchion, and took two half hitches with the rope round the projecting arms. Dropping to the ground on the rope, in make-believe to test its strength, he made a running noose, drawing the bight briskly through his palms to reduce the friction. There was a half-inch plank belonging to the inn which Dave had impressed on the way down. This was laid along the narrow bevelled ledge of the masonry, and I was lifted on to it, fighting desperately. The noose, now round my neck, caught in the lapel of my coat.

"Botchers!" cried Dave. "Wha ever heard of a man being hanged with his collar on!"

Coyle, sprawling on the top of the wall now, wrenched off my collar, and the noose, with a little slip, tightened on my gullet.

"Gie'm a long drop, Archie!" cried the natural, rubbing his hands in glee.

A sudden horrible fear seized me, and I clutched wildly at the rope. At the same moment Dave gave the word to stand clear before striking away the plank. It was the last sound I remember. In my struggle my iron-tipped heels slipped off the

weather-beaten ledge, and there I was hanging, being slowly strangled into unconsciousness.

Aunt Charlotte was at her high overlooking window, with Rab's spy-glass pointed out to sea. From the street below rolled up the roar of the busy, bustling town; the homely, jocund, scrambling world of St. Brise, to which her life was bound by tyrannous and beneficient fetters of love and necessity, where she knew all and was known of all, where Rab and she had a place (though discredited, a place), possessing which no heart is ever a pariah, the nest for which her children, however far they might fare, would never lose the homing desire. . . . There was Robin down at the harbour beside Tam Cornfoot, with the half swing, half stoop of the shoulders, a sailor to be, destined it seemed certain to navigate the world,—and the port of St. Brise would always be for Robin the end of his voyage. . . . Aunt Charlotte stood at her window, looking over it all, ranging the Firth mouth with her glass. Always looking for her ship to come home, "a ship of a flee-away, phantom kind," her husband said; but looking, as he, the rascal, knew, for his ship as well, riding deep in the waist, like that one she had seen this morning on the horizon now blotted out by the sea-mist driven in by the wind. . . .

She caught sight of Dave marching his men down the pier, and followed him with an affectionate, laughing eye. She could enter into the spirit of his sport. In her blood still was the happy lift that twenty years before had carried her truant steps to the shore at the sight of an outward-bound barque. Had it not been for that rascally pirate always hovering near, might

not her own ship have come home to her in St. Brise, laden with her own restlessness transmuted to a rich content! Perhaps: I cannot say. The best to happen to us cannot be better than that we hope for; and I will not say she would have wished it so. She was a woman of unquenchable spirit and interest in life; it was at this point that Rab's nature and hers touched. She was watching Dave now with an undivided heart, laughingly, in broad and sympathetic enjoyment of his make-believe. Indeed, his colonel was a diverting *rôle* that might have tickled a less sensitive humour than hers, and my renegade matched nature in its desperate earnestness. It was desperate earnestness with me, at any rate, when my heels slipped off the ledge, and the rope tightened on my throat. So she realised. Only the natural remained watching me: he was huddled against the wall, collapsed in savage excitement. Dave and the others had fled in a sudden panic of fright. She rapped on the window-pane, as if to arrest them; then, running into the kitchen, picked up a carving knife, which she hid in a fold of her bodice as she rushed downstairs and across the street.

A man on a horse coming out of the stables of the "Sir Andrew Wood" at a swinging trot almost rode her down as she turned into the harbour, and she was down the pier out of hearing of his oath before he could fling it at her. People turned to look at the flying woman; and a cry which got up, that some one was in the basin, emptied the street of all who could run to the harbour-head, where some silly man stood rooted, waving a frantic hand towards me, and shouting that the idiot was hanging a laddie. When

Aunt Charlotte reached me, a lamplighter on his ladder was fumbling helplessly with the rope at my neck, and she cut me down.

When I came to myself I was lying in young Charlotte's bed. It stood in a little room giving off the kitchen, and taking its only light from it by a pane of glass high up in the partition wall; but the door was open, discovering in the mellow mixed light of the fire and the sinking day the well-known hearth, which soothed my disordered senses with its familiarity and warmth. Aunt Charlotte was at my bedside, and with her the doctor; but him I did not recognise, though conscious before dropping off again of a sweet, pungent odour from his presence that seemed to chime with the ruddy-grey warmth of the kitchen.

It appears he was only awaiting this short spell of consciousness to declare me free from immediate danger. It was sleep, not unconsciousness, that I had fallen into now. So he explained. There was probably nothing more than shock the matter with me, he said; shock and the congestion of the blood-vessels. He would send a liniment for the bruised neck. These young vagabonds! Well, Mr. Shirra's son evidently wasn't to die on the gallows! Ha! ha! Keep him quiet, though: he had been drenched, and there might be a touch of fever. These imps of mischief! And her son the ringleader! Eh? Well, like . . . He tripped awkwardly upon the likeness in mischief of father and son, and saved himself with the tag that boys will be boys. Aunt Charlotte, relieved by his favourable verdict, fell back on the ludicrous side of the accident, which she

pictured with gusto, and, in tears herself, sped him laughing down the stairs.

She was still shaken between tears and laughter when there came a loud knocking at the door. She composed herself to open it, thinking this must be Aunt Sarah, to whom a messenger had been sent flying; but, instead, it was young Charlotte who pushed in, breathless.

She would have passed into the kitchen, but her mother turned her into the front room, on the sea. The girl was breathing hard, waiting painfully for her voice. She had heard of the accident, her mother supposed, and sought to reassure her. "There is nothing to fear," she said. "He is safe." The girl's eyes asked, who? in amazement. "David Shirra. He is sleeping in the kitchen there, on your own bed. Sleeping." She pictured the scene again for the girl, beginning at the end with the doctor's assurance and running back over the alarming steps, with a ludicrous touch for each. The girl listened, unheeding, until her voice came to her, and then she broke in with her own story. "She had met David Shirra in the woodyard. Dave had caught him there and marched him off. . . . And there was a letter. . . . David Shirra was marched off before he could find it. . . . She had promised him to look for it and deliver it. She found it. She delivered it. She had promised. . . . It was to Mr. Stein, in the Excise. She had promised, and she delivered it."

Aunt Charlotte went white to the lips, but she kept her voice.

"Well?" she asked. "Well?"

"Well," the girl repeated, and was silent. She did

not know how to tell what she feared, what she knew. She fingered her belt for a minute, silent, choosing her words for the telling of her story. She was face to face with the knowledge, the shadow of which was the shadow on her grey eyes. She and her mother were face to face with it, and she sought some way of escape for them, so that they need not meet, mind to mind, in the face of it. So she was silent, choosing her words; and her mother waited, a sickening fear clutching at her heart. A letter to Mr. Shirra: that was relevant enough. There was danger in that, a danger to be warded off. What was that floating in her mind? Let her think! Gold buttons . . . yes . . . on that man on the horse as she flashed past him over at the inn. Hey! In that case the Coast-guard were as good as warned. . . . If only she knew more of what the girl had to tell. . . . Why did not the girl speak?

Behind this danger rose the horrible fear. Did the girl understand the danger? Had they—not Robin only: he was a man, deep in his father's confidence—but the others, her children, Charlotte even—had they too learned the furtive secret of Rab's waist-deep ship? That stabbed her pride; and then, overmastering the pain of that wound, there sprang up in her a fierce jealousy for Rab in the hearts of her children, who could not have known him, not loving him, as she did.

She must know the truth.

"What said Mr. Stein?" she asked, so commandingly that Charlotte ran on with her story afresh.

"He came running after me with the letter open in his hand. He asked me how I came by it. I told

him Dave Shirra gave it me to deliver. He inquired of me about Mr. Shirra—Mr. Shirra is down in the town to-day. David told me that."

"Yes."

"I saw father."

"Where?"

"In the woodyard. They were still there."

"They?"

"Father and another man—a stranger."

"Yes, yes."

"Father's away to Torrie. I was to tell you. Particularly. He's off to Torrie. And the stranger—he is downstairs, in the yard, waiting. It's near dark there. I brought him along the hill, and in by the back gate. Father told me to, and to tell you. And we are to find Robin, and this man and he—he knows what must be done.... They——"

She was stopped by a sound of feet and voices on the stair.

"Miss Trail . . . and Mr. Shirra, no doubt," said Aunt Charlotte.

"Well?" she cried impatiently, as there was a loud rapping on the house door. "Well?"

"That's all. Oh! mother."

With averted eyes, but with a world of affection and sympathy in her voice and action, the girl threw herself into her mother's arms. For a moment Aunt Charlotte swayed in response. So we think; for now Charlotte and I can bear to search her mother's heart in memory, with reverence, for its great passion. The next moment that passion reasserted itself; burning up the more fiercely because of the fuel the girl was throwing upon it. They pitied her—her

ldren! Not only knew what she knew and feared, : knew she knew and feared it, and were in a con-racy of silence and pity, to shield her, seeking to :lter her behind the ill, and the ill-repute, of Rab, :ir father, her husband, the man she loved! Just :ause she was a woman of such divining sympa-y, so swift to imagine and attach her children's ood and subtle impulses, now she was jealous for ab in their hearts. . . . There was the knocking :peated on the front door. Miss Trail stood on the ther side of it—that censorious woman! Yet she t least condemned Rab and her together. What ras intolerable to her now was acquittal gained at iis expense. Her neighbours acquitted her because of him. Her children did. It was unjust. If she had a doubt that day in the bailie's court twenty years ago, had she not banished it deliberately? And throughout these years, when doubt had become a certainty, was it not open-eyed that she had kept her place at his side, lived with him, at bed and board, become the mother of his children, shared his confi-dence—yes, she would persuade herself of that, shared his innermost heart. And she would do it all over again. In the flaming of her great love she saw lit up the divided duty of these years, and was justified in the choice she had made. If ever she had looked back on the road she had come with regret, if ever she had dreamed of her ship coming home with content, she thought of it now only as a reproach to her. She would no longer shelter behind Rab's ill-doing; she would discover her share in it. There was pride as well as love in that, perhaps. Her pride no longer fought her love, but joined with

it to drive her on under an overmastering purpose. Following the agitation which my hanging escapade and the news of Mr. Stein's letter had caused her, this revelation of her children's pity overbalanced her emotions. Rab was in danger: her place was at his side. This kept beating in her head—a kind of noble madness. Before all the town, she would take her place at his side.

Suddenly tranquil and radiant in her great resolve of abnegation, she kissed the head bent on her shoulder, and disentangled herself from the girl's embrace.

"Now, let these folk in. Take them in beside David," she cried. "I know your father's plan: I'll see to it."

At the words, the girl looked up astonished out of her distress. There was something in them, encountering which her sensitive nature was thrown back, stunned; something inexplicable, something at the same time strong and true. The truth in her mother's words was like a naked flame.

The only thought in Aunt Charlotte's mind now was that the time was flying in which she must convert her purpose into action.

"Go. Go quickly," she cried, striking her hands together in her impatience; and at this note in her voice compelling obedience, the girl opened the door, while her mother withdrew into the dark of the passage. Aunt Sarah was in a shrill agitation, all tears and temper. My father, in stolid gloom and anxiety, listened to her outcries without a word. They followed young Charlotte into the kitchen, and her

mother, passing swiftly through the lobby, ran down the stairs.

What happened next is surmise only. Charlotte and I have woven a story out of the strands of our later knowledge. Dirk Dunlop would be hanging back in the shadow of the garden-wall, as the girl had left him. There Aunt Charlotte found him. Fate was making sport of these two, bringing them together as strangers now. Neither could guess the other's identity. To each, the other was only an element in a danger from which escape was to be sought. Unless by some instinct at the supreme moment they discovered it, they could not know the kindred blood that ran in their veins. Rab, I suppose, has become an obcession for me: at any rate, I can think of this fate only as some superhuman Rab, who would plan their meeting so, and exult in the mockery of their unconsciousness.

Aunt Charlotte must have brought Dirk out by the garden-gate and along the hill. Some one, it appears, saw them cross the High Street at the narrow dark point beyond the harbour. Robin was one of a group of lads and lasses daffing at the sheltered gable of the "Sir Andrew Wood." She knew where to find him: her passionate steps led her true; and she signalled him forth. A minute or two later half-a-dozen sailor men, conscious of a movement in the basin, by some animal and elemental instinct, like animals when a strange foot nears their lairs, emerged silent from doorways round the harbour, and watched the two men and the woman sail out in Cocked-hat Nicholson's boat.

Mr. Foster was walking home along by Torrie Town. He, too, had his Saturday, when, like us shore-rovers, detaching himself from the week's round, he lived in a cloud-world of his own imagining. There he breathed a finer intellectual air, and laid up stores of moral energy for the driving of his imperfect mill of men. When he dropped from it to earth again, he was still charged with a rarefied temper, and made little futile efforts to rise, like a bird with a wounded wing. His intimates in the town, not understanding the secret of his exaltation, nor perceiving how remote from them he was, saw only the added touch of the grandiose in his address, the greater high-steppingness of his speech, and smiled at what they called his "week-end manner."

He had reached the junction of the shore and the landward roads to St. Brise. The wind had fallen with the sun, but still drove angry spray-laden blasts along the coast. As he stood in unconscious debate whether to brave it or seek the sheltered highway, he was aware of a figure down among the rocks to the east of him. He recognised it as Rab Cuick, heedlessly, with a mind far above a tailor; yet some tension in the figure straining seawards caused it to turn with it and look. God! His mind came fluttering down lumpishly, like a sail when the sheet is slackened. That was a boat out there! He knew nothing about boats, but the distress of this one was clamant. It was a brown speck fighting helplessly against the heaving grey of sea and sky that threatened to engulf it. He cleared the spray from his eyes, and he made a kind of physical endeavour to clear the dreams out of his mind, to fix them on the

boat. Even as he looked again it was swallowed up. Instinctively he turned to the figure on the rocks beyond him to share with him the shock of that sight.

He saw Rab climbing over the rocks. To his amazement he saw him strike inland among the trees and disappear. He ran a step or two after him, crying his name aloud, the wind catching the sounds and scattering them. Then he stopped, in angry helplessness. He had come to earth with a crash, dashed against terrible physical realities. His helplessness was intolerable. A moment before his had been the faith that could remove mountains. Now, powerless, he was calling for any human companionship in the knowledge of disaster. He stopped with his hand still raised in consort with his voice after Rab. And then some sudden, swift, divining doubt filled him of the figure stealing away among the trees.

He turned into the landward road, and made all speed for St. Brise. News of an accident met him outside the town. The farmers driving out from market were scattering it from their gigs, like seed with both hands. At one place he heard it told that the whole Cook family had gone down in Cocked-hat Nicholson's boat. "Perished" was the word the speaker used, and he kept reiterating it: "all perr-isshed, all perr-isshed." Mr. Foster, seeing again that figure stealing among the trees, set him right about Rab's safety at any rate, and found himself the centre of a gaping crowd, like a common gossip who can say, "I'll tell you: I was there, and saw't happen." The little gentleman drew off in a nice disgust and hastened on his way with his mouth closed.

Within the narrow entrance to St. Brise, the clamour of the High Street assailed him: the crack of wheels on the causeway, and the complaining echo of it among the pendent house-fronts, the Saturday-night cries, the tramp-tramp on the pavement, the irregular rhythm and strident note of it all clanging with rise and fall through the closes. The involved cross-streams of traffickers made ceaseless flicker in the transverse glare of the windows, through which burghers in shirt-sleeves could be seen hopping about behind their counters, with the air of busy birds building their nests. Women, marketing in a penurious agitation, their arms full of brown-paper bags and parcels, bustled into one another in the doorways. The shop-boys with tucked-up aprons, loaded the barrows at the gutter, or skidded after the urchins who jinked one another round the wheels. Working-men, slack-kneed, with clean, shiny faces, gathered in groups in the street or daundered along it in week-end relaxation. Lads and lasses, passing in two's and three's, hung back upon arrested steps to fling a sally over their shoulders. At Robbie Sand's confection-shop the bell behind the door made its rasping "ping-ping" unceasingly, as the customers trooped in for hot pies for the evening meal. One woman, as Mr. Foster passed, gawsily sniffing the seasoned fragrance steaming from her basket, hung upon the step to exchange a last word on this "la*ment*able business." A loathing of this woman possessed him; a physical repulsion from these gaping nostrils. He stepped from the pavement on to the street, with his hand raised towards her, as if in deprecation.

The town was going on in its comfortable, customary Saturday-night way, notwithstanding that its voice ran all upon the boat swamped at Torrie.

Mr. Foster heard the news as he came through it —heard it in a hundred variants, indeed. The true story was tossed on a sea of rumour, like the boat he had seen swallowed up in the bay. But some elements of the story were constant in all mouths. Mrs. Cook and her boy Robin were drowned,—they and a stranger. All tongues wagged round the stranger: a sailor, of course, a foreign sailor, a smuggler. That was his ship beyond a doubt that had skirted the Firth mouth all day. But what was the woman doing in the boat? It was a smuggling business: Rab's record made it easy for them to determine that. But what was the woman doing in it? And had any one seen Rab, by the way? Where was that gentleman hiding? Mr. Foster heard, and kept his lips closed. The recollection of the gaping crowd that had gathered round him outside St. Brise, when it was known that he had witnessed the accident, kept his lips closed. His office brought him wonderfully in contact with this causeway world, and each morning he put his hand to the rough work of it which fell to his share, cunningly and conscientiously, but in a defensive, ironic temper which sent him home uncontaminated at the end of the day. He was not averse from the pleasures of life,—good wines, a good table, the company of his fellow-men, the elegancies and the pleasures of life; but he sought them in a few families of his own standing in the town. He sought them where a gentleman ought, as a matter of course. It did not occur to him to seek them else-

where. He did not find them in great measure anywhere in St. Brise, indeed; but that also he took as matter of course. Among the things that Mr. Foster taught us was that superior persons need not be prigs. If a man must go out in foul weather, better the dirty pavement than the dirtier caus'ey: Mr. Foster's social consciousness was no more fastidious, and no less assured, than that.

He kept his lips closed as he came through the town: he was Mr. Foster, not a caus'ey newsmonger. Yet he listened. It rather shamed him later to think how eagerly he had mixed with this Saturday-night crowd, allowing himself to be accosted by folks who did not know him, or presumed to know him only because he thrashed their laddies, and giving civil ear to them as they churned the matter with their tongues. Where was Rab Cuick? And what was the woman doing in the boat? Again and again, and always with a sense of angry doubt, he saw that figure stealing among the trees at Torrie. The vision seemed to hold at once the solution and the perplexity of that other question. A great moral discontent kept him out in the street searching for the answer.

He turned in at the harbour and walked down to the point of the pier where people were hanging about waiting for confirmation of tidings that lacked no certainty. The talk there ran on whether the bodies would be found. The sea pundits said No. The tide was flooding when the boat was swamped, and it ran strongly at that point. The natural fondled a hope which he displayed tearfully from group to group. He had been balked of my corpse earlier in the day. "Wassh—it—not—posshible—Mishter—

Forshter — that — some — o' — them — ss'ud—be fund?" he asked, sidling up to the Master. Mr. Foster edged away from him without answering, and hastened back to the harbour-head. Under one of the lamps there a horrible old man, with a grey-blue jersey, and a pudding-stone-like nose beside which one eye glowed unwinkingly, was haranguing an audience on the causes of the accident—"His version, the only true and authentik." He was very drunk.

"I was at'owre my doorstep when the whillie-wha sailed oot o' the harbour, and I saw her, . . . and in 'dition Capt'n Galbraith he said to me aince, an' Capt'n Galbraith was th'most skilfu' nauv'gator 'tween here and the Port o' Lunnon. . . . But anon!"

He pawed the air gravely. His hands showed blue in the lamplight—indigo-dyed. "Blue-Thoombs" was his by-name. He went on—

"Young Robin had the tiller; t'other chield the main-sheet. The deid wumman—puir lamb!—she was forrit. It was blawing a bit doon the Firth, an' the tide was flooding. Robin ran her doon the coast —ye think so, do ye?—to Torrie P'int belikes?—jist so. . . . And in the nesty, short following sea he had his own a-do's to keep her from getting broadside on, an' broachin' to? . . . To be sure. And aff Torrie P'int, being in a hurry to mak' the ship, Robin, he gybes. . . . Poof comes the wund! Whup! the sail is roond! Doon gangs her boom from the tap o' a wave!—and it's all away wi' them. . . . Ye think so? . . . Weel, that wasn't hit ava!"

He looked at them in a solemn derision, the single eye glowing solitary in the lee of that conglomerate nasal promontory.

"Come to me for the facks," said he again. "Neyther gybe nor wear—for why? Becas they bore down straicht on the ship from the harbour-mouth, and were running ashore when they were swamp-it at Torrie P'int—for why? Becas she wis full o' water—for why? Becas—no, she didn't ship it, if you'll allow me, Mr. Shairp-nose—but becas she was leaking—and—for—why? Becas that set-me-up fleegarie gewgaw o' a cocked-hat—she was a —— Audmiral, she was—cam ploomp! on the sandbank in reaching out o' the harbour, and sprung a bolt, jist as Capt'n Galbraith,..skilfu' nauv'gator, said to me sitting up in the 'Sir Awndra' there when he said, 'Blue,' says he . . ."

The Master, with a vision of himself on the Torrie Road, had a whimsical, sub-conscious thought that there, under the lamp, but for the grace of God, stood James Macdonald Foster, M.A.

The crowds in the street, as they passed and repassed Rab's house, stopped in front of it to gaze up at the windows behind which the drowned woman and her boy had lived; so that Mr. Foster, coming out from the harbour, had to slacken his pace and to work his way through the block. He caught sight of David Cook hanging back a little in the close-mouth, an incongruous figure, with his white and tense face surmounted still by the kepi in which he had played the colonel. With a wonderful restraint and dignity, tipped, indeed, with the exaggeration which touched all that family did, the boy was an-

swering curious and sympathetic inquiries, and keeping the more pressing from mounting to the house-door.

It was Dave who had come running upstairs two hours before with the terrible tidings. He had signalled Charlotte out from the kitchen, where she sat dumb under Aunt Sarah's callous, querulous tongue, revolving that inexplicable transformation in her mother; and in the dark in the front room on the sea, holding her in his arms as he had never held her before, he told her how it had bereaved them. Yet even in that unspeakable first embrace of brother and sister in the agony of their greatest loss, when under the fiery ordeal the bud of their young affections burst in passionate flower, their minds leapt together to an understanding of the new part that was required of them. They were quick-witted: they had come through the hards of childhood—the mental hards. They knew the town, and already in anticipation they knew how their mother's reputation would be shredded on its teeth. That had been their concern while she was living, the filial chivalry that caused them to make it so preventing them from acknowledging it to each other, to themselves even. Now that she was dead it was their trust. The girl was still dissolved in doubt, fearing and resisting that impulse of her mother which she could not understand, but Dave lifted her to assurance on strong arms. His saner, coarser sense, which appraised a bit smuggling at its true value, accepted his mother's action loyally, in faith unquestioning, and wrapped her round with the masculine tenderness that will keep a woman's name off common lips even in ad-

miration. So in their unspoken purpose Charlotte had gone back to the kitchen when Dave had cleared it of lamenting neighbours, and, having found Tam and sent him to the pier-head to await the latest tidings from the pilot-boats and other craft that made forlorn search in the Bay, he took his stand in the close-mouth, keeping guard on the honour of the house, as he felt in some fine, highly-coloured way.

Mr. Foster knew nothing of this; but in some mysterious way the subtle elements in this affair were impinging upon his fine and salted sensibility, as the fine and subtle elements all around us do constantly converse with single and spiritual minds. And so it was that a swift divining understanding of the true mettle in Dave Cook, playing his manful part in the close-mouth, assailed him. Here, he recognised by a sudden inspiration, was character at its higher levels. He went up to the boy and put his hand upon his shoulder. It shows how shaken he was.

"Admirable, sir," he said.

Dave was startled by commendation from that grandiloquent source, but the true emotion of the master lit his understanding. He bit his lip to keep his tears from showing.

"My sister—Charlotte—is upstairs, sir."

Mr. Foster felt a sudden uplifting at the boy's nobility. They were lifting each other into spiritual heights. He put a hand on Dave's shoulder again in recognition of the unspoken request, and went up the stairs.

The door was off the catch. Charlotte and Dave felt closer to each other with it so. When Mr. Foster pushed it open and entered, Aunt Sarah's voice

came to him from the kitchen in a high affrighted "Who's there?"

"Oh! Mr. Foster, I'm relieved," she cried when she saw him. "I knew it couldn't be the nurse—I've sent Mr. Shirra for a nurse, though where he's to get one Heaven only knows—and I was terrified it was them bringing up the bodies. . . . D'ye think they'll find them—and bring them up here? I couldn't bear the sight of them—dripping wet, the clothes washed off them maybe. . . ." She flung up her hands. "Couldn't they take them to the police-office, couldn't they? Or there's the model-lodging, just beside the harbour? . . ." She ran on upon this in her callous, shrill voice, not giving Mr. Foster a chance to speak. His gorge was rising.

"David's in here," she cried. She made a little run into my room and ran back again. "It was kind of you to come. These scoundrels of boys—that scoundrel of a boy, Dave Cook—nearly hanged him. . . . All wet and damp through wi' spray, . . . and now he's in a fever of course—delirious—and the doctor won't let us move him. And I must stay here unless his father find a nurse for him. Here! Here!" She flung round her hands in token of the disreputable walls within which she found herself.

" . . . What's the truth of this discreditable story?" she cried next, dropping into a calmer voice of malice. "For discreditable it is, without a doubt. Though I've heard no particulars. I always doubted that woman—al-ways! What was *she* doing in a boat? Eh? And where was Rab Cuick I would like to know? Where is he? Why is he not here—though if he come in, out I go. It's bad enough to be

here—but I'll do my duty by Grace's child. To the last. . . . But not with him here. . . ."

"He, the pimpernel, hides in ill weather," said Mr. Foster, suddenly striking out for himself the truth about Rab in his anger and disgust at this woman.

Some of the wrath and indignation in his words smote her and silenced her. My voice was raised deliriously. I was down on the shore again that first day with Charlotte when she told me of the call of the sea-witch. "Do you hear him wandering—nonsense, all about the sea and sailing. Nonsense that he learned here, in this house, from these folk," she cried shrilly, recollecting her grievances afresh. She ran in to me, fluttering over me, feeling my head and my pulse in her agitation. "Will you come and see him?" she cried out to him.

"Where is Charlotte Cook—the girl?" he answered her.

She stepped out into the kitchen, looking at him in sharp surprise. Her eyes went beyond him, and he turned at the fling of her head. Charlotte was in the doorway.

The girl came forward and shook hands with him, all composed. She had heard him ask for her, so she supposed he had come to see her. In her mind she associated his visit with that to be expected from the clergyman, who came to tell folks the worst, and condole and pray, and went home again to his own unherried household. Dave and she had told each other the worst. But she would listen to him—that was all in the part they had to play.

Mr. Foster, preternaturally sensitive, felt what was in her mind. He was filled with a fresh disgust

—this time for the clergyman's office. He wasn't an official breaker of bad news, or offerer-up of prayers. Yet he had accepted the office of consoler, and the girl was waiting for him to speak. And there was Miss Trail looking on and listening. He fumed at his false position.

Aunt Sarah was calling him again to come and listen to my nonsensical ravings. He put a hand on Charlotte's arm, and she followed Aunt Sarah with him.

"The sea's a witch, and if she wave her wand for you to come, you maun go, though you never rest by a fireside again."

"Hearken to him!" cried Aunt Sarah querulously.

"Robin Cook's bewitched; he's just waiting till Cocked-Hat Nicholson's boat's ready, and he'll be off, . . . and Aunt Charlotte and all of us; . . . we are going to sail for the Happy Islands."

The girl grew rigid under Mr. Foster's hand. He drew her into the kitchen. "She has reached them," he whispered to her, almost ashamedly.

The tenderness, the confusion, the confidence in her understanding and high level of feeling, filled the girl with a great and surprising emotion.

"Thank you," she said. She put her hand in his, and looked at him with a wonderful understanding out of her full eyes.

Aunt Sarah saw and heard. She stood silent in angry perplexity, vainly groping for the secret of their correspondence.

"Good-night," he said to her, shaking hands.

"Thank you." She repeated the girl's words mechanically.

At the door he stopped, hesitating. Then, wi conscious eye upon Aunt Sarah still—venial w ness, surely—he stepped back into the kitchen kissed Charlotte on her brow.

Aunt Sarah flung up her hands at the sight. therein Aunt Charlotte was vindicated.

PART III

Love in a Mist

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ESTATE OF CLEPHANE.

Years had passed.

For me they had been years of weeding out and quiet change. I had served an apprenticeship in Mr. Michael Trail's office, attended the law-classes in Edinburgh, and was back again in the Town of Tarvit with my uncle, become his right-hand man, indeed, and destined to succeed him in his business. My father and mother were dead. Mr. Foster's mill drove on. Aunt Sarah lived on in St. Brise still, like the unfruitful cherry-tree that clung to the sunny wall in her garden. Rab had carried off his family from St. Brise soon after Aunt Charlotte's death, and led them in a roving life. A short period of prosperity in the north of the country ended disastrously with an Excise trouble over some maltings. I heard of him later in the west country, and again in Berwickshire; and for a month or two at a time, at intervals, he occupied the house in the Back Bowes which his wife had inherited from the Setons. I saw him several times pass my windows in Town of Tarvit. Once in Edinburgh I ran into him turning

out of Thistle Street, but I had a companion with me, and we only exchanged a "Good-day" in passing. In all his wanderings his daughter, Charlotte, accompanied him, or kept a home to which he might return from his adventures, whatsoever they were. On one occasion at least, perhaps twice, they led him as far off as London.

I had not met Charlotte in all these years, but she was still a living memory, kept fresh by news of her I received at intervals from her brother Dave, who was a saddler in St. Brise now, cut off from his father, scarce on speaking terms with him even, and doing well. My old companion James, the great scholar, after blossoming into a minister of promise, had withered in body and mind under some mysterious blight, and was lingering in an asylum, industriously perusing the Hebrew Scriptures. Tam was in Australia, a ne'er-do-weel according to all accounts, but writing home as cheerfully as if he were still keeping rabbits up the St. Brise close. All was changed, but changed as the landscape changes, in the main remaining as it was, the only differences a tree fallen here, a dwelling erected there, insignificant and unnoticed save in a few hearts to which the old contours are sacred.

In all Fife there was no man possessed of half the influence of my uncle and master, Michael Trail. Rab Cuick had a by-name for him, "The Peerie," and my wit cannot discover a better description, for apart from the bodily shape of him, which it exactly fitted, he was, as Rab said, always humming. He was a man of a large and informal capacity. Most of the affairs in the countryside seemed to be gath-

ered up under his hand in that Town of Tarvit office, yet his way of guiding them was to run all over the shire after them—never off the railway that he himself had been foremost in promoting. It was familiarly known as "Michael Trail's Railway." He would travel twenty miles rather than write a letter; his correspondence lay in a litter on his table, for a great part unopened. To him a piece of business was like an abscess—not to be touched until ready for the lancet. Now that his cases were more numerous than even he could freely carry in his head, he established me in his infirmary (this was his joke) as a kind of confidential nurse, who should watch the more delicate of them, and report how they progressed.

One of these cases now fast approaching the crisis was the Clephane estate. The Clephanes of Clephane date from the first half of the eighteenth century, when Andrew Clephane, burgess of Newburgh in Fife, married Jane, seventh daughter of Lord Kinghorn, and retired with her into the country on his fortune. There, at Clephane they founded a line of Richard Clephanes, merry and undistinguished gentlemen for the most part, who even in the dissipation of their ancestor's wealth displayed no splendid qualities. The fifth Richard—he who suffered upset driving home from Mr. Adam's on the night of the legend—was the first to show originality of conduct, and to break with the family tradition by embarking on matrimony with love without a dowry, which he did, not once, but twice (showing how hopeless his case was); and each of his wives presented him with a son, to whom at his death he be-

queathed a half of his personality. These two half-brothers, between whom lay a difference in age of nearly twenty years, were bound by a tie of more than ordinary affection. The elder, Richard, shared with James his ancestral home at Clephane, for the upkeep of which they pooled a portion of their incomes. When at a mature age Richard married their neighbour, Miss Mirrin MacNab in the Den House, or she married him, although James thought his brother was old enough to have known better, the harmony between them was still unbroken. With her mature charms, Mrs. Clephane brought her husband the Den property, including the House upon it, and here at Nochty (as it came to be called) Mr. James Clephane was installed, in an occupation scarce less proprietary than that which hitherto he had enjoyed at Clephane.

Nevertheless, during the remainder of his sister-in-law's lifetime, Mr. James Clephane was very seldom in Fife. He was not a man to be sensitive about living on a property belonging to a woman whom, frankly, he disliked; and, indeed, he paid a full price for that privilege, for Mrs. Clephane, who ruled her husband and all within his gates, was, 'spite her ambition, a particularly keen woman of business. He was too densely downright also to fear (as many a more supple man would) that any show of this dislike into which he might be surprised would be attributed to chagrin at the loss of a property; in the reversion of which he had been ousted by her and by the two children who—contrary to all speculation, but she was a determined woman—appeared in Clephane before she gave up the reins

there. But James Clephane was an easy, affectionate, hot-tempered man, who dreaded above all things a break with his brother, and he thought it prudent to put himself beyond range of consultation on the ambitious schemes to which Richard was urged by his wife (the Mackerel Election was one of them), concerning which it would have been impossible for him to curb his tongue. Moreover, he was still young then; so he spent most of his time away from Fife, some of it in London, much of it in Edinburgh, seeing enough of the world to give him a key to its scandal which reached him when he had once again settled at Nochty. That was after Mrs. Clephane's death, when he was able to share fully with his brother's boy and girl the affection and confidence of their father.

Now one summer, shortly before Mrs. Clephane died, Rab Cuick had turned up at the Bowes, and engaged Mr. Richard Clephane with a story of there being coal on the MacNab property. Mrs. Clephane, when she heard of it, was extraordinarily interested, and went across herself to the Bowes to interview Rab; but she came back with a black face, and from that moment would hear no more of coal in the Den, nor could she bear Rab within her sight again, or the mention of him. But after her death the story was revived, and there was a time when Rab was up at Clephane daily, and daily you could have seen the Laird wandering along the Den born, while Rab whistled tunes in his ear about seams and outcrops. Very soon Rab was away again upon his adventures, but not before he had set Richard and James Clephane upon an undertaking from which it needed all

Michael Trail's skill to bring them safely off. The peaceful old shoemaking hamlet of the Bowes was become a grimy and squalid village of miners, and the Den property was in a medley of borings and pumping and ramshackle shafts—all swallowing up money which it gave Mr. Trail sleepless nights to provide. "Clephane's Folly" the undertaking came to be called, but in the end coal was found, as Rab had prophesied, and of a quality and quantity that promised a gold lining to the pockets of those who had sunk their money in search of it.

Scarce, however, had Mr. Trail brought the fortunes of the estate to this happy condition, and placed them in my hands, than fresh danger threatened. A project for bringing a railway through this fruitful property raised some old and delicate questions of boundaries and common rights, and once more Mr. Trail was operating himself, with a cool head, and a very fine edge on his temper. It was at this fresh crisis in his affairs that Richard Clephane, who had taken only a passive share in unravelling their complications, wound them in a fresh tangle by dying in his sleep up at Clephane.

It was James Clephane himself who brought the news to Town of Tarvit.

I was sitting with Mr. Trail in his room, fingering (as it happened) some accounts connected with the estate, which were sorely involved, and Mr. Trail was standing with his back to the fire, as was his way always if his temper was at the straining point, when James Clephane's foot sounded in the passage, and his head appeared round the door.

"You haven't heard?" he cried.

"Either come in or bide out, Mr. James," said Michael irritably, sifting his red handkerchief through his fingers and shifting from one foot to the other.

"So you haven't heard!" James said again. "You that kens everything first before other people,—and I tell you news about one o' your own clients,—one o' your own particular clients."

With that he stepped in, with a waggish look on his face, but very pale it seemed to me.

"Take these papers to your own room," Michael said to me, making a move to turn over the blue deeds so that the endorsements should not be opened to James's eyes.

He turned next to say "Guid-day."

"What's wrong, James?" he cried. "You're not yourself to-day."

At this I looked up from gathering my papers, and I saw all the waggery go out from James's eye like smoke.

"No. I'm not myself to-day," he answered. "Dick's dead," he said; "my brother Dick." And with that he sat down on Michael's chair, and bowed his head on the arm.

"Get out o' this with your papers," cried Michael to me in a bizz from the hearth-rug, and gathering up the accounts under my nose, before I had time to look away from Nochty sitting there crying quietly. "Take them away, take them away anywhere," he cried, piling them on my bent arm. And then in his pernickety way, "That's my chair, James," he said to Nochty; "sit down here." He put his hand under

James's arm, and helped him to the opposite chair, in a wonderfully humane manner.

It was some three-quarters of an hour before Nochty came out, and Michael saw him to his horse in the street—itself an unusual thing—and said a word or two there before they parted. Then Michael, putting his head into my room on his way back, said very testily, "Bring these papers into me now, Mr. Shirra." That was one of his little ways. I was his nephew, yet it was always as Mr. Shirra that he addressed me.

"There's more need of despatch than ever," he said, when I took them in, and began to handle them afresh. "What was the man doing, going dying now!"

Being in a wonder still at the sight of Nochty's tears,

"I couldn't have believed some folk were so soft-hearted," said I, with a nod towards the street up which our client had disappeared.

"Some folk are par*t*icularly soft-*headed,*" was all the answer he gave me.

After this Clephane affairs kept us all in a thrang. Under Richard Clephane's will Mr. Trail was a trustee on his estate, with his brother James and his friend the laird of Fallowfield. They appointed me factor, a difficult office; though James Clephane would laugh and say he was ready to neiver it with me any day for his guardianship of young Richard Clephane and his sister Jenny. "Did ever man have such a handful?" was his constant complaint, partly affectionate, partly irritated. They certainly led him a dance. Brother and sister lived on at Clephane

after their father's death, going their several ways, which were just as far apart as their common blood had it in it to carry them. Jenny was tall and straight, comely in her features, honest and queer and courageous—proper daughter of all that line of merry Clephanes, but with the gipsy, MacNab, strain in her somewhere for all that. As for Richard, he doubtless was an open book to any one who understood his mother, Mirrin MacNab; but I never met the man who could say that he understood Mirrin MacNab.

Young Richard was really a stranger among us. He had been sent to a school in England and afterwards to Cambridge—his mother's ambition again, —though I never could hear that he learned much there, save, indeed, his taste for music and painting and all the rest. Afterwards, when he came to settle with his father and Jenny in Clephane, we scarce knew him. We were familiar enough with his face, of course, with its swarthy complexion and close-trimmed, jet-black beard; he was a man you would turn to look at twice as he rode through Town of Tarvit. But that was just it. You would not have turned twice to look at a real young Fife laird. By-and-by he took to going about a great deal; but it was to Edinburgh, or among one or two country houses, superior places, no doubt, but of no account in the shire except for theatrical and musical parties that drove out from them to give performances in the coast towns. Richard Clephane, it seems, was their great musical star. He could score music as well as play it wonderfully on his violin; and he and another, a curate, acting chaplain at one of the big

houses east the coast, wrote a sacred cantata, "Felix," which the St. Brise Choral Society produced to raise funds for the soup-kitchen one severe winter. I heard it, I remember. The Lord Lieutenant was in the chair, and made a long speech on the nutritious properties of lentils—he called them "wentils;" and then came the cantata, a wearisome business I thought, though Blelach's musical critic summed up very learnedly in its favour. "Felix" at any rate was the means of raising sufficient money to fill all the empty stomachs in Fife for a generation with lentils; but it nearly wrecked the Choral Society, the basses, half-way through the rehearsals, clamouring for "Elijah" or "Israel in Egypt," in which, they declared, they could have a "good breenge."

Richard's playing might have had a repute as widespread through Fife as Mike Runciman's of old, and his Uncle James would not have cared greatly, though it would not have raised his nephew any higher in his estimation. But it was different when Rab Cuick was once more in residence at the Back Bowes, and between it and Clephane there was a constant traffic, Richard and the Rascal spending hours together speaking and playing music. James Clephane's wrath rose when that came to his ears. "He would give the lad a talking to!" and he sought him out there and then. "Less fiddling!" he told him, slapping fingers on palm to enforce his counsel; and then he discovered the enigma he had to play guardian to. He returned to Nochty with the fretful indignation of a man whose assurance of his authority is for the first time put to doubt. After

that I heard nothing but the rumbling of his anger because his nephew consorted with any idle folk, instead of acquainting himself with all that was going forward on Clephane estate. The truth was, as I found out, Richard Clephane knew very well what was doing there. Nobody could call him light-headed: light-headed is glib-tongued, and Richard was a silent and laconic man. Some would have it that he was light-hearted. I need not tell you what people thought he was. You can judge for yourself when my story is told.

All this time I had been kept running between Town of Tarvit and Clephane, in consultations with James; and also I was thrown much into the company of the other trustee, Ben Duncan of Fallowfield. The laird of Fallowfield was the fifth of a family of eleven sons. Their mother was the daughter of a retired St. Andrews professor, who (but not until he was hourly expecting dissolution) married her to her cousin, roaring Jock Duncan, the "Whaler." The very next voyage after his marriage Captain Duncan lost his ship in the ice, and he settled down on his wife's little property at Fallowfield, to rear laddies and the other pursuits of a gentleman, as he said. Of the eleven with which his efforts were blessed the fifth was christened Benjamin, in a premature belief that he would be the last. Afterwards, when five others had followed him, the "Whaler" jocularly called him "Young Midway," and the name stuck to him until a silly foible of his own struck out another, "Auld Trincomalee." One of his brothers was lost commanding a clipper off the coast of Borneo. Another was drowned in Auckland har-

bour, going off to his ship one night, very drunk, it was said. A brass tablet in Town of Tarvit kirk tells how a third fell in the Alma. Seven of them, including the wealthy merchant of Trincomalee, of whose wonderful bungalow Fallowfield was never done talking, were still living, set up in homes in every corner of the globe.

"I'm the only one of the eleven who never stirred beyond my own door," Ben used to say, "and I ken more about the world than all of them put together."

If blethering about it was knowledge, that was true.

"How could it be otherwise?" he said. "I keep a fireside for them here in the heart of Fife, should any of them fare badly or be homesick. They write to me as they used to write to their mother, the laddies. Sometimes the Monday's post will bring me as many as four letters that have travelled six thousand miles: that gives me my reading for the rest of the week. It's a liberal education, and used to be for the whole parish. Nowadays, to be sure, letters from the other side of the world are left at your door as if it were a load o' peat from no farther off than the Star Moss. Just like that! But when old Geordie Barnes was the Fallowfield post he kent the handwrite on the outside o' them as well as I did myself. He used to wait till I broke the seal, to see that the laddies and their folks were all well. Then he would go off on his rounds, dropping the news like a good going water-cart. Or if I was out and met him coming from the house, he could tell me what I was to expect waiting for me there. 'I've just left a letter from Bob,' he would say. 'I houp he's had nae mair

fracases with they blecks!' It was cheery, I tell you, to find all the bodies round you able to give you word o' your own folk without your having spread it."

Fallowfield House was crammed with maps and globes and books of travel, and the spoils of travel as well—skins, furs, precious stones, weapons, and I know not all what. It was seldom, too, that one or other of the seven families had not a representative living with their bachelor uncle at Fallowfield; frequently several members were gathered there: and to introduce a cousin from Australia to a cousin at the Cape, who had never seen each other before was Ben Duncan's highest delight. At the time of which I am telling, there was staying with him a niece Edith, a daughter of his brother Alick, the New South Wales squatter—"on the Darling Downs, the very acres, mark ye, on which John MacArthur raised the first crop of wool that ever came into the home market!" So Ben explained when he introduced me to his niece.

"I have to come to Fallowfield to learn about my own home," she said to me with a roguish laugh. "Uncle Ben ought to be published for the use of intending emigrants."

Edith Duncan was the briskest little girl I had ever met—not pretty, not ugly, just a swarthy cheery face round the laughingest brown eyes that ever pleased a man. If you were not very ardent on the subject of Colonial expansion, Ben Duncan got a little tiresome, I found; but when Edith was there, Fallowfield was the most entertaining house in the world.

Early in this autumn, in the thick of the mining

business that was keeping my nose so much to the grindstone, I had word from James Clephane that he wished me to come west to him for a day or two's audit of accounts; and on a sharp and sunny afternoon, having forwarded my bag by carrier, I set out from Town of Tarvit to walk to Nochty. On the hill above the Back Bowes I heard a noise in the hedgerow, and a man with the wind in his cheek came stepping into the road alongside of me. I knew him at once, with something like a flutter at my heart.

"Guid-day to you, Rab Cuick," I cried as offhandedly as I could.

He was the same man as ever,—little and limber and clean in the face; only the hair on his head was thinned as well as grey, and where not thin was cut close, showing the shape of the head and the feel of the hard bone in a kind of indecent way you will see often with rascally old men.

"It's Dauvid!" cries he, as if surprised to see me, —but well he had known that I was on the road.

"Or rather I should say Mr. Shirra nowadays," he went on,—"for I've heard of your well-doing, though I haven't seen your face for—let me see—how many years is't? A long exile from sic a pleasure."

There was the man at his vicious twittering again, and my disgust rose as it might do at the sight of a weasel. I was back again at the East Port of St. Brise, these years ago, and the whole story came flushing into my mind afresh.

"Ay!" I answered, as much as to say, "There's many a thing taken place since then."

"A lawyer, Dauvid, a lawyer!" cries he. "That

'Ay' o' yours is the sign-token of your never-commit-yourself trade. Yours is the profession for wits," says he,—"unless it be the Excise," at which glance at my father my blood boiled.

We were at the head of the Back Bowes now, and I was for stepping into the Den road to Nochty.

"You'll not pass the auld place without giving your friends a call?" said he.

It was true: the man was a connection of my own.

"Charlotte will be glad to see you," he went on. Once more these things of years ago came into my mind, and especially Charlotte.

"I'll be glad to pay Charlotte a visit," I says.

"Aye, a gallant, Dauvit. Oh! ho! I've heard of the Fallowfield friendliness, and the young leddy there," he answered, giving me stroke for stroke. But I think that I had hit him hard, for the whistle came cleaner through his teeth.

"Besides," he says, "we're not far out of your way to Nochty,—for it's him you're going to see, I suppose."

"Mr. James Clephane——" I says.

"A nice man, James," he chimed in. "In fact, a man that I can admire. A guid man and a frolicsome man—a nice conjunction."

"Though it's true," he continued, "he has a way of taking his own excellence, or, at any rate, other folks' frailty, for granted, and is not very delicate in fingering a body's susceptibility. I was down at St. Brise market last Saturday, and he calls me over to him, and says he, before a lot o' fouk, too, 'Rab,' says he, 'I've got my turnips all in.' 'They're weel aff that hae neeps,' answered I, 'but I'm real glad to hear it.'

'And,' continued he, rugging his cheeks and laughing to Clentry and some more of them standing by, 'I would mak' a bargain wi' ye. I'll send ye over a cairt-load if you promise to let my pit alane a' winter.' 'A cairt-fu' o' neeps,' says I; 'I wouldna tak' your twa!' It's aye the way: the big folk take advantage o' we puir bodies."

"But here we are at my door," he says; and I found myself back at the Seton's old house in the Back Bowes.

There were the same flower-beds, the same currant bushes, the same loupin-on stone at the cottage door: everything the same as it was that afternoon long ago on which I went to visit the Setons there, and had first seen the elder Charlotte, and little Charlotte, my Charlotte, and met Rab, and had that wonderful ride with him to Jock Myles's. A daunting shyness took me when Rab called "Charlotte," and Charlotte stepped out and put her hand in mine.

She had come into the doorway before we got to the end of the garden path. She held out her hand to me without a word, but with a welcome on her face. It was the old smile: I noticed that; and it seemed to me, too—and this gave me a touch of disappointment,—that something had gone from the face. Perhaps it was that the sun striking fair upon it took something out of it. Perhaps it was only that these years had taken away the girlish brightness that was in my recollection, and that what they had put in its place was not to be read at a glance, especially by the eye of one so shy as I felt myself. She led the way into the house, and there I was back again in the Seton's kitchen. I do not think there was a bit of

furniture changed in it. Rab hadn't had a stick to bring with him to the Back Bowes. The only difference was caused by some trick of a younger woman's hands—a tidier woman than Aunt Janet could not have been; the hands may have been Charlotte's here, or they may have been the elder Charlotte's. Just a trick or two of a woman's hands, and a touch or two of Rab's. There was his gun the height of his hand above the mantelpiece: Uncle James couldn't bear a gun, far less handle one.

"It's a long time since I was here," I said; "not since——" and then I caught Rab's eye sardonic. "Not since you and me were set back to back here for measuring," I blurted, and Charlotte nodded smilingly.

"But I knew you the moment you came into the garden," she said. "You haven't changed—taller, that's all."

"And a lawyer," says Rab. "Mr. Trail's right-hand man."

But Charlotte paid no heed to him.

"I ken no difference," she said.

"And you," I cried; and I looked full at Charlotte, now in the cool shade of the room.

She was her mother over again. The light-brown hair had the wisps of gold in it; the eyebrows, it seemed to me, had got darker over the large grey eyes, and the nose longer, and the chin larger, and the mouth arched more on the upper lip, more proudly arched. I believe, now that I think of it, that the changes I saw came all from the taking up of the hair, which I had never seen save lying down on her back; now it was parted in the middle, and lay with

large waves upon the temple, coiled in a large coil back on her fair neck, round which was a plain black ribbon. Proud at the mouth, grave at the nose, wonderful at the eyes!

I stood looking at her in my stupid way, in a cloud of uneasiness, not because of what I saw in her, but because of the days in St. Brise, and especially that last terrible day, that my memory went slipping over; and she all the while regarded me with a grave smile.

"Ay!" says Rab, "it was here you and me first met, Dauvid. You'll not mind the bit jaunt we took with the cairt up the length of Jock Myles's?"

And that brought me to my senses. Every word he spoke was like a blow given in front of the girl. What she felt I could not tell. She kept talking to me evenly of old times.

"I'll come back soon to see you, Charlotte," I said.

"We cannot expect to keep him. . . . A man run after by all the big folk in the country," Rab murmured, leading the way out to the garden.

A hand was laid on my arm.

"Wait," Charlotte said, and I waited.

She had ran upstairs, and I heard her moving across the floor above my head. When she came down she had a little square leather case in her hand, which she put into mine. I unclasped and opened it, and was looking at a picture of Aunt Charlotte, under glass, and set in gilt filigree. I looked and handed it back. I could not speak because of a sudden happy relief. I knew that she had shown me this to remove the doubt in my mind that reproach or anger was harboured by her because of my share in

the events of that terrible day. Her eyes were shining through her tears to tell me so.

I found Rab in the garden, and he whistled me out to the Nochty road. At shaking hands he mentioned something about the Clephane minerals; then, changing his mind, "I'll see you up the road a bit," he said.

He began to talk about the coal-beds, and the chances of developing them, and the effect of the railway should the bill pass; all with a knowledge and interest that surprised me into a foolishness.

"Man, Rab," I said, blurting out more than I meant, and saying more than I seemed to say, "Man, Rab! you would have made a grand business man if you had liked."

"Or an exciseman, or a laird, or a lawyer even," he cried in a sudden heat, "if I had liked. But what man would like to be one or other!" And then he broke short with a laugh. "I wouldn't give my fiddle, and my gun, and God's air aye above me, and my wits aye playing wi' other folks' wits—d'ye hear, my wits playing wi' other folks' wits. . . . Huts! I needn't tell you what I wouldn't give them for. You wouldn't understand. You're by nature one of the narrow traffickers o' life; aye sailing circumspectly—like my son Dauvid. Twa Dauvids! A pair of you! There's a lot o' your kind on the earth —and I don't care *that* for you!"

With that he snapped finger and thumb in the frosty twilight, and, swinging on his heel, went back to the Bowes without another word.

CHAPTER XV.

AUDACIOUS CREEPERS.

I WENT on my way to Nochty, all my heart rosy with the thought of Charlotte.

James Clephane welcomed me to his house in a very friendly manner, and commended me to the favour of his housekeeper, Miss Antonia Riggs. If only I had time, I could tell you a romance about that little lady. Years ago a band of Italian plasterers travelled through Fife by easy stages, from country-house to country-house, the ceilings of which they were employed to decorate. I remember Rab Cuick, who had a sense for everything of the kind, explaining that that is how you find the garlic trailing through so many Fife gardens. One of these Italians died in the middle of a piece of work near Falkland; which threw upon Fife a widow, a foreign prize, for whom half the lads in the countryside had a scramble. Ultimately, after a romantic bit of courting, she was carried off by Hugh Riggs, a bower from the hill-foots; and from them was descended in the second generation Antonia. To all the world she was known as Tony—Nochty's Tony. She was deep in James's counsels, and as constant to him as his shadow. Indeed, this figure of a shadow pictures her perfectly. Her dainty light body, always clothed in black silk, flitted from room to room, and from

dairy to poultry-yard—as brisk as a working-bee, as James said; and it was surmounted by a head of black curls, like a full peruke, out of which glimmered at you the keenest of Scots faces, startling in its olive dye. And if you gave it a chance, in banter or in temper, there leapt from it also a Scots speech, surprisingly broad, yet as sharp as an old Edinburgh leddy's.

She and James were very gracious to me at dinner (which was early at Nochty); and after it young Richard dropped in, evidently by appointment. His Uncle and I ran over with him some urgent points of business; or rather, we ran them over in his hearing, for he did not pay us the compliment to profess anxiety to understand them. Business bored him, or he affected that it did, and to-night he showed more than usually indifferent and anxious to be done with it. No sooner was he gone than James, with a motion to me to do likewise, drew in his chair to the table!

"The tumblers, Tony!" he cried: "tumblers and hot water! For if Mr. Shirra is at all like me, he's very dry in trying to sharpen his wits on that dull whetstone of a laddie. What say you, Mr. David?"

"Jenny's bad enough at times," he went on before I could find a discreet answer. "Yet, maybe, she is only properly deep. I cannot tell, for she has aye a ruffled surface. But that laddie's a well."

He mixed the toddy in his rummer, and ladled out a glass for Tony.

"Who's this Paraboo that he's bringing to Clephane?" he started afresh, and I learned that the great fiddler was to sleep the next night at Rich-

ard's on his way to one of the country houses I have spoken of. In truth, the news interested me little, for my restless heart was whispering "Charlotte." James entertained me with a medley of estate figures, and Paraboo, and a racy story of how Pap Inn came courting Tony. I listened with a discreet show of interest, but my eyes were turned inward, entranced, upon the vision of Charlotte that afternoon in the Back Bowes doorway.

It must have been near ten of the clock, I daresay, when there was a small stir in the house, and a maid with a hand on a laugh came in to announce Mr. Rab Cuick.

"Speak of the devil," Nochty said to us: it shows where his thoughts had been, for we had not been speaking of Rab; and to the maid, "Bring him in."

"Come away, Rab," he cried, as the rascal appeared in the doorway.

"Have you come for your cartload?" he continued —and to most men in the circumstances that speech would have been disconcerting.

"No," says Rab, as cool as a crab—"no; yet I've come to ask a favour all the same, though, unfortunately, there's not a man about the place to grant it. You maun know, I was bringing a cart home by the Den, and Jess reested, and not a foot will she move."

"You and Jess were up late?" says Nochty.

"Oh! stuff for a body in the Bowes. To tell you the truth—and it eases my feelings in bothering you at sic an hour—it was one o' your young folk, Mr. James, that detained me."

"Your nevvy honoured me wi' a call," he went on, "and the crack fell on music, and that means nothing

less than a night of't. He's daft about the fiddle, Mr. Richard, and very full, and no wonder, about Paraboo coming to stay wi' him—the great Paraboo —the graundest fiddler. Clephane should be proud. . . . We sat cracking, and before Charlotte, who is at the washing in the Den to-night, came back for her supper and let me awa', the night had slipped by unconscionable."

James was sitting frowning and silent.

"Your fiddle's still your friend, Rab?" said Tony, filling up the pause.

"Friend? Lover, mem. A woman, sweetheart or wife,—just an instrument out o' which a man draws the music that's in himsel'."

"Hum! Well—and the favour you want?" Nochty said curtly.

"A theat," answers Rab. "I came for a theat. Your men are very willing, Sandy, your stable-man 's particularly obleeging, but there's none of them about. So I've had to come to yourself to ask for the loan of a horse."

"Willingly," said Nochty, always courteous, and rose to put on his boots.

But Rab stopped him.

"Not a foot, Mr. Clephane," he said. "I go without it if you're to put a foot across your threshold to-night to get it for me. I can easy get the horse myself. I *could* easily have got it," added the rascal, "but I canna bear to take anything by-leave."

James snickered, 'spite his gloom.

"I'll go with Rab," I cried, in eagerness.

In truth, I could not rest for thought of Charlotte. All the evening I had been seeking an excuse for

going to the Back Bowes for a word with Charlotte, or a look at her. Now, with the news that she would be back in the washing-houses in the Den and that I might meet her there, came my opportunity.

"I'll come with you, Rab," I cried.

"Ho! ho!" said he. "It won't be the first time you've lent me a hand wi' a horse."

"Can't you forget that?" I said, desperately, at that glance at the Jock Myles' affair.

"I'm not likely to. It was my first inkling o' your saugacity," he answered me. "Time's flying and Jess is standing still, else I might give the company the story."

"It'll keep," I said. "Come."

Making excuse to James that I wished the air before turning in, I accompanied Rab to the stables. He took out a horse and walked it down to the Den road. I, at his side, had to give ear to his oblique chatter, in which he seemed ever to be about to surprise me with the discovery of my errand; and all the time I whispered to myself, "Charlotte! Charlotte!" and it seemed to me I would have gone to her before the whole world. I could not walk slow enough for him.

"But I'm detaining you," he said. "Your company is kind, but I must not keep it to myself."

I slackened my pace without a word.

"Thank you," he said, "if, in your goodness, you can spare me some minutes of your time from a pleasanter ploy. I'm in a quandary, Mr. Shirra, that's the truth,—a quandary, and it's a man o' the world's help that I need. Supposing—as I hope to

: to see it—supposing you were at the head of a ge family, like me, lasses and lads growing up und you—ah, the proud parental feeling, Dauvid! d supposing, in the springtime, one of them was ing a foolish thing and you discovered it—not ill thing, mark, but just an imprudent, allowing e affection, in the vigours of its youth, to rush up :e a clematis on the house-front and entwine itself out an object higher in station than itself—would ou think it your duty to nip that creeper, Dauvid?

"I ken what you would say. It would depend on ie person—I name no names, you see; it's a suppositious case. But suppose this person higher above he other was also a creeper, wi' wild and wayward ffections, a fine, lovable, likeable thing, whose parnt or guardian or gardener, so to say, wasn't noticng its trailing romance—would you think it your luty to point it out to him, so that he, if he wanted, ould drag it away, before these two were bound ill death did them part? Creepers! Awa' wi' the igure. It's a love affair I'm talking about, Dauvid, and asking your advice, as a man o' the world,—a young man o' the world, but as cool and tough a lawyer, so I'm told, as the oldest."

What was the devil driving at? I thought to myself.

"Ponder it! Ponder it!" said Rab at my side, seeing my hesitation.

Ponder it! The blood rushing to my head beat Charlotte. All that lawyer's coolness, of which I was so pitifully proud, vanished in one flame of Charlotte.

"I have been wronging this man," thought I (poor

fool). "It is thus delicately that he tells me. It is me he means. And Charlotte. Ah! can it be even so that her affections have strayed to twine themselves about me?"

"Rab," I cried, "as a lawyer—a lawyer's able to look after himself, is he not? As a man, *Amor vincit omnia,*" cries I, with a laugh to hide the passion I was shaking with.

"Your hand, Mr. Dauvid," he cries, "your hand, and thank you. *L'amour! l'amour!* Why should I nip the romance? That was my own heart's instinct, but I mistrusted myself. But now you've said it. I thank you."

"And I thank you," said I. "It was kind of you."

"Not a word, not a word. I will not understand you. Kind? You ken better than that; it was to ease my own conscience. Have you not told me often yourself I am selfish, unscrupulous. . . ."

"If I have wronged you in the past, Mr. Cook," I said, "I am sorry. But it was natural. My father's life. . . ."

"Na, na," Rab said, "say not that I stood in the way of the Supervisorship. Nothing stands in any man's way save his want of grit to surmount difficulties. Your father—if I had been in his shoes, I'd have got the Supervisorship though I'd walked over corpses."

"My father was a good man," said I.

"Ah! there you touch the riddle of the universe, I'm thinking. The relations of virtues to the ends reached by other virtues—might and right, and the like. Take a case. There's a mild, sweet-tempered man ettling at a supervisorship, and in his path is an

unscrupulous, clever devil. Sweet-tempered men cannot ride down clever, unscrupulous devils: yet the Supervisorship for that mild-tempered man meant virtue. Where are you? Mild-temper is itself a virtue. Again, where are you? . . . Well, here we are at the parting of our ways, Dauvid. I maun away to Jess, and you to——. Good-night," he interrupted himself. "Good-night."

We were at the slap in the dyke where the path ran through to the Den, to Charlotte; and with a lift like a quick-step in my blood, I started out upon it, and the whistling of that rascal died in my ears.

Among the trees, winding the hill on the south side of the Den, the footpaths hung like so many galleries, this one from the Nochty road the highest, and all, like it, descending gently towards the village at the farther end. At first my walk lay in the gloom of the hill, till, turning its northernmost brow, I faced the late moon hung level with me, it seemed, above the grey and red roofs of the Back Bowes. Its light, fitful among the beech trunks, filled the open valley with an even, lustreless glow. The murmur of the stream reached me now, as the path made a sharper descent, and I could distinguish the greensward beyond, flecked with the washings spread upon it. A steady lamp here and there kept watch high up above it in the village; down below, the lights in the washing-houses flashed and died at the opening and shutting of their doors that made no sound for me. Now and then a laugh, a voice, a snatch of song among them reached me, and died. Some of the lasses were back from supping, and had gone in to the washing-houses for the night; their

escort of lads were mounting the path homeward already. I could hear their repeated signals grow fainter as they turned the house ends.

"Charlotte!" I cried in my heart. Romance glowed in the valley and in the boscages on the hill around me. In all the world the moon hung there for me alone, and Charlotte only was in the valley. And I ran down the path to her.

Towards the ford, every here and there, the boys had cut steps in the hillside by which one descended from terrace to terrace. Down these I climbed, the sounds from the washing greens becoming louder in my ears, till, on the last of them, a laugh and a voice arrested me. Looking down, I could see two figures in the shadows beside the stepping-stones, on which the moon, shooting behind the Back Bowes roofs, lay in a silver circle. Presently, into the circle stepped Charlotte, skipping from stone to stone, plainly disdaining some offer of help. Presently she was on the other side; I could hear her adieu, and see the little wave of the hand accompanying it. Richard Clephane's good-night in response immediately below me, rose fainter, and before I recognised it for his he had turned into the Clephane path, and Charlotte was lost in the shadow of the opposite bank.

The light in my heart, set there by Rab Cuick, was eclipsed, and a bitter black hate of Rab filled it. Then, suddenly, a light filled my heart again, set there by myself. Charlotte was mine! I knew it! I needed no man to tell me! The figure of the creeping clematis came into my mind afresh. It had climbed high he said; and I, standing high above her on the terrace, took the figure to myself like an inspiration.

To catch up Charlotte by way of the ford was impossible, but farther down upon the river was a bridge, and crossing by it I might intercept her even now. She came level with it and stopped, as I crossed it.

Once more the light in my heart was eclipsed, not by cloud of jealousy or hate, but outdazzled by the sight of her so radiant.

I remembered that day in the Back Bowes kitchen, when I measured myself back to back with her, a tall, slim lass, and noticed the gold which the sunlight picked out in her wisps of hair. I remembered that other day, in the room overlooking the ships, when the cloud in her grey eyes bade me look out on life. I remembered that terrible day when the elder Charlotte sailed to the golden islands. They had run in my mind all night like bits of an air that I knew, and yet could not find the end of; and here was the end of it.

Grave, and sweet, and radiant withal.

I knew the end of the song, but I could not sing it.

She was without a hat. A light shawl wound round her beauty.

"It's nipping cold," I said, "and you must not stand. I'll walk with you. You're at the wash-houses the night—your father told me."

She walked with me in the silver and green of the bank.

I knew the end of the song, but I could not sing it.

"Good-night," she said, at the wash-house door.

"Good-night," I said.

And for me, also, she had a little wave of the hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

JENNY CLEPHANE.

NEXT morning showed me Charlotte, mine, like a piece of amber, but with Rab a fly in it. Being up betimes even for Nochty, I was shaving leisurely, looking out upon the fine scenery of the Lowlands westward, and seeing nothing of it because of that disconcerting imperfection in my jewel, when there was a terrific knock at my door. Before I could clear my lips for a comfortable answer to his summons, James Clephane followed it hard into my room.

"Where's Michael Trail due to-day? Where is he to be found?" he cried.

"That I can't say, Mr. James Clephane," I answered, being a little annoyed at his manner.

"Oh! I ken fine," he said, "that Michael Trail loups about Fife like a flea. But you maun e'en lay your finger and thumb on him, for there's work for him this day."

"Is it so pressing?" said I.

"Man! It's at the gallop," he answered. "To think that a Clephane should elope wi' flesh and blood of a vagabond tailor! Is not that pressing?"

At this Richard Clephane and Charlotte leapt to my mind, and the blood ran out of my legs.

"When was this? Where are they gone?" I cried. "What's to be done?"

"Indeed," says Mr. Clephane testily, "if you could tell me all that, then you might shave in peace. That laddie Dick is a bone with little marrow; but sucking's in a lawyer's line, so haste you down and try it on him."

"Richard Clephane downstairs!" cried I in bewilderment. "And is not Charlotte with him?"

"Charlotte! Wha's Charlotte! If I but had Jenny by the tails, you might be off with the best Charlotte that ever stepped."

"I wish nothing better," I cried in my thankfulness when I saw the mistake I had made; and I burned in the face at this discovery of my emotion. James was too douce a man to be lighted at my fire; but he eyed me curiously, and I think that in some vague way he may have associated Richard and Charlotte in his mind.

"It's Rab Cuick's son David, that's a saddler in St. Brise," he said. "I would have you come quick down and sound Richard about the matter, and in the meantime cast about in your mind for the best way of getting at Mr. Trail."

By the time I had dressed and was in the dining-room with the others, I had settled Mr. Trail's whereabouts (always supposing, that is, that he had kept in the same mind about his movements as when I left him), and had mastered as well the business that was calling him so loudly. Richard had no other news than the bare fact that his sister Jenny was away, stolen out of Clephane the previous evening,

leaving a note for him that she was being married to David Cook in St. Brise.

"Might I see the note?" I asked; but Richard declared he had torn it up in anger at the first reading of it. That I could believe, if Jenny's pen was as caustic as her tongue in its opinion of him. Uncle and nephew were in a daze. There was no doubt that the news hit the two badly; and it seemed to me that Richard was always rubbing at his own sore. I could understand James Clephane's disgust, and even sympathise with him, though he harped away at the necessity of having Michael Trail with him, as if Michael, any more than myself, could untie that knot. It was easy to see that James felt that the good name of the Clephanes was in his keeping; and that, even more than this smudge on it, he took to heart the ill-fare of his niece. He could not but deem it ill-faring, for to him, Rab Cuick was the symbol of the family Jenny had married into; and I was sorry for him. But this David was Charlotte's brother, and Jenny's elopement with him had brought me a hopeful and happy state of mind in which a Cook marrying a Clephane seemed the most natural and desirable thing in the world, or only a little less so than a Cook marrying a Shirra. The completeness of Jenny's escapade pleased me the more when I saw that Richard had never a thought of the consequences to her, but only a fear that they would direct a finger of ridicule upon himself.

"Have you seen Rab Cuick about this?" I asked.

"Rab Cuick!" says James, rubbing his palm slowly, and repeating my words as if they were hullo! upon his wits; and then, when they came t-

him at that bidding, "God's mercy! he's a connection o' mine by marriage now," he cries, and laughed to himself at the thought of it.

But the thought of it made Richard yellow to the lips, as I could see out of the tail of my eye.

"You're right, Mr. Shirra, we'll better see Rab," James said after a minute's reflection,—"you and me, while Richard rides over to the Junction and intercepts Michael. For Rab's a very ferret."

"He and his son don't get on overly well," I said. "But with Rab, that's the better reason for his knowing David's affairs. We had better step down to the Bowes."

At the end of the Back Bowes road, where the St. Brise and Nochty roads meet it, we saw Rab Cuick walking towards us. I believe he had lain at the hedge-side, sunning himself like a partridge, waiting our coming; but when we set eyes on him he was stepping it out like one in great haste.

James Clephane stopped short on the road.

"Mr. Shirra," he said, "I cannot trust myself yet to face that man. See you him, and bring word of what he knows to me at Nochty." And James turned on his heel, and left me to meet Rab alone.

I meant to go straight to the heart of the matter, but Rab was there before me.

"I see Mr. James takes the news ill," he says.

"Ah! you ken," I cried.

"Ken!" he cried. "All Fife kens. But to be frank, I heard it before anybody else. As you must have guessed, I heard it last night."

"Ah! after you left Nochty," I said.

"Before ever I came to Nochty, man," he answered.

"Rab," I cried, "you don't mean to tell me that your visit to Nochty last night was designed to help these two——"

"No, no," he answered. "I thought you had better understood me. To help myself. Love was *their* theat. But I own I had met the two stravaigers in their happy gait,—and even tendered them fatherly counsel," he said.

"Yet you kept silence at Nochty?"

"And did not you, your own self, approve my silence?"

"Then," I cried, the truth breaking on me,—"these two—they were the—the creepers!"

"Precisely."

"But—'a supposititious case,' says you?"

"To be sure. What man's advice is worth anything on a particular. Yet you maun admit that I put it to you fairly, as both lawyer and man. . . . But . . . Mr. Dauvid. It did seem to me that you were a little shy in speaking of it. Can it be that this affair—how shall I say it?—is a disappointment? Was Miss Jenny Clephane . . . ?"

"Jenny Clephane!" cried I. "I am here as the Clephane lawyer, to get at the ins and outs of this matter."

I spoke in a heat. Well I knew that he was playing with me. This man was, as James said, a very ferret, and I had shown my heart to him.

"You relieve me," he said. "For the minute I was afeared that one of my own family, my own son Dauvid to wit, was mixed up wi' your manly affec-

tions. . . . Just lawyerly inquiries is it? Well, then, I'll tell you all—the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me . . ."

He was holding up his hand, gingerly, as if he were taking the oath.

"Stop your blasphemous nonsense, Rab," I cried, not able to endure him.

"I thought you were better lawyer than to bully your own witness," he answered me. "But I'll tell you all about it if you'll listen."

"I will not deny," he said—he had indeed a wonderful knack in telling a story, and drew himself up for the recital of it as if he were singing a song—"I will not deny that the transaction was not quite on all fours. It was not a bonny transaction at all, but it was done to obleege a leddy. I met her between the hedges west from Nochty, at one o' James Clephane's fields, on the Cariston side of the Bowes. I had yoked Jess with the spring-cart, and—to tell you the truth—it was Nochty's neeps I was after. You ken my provocation; 'a cairtfu' o' neeps,' says he! . . . It was Nochty's field and Nochty's neeps, and the cairt was that full of them that Jess reested, and would not, or could not, move it out of the bit in the soft field. So there was I with a cartful of neeps not of my own growing, stuck fast in their owner's field.

" 'Take your will o't, Jess,' I says to the mare; and with that I sat down on the paling at the field-gate and hummed awa' to a star. All of a sudden there was a hand on my shoulder—and there was that brown-faced dochter-in-law of mine to be (set me up!), James Clephane's niece, Jenny Clephane.

I wasn't surprised to see her there alone at that late hour, for I knew her for the mettlesomest lass in the county;—but it was awkward she should come upon the cart with her uncle's neeps. It was a black night, for the mune, you'll mind, is late, with just that one star that looked so glad of my company, and I hoped she could not make out Jess standing there yoked and as dour as the paling-stab I was gripping. I thought she might not see her, so I whipped round, and says,

" 'Hech, Mistress Jenny, it's a fine night for a ramble.'

" 'Yes,' she says, 'and for carting turnips,' and she showed her white teeth in the dark.

" 'Wark maun be done,' I answered, with a bit cackle as a signal for the daffing o't; and she flung it back.

" 'And you have a heavy load of other folks' burdens to bear,' she said.

" 'The heavy end of it falls to the women in this world,' I says, with a nod towards the mare; and she—

" 'We are to be pitied, Jess,' and laughed in my face.

"I had long ettled her to be one of my kidney. 'Here's ane o' your own mettle,' says I to myself; and I wouldn't have lost these turnips for a fortune.

" 'And now,' she says quite suddenly, 'Good-night, Rab'; and then she gives a little skirl with a false note in it. I'm shairp at sounds, and I detected that note in a minute.

" 'Mr. Cuick,' says she, holding off in the dark—'Mr. Cuick, you must be off.'

" 'Talk to Jess, then,' says I.

"She ran up to the mare, all in a whirl, and cries, 'Gee up, Jess!' and 'Good horse, Jess!' and chuck-chucked in her mouth as she tugged at the reins. But Jess would not budge, and all of a sudden I sees a white flash in the dark, and hears a rattle of harness, and a scrunt in the shafts as Jess shook her head clear of the blow. At that I gave a laugh, low-like to myself, and Jenny was back and saying in my ear, 'Hush, you old——,' and then up went her two close little blue-veined fists to her face, and she cried, 'I forgot, Mr. Cuick, I forgot.'

" 'Forgot what, my dawty?' I says (little thinking my right to say it), and put my hand on her arm; at which she held away from me, for she has the high spirit I like, has Jenny.

"So I whipped about again, and whistled to the star.

"In a little she came up to me, and I felt that she had something on her mind.

" 'How's Charlotte the night?' she asked.

" 'Well, thank you.'

" 'And Tam—any word from him?'

" 'Oh, yes,' says I, 'Tam's done very well at ill-doing, and James has done ill at well-doing, and Dave's pursuing a mean in St. Brise, of course.'

" 'Of course,' she says—'of course Dave is in St. Brise, and market-fairing now, I doubt not,' and she gave a little laugh, in which I joined.

" 'I doubt not,' I said. 'At the market, with I ken not what lass—Dave's sic a deevil'—for Dave, you know, is of the still kind, and very respectable.

"At that she says, with a viciousness I can fathom now, 'It's to his credit that he's so steady, all things considered.'

" 'He's sair held down wi' a father—if that's what you mean,' I said, and went on in my whistling.

" 'You're a good whistler, Rab,' she says again.

" 'I'm called so,' I answered, jumping off my spar, and trying again to coax Jess out of the bit.

"When I saw it was of no use, I came back to my paling, near where Jenny was still standing.

" 'Maybe,' she says, very low, and coming up close to me again—'maybe I might as well tell you. Although I don't care *that* for you,' she went on in vexation, snapping her fingers.

"If I was to get these neeps clean out of that field, I had to depend on two folk, Jess and Jenny, and I thought the best card to play was the silent one.

" 'Not *that,*' she cried again, and again snapped her fingers, 'although you will be my father-in-law.'

"At that, I maun confess, I gave a start on the paling.

" 'Sit quiet,' she says, 'and listen to me. I'm going to marry your son. I'm running away with him —now. Now!' she cried, vexatiously stamping her foot. 'He'll be here for me any minute, and yet you'll not get out of my way.'

" 'I have more than one son,' says I.

" 'None of your make-believe,' she cried. 'It's David.'

" 'O! It's Dave,' I said. 'I thought you might mean James.'

"With that she up with her hand, as I had seen her use it against Jess, and flung it straight on my mouth. 'I'm not worthy of doing more for James than that," she says; and I says, 'I'm sorry for Dave.'

" 'Rab,' she cried all of a sudden, 'I think we understand each other.'

" 'We're on very friendly terms,' I said, stroking my mouth that was itching with her soft blow.

" 'Dave and I are driving to-night to—I'll not tell you where,' she continued, 'and you cannot stop us. He'll be here any minute with his carriage—and if you try to stop us,—there's the neeps!'

" 'No, we don't understand each other,' I cried, 'not a bit,' and with that I jumped off my seat, very angry. 'Not a bit, or you wouldn't have mentioned the neeps. I had no more intention of stopping you in your silly gait than I had of hitting you back for that blow on my mouth. Your uncle shall ken of these neeps—but he'll drive them home for me before that,'—for I had a plan.

"Just as I would have left her, a coach comes up, and the driver pulled up at the gate-side. I saw Dave look out and draw back again.

" 'It's a luxurious way of spending your market,' I says, putting my head into the coach window. I could see the thoughts working below the surprise in his eyes.

" 'You needn't look to your father to pay the bill,' I cries.

" 'The son pays the father's bills in our household,' he answered me—which was a lie.

" 'I can keep myself,' he cries again furiously.

" 'God keep you both,' I answered, and went down the Nochty road.

"When I came to Nochty there was not a soul to be seen in the steading—gone to St. Brise market, though maybe the stableman, so obleeging, was lying

somewhere in the straw. There was nothing for it but to go up to the House. I looked into the dining-room window to make sure that Mr. Clephane wasn't entertaining; but there was nobody with James and 'Tony but yourself, who hardly count for company, being almost one of the family up there now, it would seem. The three of you looked very happy together, even you casting aside the burdens of your office, and I was loth to intrude. As it was, as you'll remember, I parted with you at the Nochty slap, greatly relieved in mind and conscience by your counsel that justified my own instincts. What a nicht it was, Dauvid! I maun say it was well chosen by the lovers for an elopement: even for you and me, wi' no such-like fancies in our heads, a braw romantic night. You found it so, I take it, for when I returned wi' the horse you hadn't got back, and Nochty and 'Tony were still on the crack by the fireside. Talking o' you and me when our backs were turned, doubtless. I ken not how near they hit the truth wi' you, Dauvid, but I'll warrant they didn't think o' saying that I was theating home Nochty's neeps wi' Nochty's horse, and trying to reckon my new degrees of affinity with the owner of them. . . . Ho! ho! I got paid back for his market joke, I'm thinking."

"Rab," I said to him when he had finished, "what does Charlotte think of Dave's marriage?"

"What could she think," he answers with a grave snigger, "but just the more highly of audacious-growing creepers?"

And I returned to Nochty with my spirit limping at that prick.

CHAPTER XVII.

INFLUENCING THE PRESS.

It was after the midday meal when Richard came riding back into Nochty. James and I went round to the stables to meet him before he was alighted. He had been unsuccessful in intercepting Mr. Trail, he explained: there was no Mr. Trail at the junction to intercept. As likely as not, I had warned them, he was at the other end of the county, if not in his own room in the Town of Tarvit office.

"Better ask Tony to give you something to eat; then ride over to Town of Tarvit and see if you can find him," James said. "Had not he better?" he asked of me.

"He can ride, and he may find," I said; "but we must act. By all means ride," I added, for I thought that Richard would be well out of the way.

"It's spreading over the county," Richard said, coming to the piece of information he found it least easy to swallow.

"More publicity is what I would avoid," I answered. "Mr. James, you and I must into St. Brise."

"St. Brise!" cries James. "Would you hunt for them there? Besides, man, the deed's done."

"Listen!" said I. "This is Friday, is it not?"

"Your plan, without any conundrums!" James cried testily.

"And on Friday night," I went on, "Blelach gets ready his paper. If we can't stop him, as likely as not it's published to all Fife in the 'Journal' to-morrow."

"Will it?" cries Richard in alarm.

"There's not a doubt about it," I said. "Blelach never misses a chance."

"Then how will you stop him?" James asked.

"I didn't say we could, Mr. James; only that we might try."

"This is the chief night of the market," I went on. "That being so, the town will be crowding westwards; and at Blelach's end of it 'twill be like a Sabbath. We can, I doubt not, slip in unobserved. We must drive in any case, for we'll be late of getting away home—eleven, or even midnight. But we can take the dog-cart and drive ourselves, and can stable unobserved at the Sir Andrew, from which there's a shore road to Blelach's that I know well."

"No clandestine stabling and backdoors for me," cries James. "I've run away with nobody's daughter, and the deed's the deed, not the rumouring of it—though Richard and you don't seem to see it so. . . . Yet maybe there's wisdom in your advice, Mr. David, and I'm obliged to you for giving the best in your power. We could have the dog-cart round after dinner, and to St. Brise. Yet I misdoubt me, we must fail. I know little of this Blelach."

"And I know him little," I said; "and we must

fail for a certainty if we go to him alone. There's another must go with us, and he, I fear, will not be altogether to your liking."

James gave me a steady look for a moment.

"If you're going to get that—" he boggled at the word. "If you're going to get Jenny's husband—Miss Jenny's husband—to go with us, then I put no foot in St. Brise this night."

"It might not be so easy to get him. But it was the father I meant," I said.

James broke out in a fury. "Rab Cuick! That rascal in the Den! I'll proclaim the marriage at every cross-road in Scotland sooner than go with that man. He and I going together, like foreign fathers and mothers giving blessings over portions and tochers,—Heavens! that *would* be a family affair."

"Yet it's the only hope," I said. "Hear me out. You asked for my advice: bear with me till I give it you all. It's not for your sake or the family of Clephane's alone. It's for Miss Jenny's. Mr. James, we maun face the facts: she's Mrs. David Cook by this time, and from this time. I say not a word about her exploit. I sympathise with you there. David wasn't the husband for her, on every count. And yet, let me tell you, David Cook's at the opposite pole from his father, as others in the family are. They had a mother—one in a thousand. David's sober, honest,—an honest man. I doubt not, he'll make an honest husband, and her an honest wife: whether they are happy or not, and it's an experiment with the odds against it. Happy or not, your care must be to keep her honest; and it would

be a bad start if, in the town she's to live in, maybe be a mother in, she's heralded with a scandalous pen. I know this Blelach. An Englishman by origin, I've heard. A gentleman in a manner. He lives with his mother in the High Street; and, they tell me, never was a more affectionate son. I have seen his bounty bring coals and bread to poor folk. I have read beautiful words he has written about men when they died, showing a natural heart for a good life. Yet I've seen him stab honest men that countered him, week after week, till they shrank from their neighbours' eyes in their pews on Sunday. He can be cruel and blasphemous and slanderous, and he never misses his chance; and his chance is here. If he will not take it against the lady, he'll take it against the man; and that will hurt Miss Jenny the more. It's worth while trying to save her from that."

"But how can Rab Cuick help us?" James asked, evidently moved by my words.

"This way, Mr. James. There's a kind of bond between the two men. They're birds of a feather, somehow, though, God kens, I understand their breed but little; and though I like them less, I must confess there is virtue in them somewhere. I have known Rab Cuick all my days; I have no reason to like him, on the contrar, he has been a stumbling-block to me and mine—but that's nothing. The point is, there is something in him that attracts many men, maybe all men that are not too close with him. Attracts them, or at any rate, wins them. . . . Swallow the pill, Mr. James, and take him with us, if he'll go. It's a double pill, for you'll have to ask

him to go. But I'll step over and do that, if you say the word. . . . Believe me, it's an only chance."

He turned from me and went in among the horses, clapping them and rubbing their noses and turning up the hay in the racks, all in an abstraction of habit; while Richard and I stepped about on the cobbles, eyeing each other but exchanging no words.

"I'll take him, then," James said when he came out. "I've nobody but you to advise me."

I began to doubt the wisdom of my counsel, now that I saw with how little assurance he resigned himself to it.

"There is a way," I said, "by which you can have another opinion before you take the final step. Let Mr. Richard ride over to Town of Tarvit, as you propose. There is a Council meeting there to-night, and Mr. Trail, wheresoever he be now, must be back for it. You might as well think of an engine without a boiler as Tarvit Council without Mr. Trail. Let Mr. Richard then go there, and put the case to him, and if he say 'No,' ride along to St. Brise and intercept us. He has ample time. If Mr. Trail advise against it, I am content to come home without seeing Blelach."

So it was arranged. Richard raised the difficulty that he was expecting Parabo. "Let him come to Nochty—Clephane's not in a state to receive. I'll send Sandy across to the Junction for him with the trap. If he's a gentleman he'll not object to be my guest." James spoke to his nephew with recovered authority. Jenny's escapade, or perhaps Richard's sensitiveness to it, had given the uncle the whip-hand again. "This business is before play-acting,"

he said, and settled the matter. And for the second time that day I went in search of Rab.

I found him at the Back Bowes, sitting down to tea with Charlotte. "I'm just here for a moment's business," I explained, in answer to his invitation to join them in the family morsel.

"At least I keep a good bottle," Rab cries, and sent Charlotte to the press for it. "The sins of my youth rise up against me in the shape of a prime brew."

I found myself seeking to conciliate him with a laugh. Deeper still the anxiety stirred in me to conciliate, not him, but Charlotte. I had a premonition how my mission would show when I brought it out into the light of her sincerity.

"What do you think Charlotte has been busy with all forenoon?" Rab asked, when Charlotte returned. "Wrote to Tam at the other side of the world, to tell him of last night's wonderful doings. Womanlike, full o' the news!"

"You were surprised?" I said to Charlotte.

"Surprised! I cannot say that I was," she answered me with evident glee.

"Nor sorry," she added; though I had said nothing of that. It was always my fortune in that family to be shown my folly in measuring the affairs of life by my own sufficiency.

"Cousin David"—Rab had never called me before, and I was angry; and Charlotte did not follow him in that usage, which might have tempered my choler—"Cousin David is of the other party, you maun mind," said he.

"I am sorry for that, Mr. David," Charlotte said; "but I cannot say that I mind a bit."

"Nay," I said, shamed in my honourable task by that taunt; "I am of no party, but only of my office."

And so, avoiding Charlotte's eye, I stumbled over my story.

"In fact," says Rab, "you are asking my help in interfering with the liberty of the Press."

"In influencing the Press."

"In influencing it. Stripped bare, that is your wish," said Rab, playing with his words; for indeed to explain it thus was to cloak my request thickly.

"That is Mr. James Clephane's wish," I said. "I am his agent—his agent's agent, no more."

I looked to Charlotte upon that explanation, but her face was kept resolutely turned from me.

"Do you ken Blelach?" asked Rab.

"Save by repute, not at all. Yet I know him to be your friend, and a dangerous man."

"I thank you," says Rab. "And to that knowledge, I take it, Mr. James and I are indebted for this plan of paring his claws. Yet I knew you could have little acquaintance with Blelach to propose it. . . . As a matter of fact, I've seen little of Blelach since I left St. Brise. Though I do send him a bit o' news now and then," he added, laughing; and, still with a laugh, "it's a good deal you're asking of me, Mr. David, if you only knew!"

"You are not going on that errand?" cried Charlotte, suddenly turning upon her father.

"Remember," I broke in; and, I believe, would have pled the naturalness of James Clephane's wish. But she divined my meaning.

"We are as good as the Clephanes," she burst forth.

"Whe-e-w!" whistled Rab.

"Too good for some of them," I cried, her heat acting upon my own. But she brushed aside my meaning.

"There is no better man walks Fife than my brother David," she said.

"It's his father is the scandal," Rab says chirpily.

I saw a red flush mount her face in token of the truth of that saying.

"And will you be your own crier!" she broke out, turning her back on me; "beat drum upon your own shame? Is it not enough that we all maun suffer for the knowledge of it, which is as patent as the Lomond Hills? James and Tam, and now Dave? And some are in the grave with the burden of it—that were content to die—to live—proclaimed partner in your ill-doing, rather than play a less noble part by being more virtuous and denouncing it? Is not that enough, but you must play with your own ill-repute? Shame on you! And shame on you, David Shirra—agent or agent's agent—to tempt a man to so mean a mission!"

She went out, leaving me standing there, avoiding Rab's eye, and dumb under the reproach and the appeal of her words. Their injustice was a wounding stroke to my spirit, and left a pain of a life-lasting kind—the sense of a new, cruel complication in life. To be associated thus with that rascal—I, who sought only to do a plain Duty! It was monstrous!

Smarting under her reproach, I hardened against her appeal. In my heart I condemned her for her outburst. It was—it was——I could not give a name to that wherein it exceeded good custom; but

the sense that it did exceed it weighed on me. We were a frank and outspoken people in Fife—but our women did not show their hearts like that. I think it was in my mind that Edith Duncan would not show her heart like that.

To Rab, as well as to me, this revelation of Charlotte was disconcerting. It left him—one of the few occasions on which I have known him so—ill at ease with me, and inept and violent in his speech.

"Women have more teeth than men, ye know," he said. "And when do you propose to start?"

I would have given the world now that we should not start at all; but I dared not draw back. Yet when I named him time and place, and he had agreed to them, he protested. It seemed to me that he was protesting to himself. "Why should I go? Who are the Clephanes? D'ye I think I go to please them? I go to please myself—myself, d'ye hear—myself! Who is James Clephane that I should do this for him? D'ye know that what he is, he is, owing to me? You're his man o' business, but you don't know that? Answer me: you don't know that?"

"We are conscious," I said, "how much we owe you about the coal"—for I thought it was to this he referred.

"WE ARE," he laughed. Oh! you condescending—" He stoped short of the epithet, laughing; and with sudden insolent familiarity, "I'll tell you a story" he said. You know Blue, Old Blue? . . . Strange to say I dreamt o' him only last night. Well, Blue, though he is by way of being a reformed character, was in his day a co'rse fellow, and a pro-

digious swearer. Your Aunt Sarah, good woman, and some others concerned for his reformation, set him up as a carrier, Cluny-wards—subscribed and sent him on his rounds wi' a donkey, conditionally that he was neither to beat the beast nor swear at it. Ae day, your aunt, walking out by Cluny Hill—not at the express, you can fancy—overtook Blue. I was under the hedge alongside o' them—the sun beaking down powerful. Blue was in a toil and moil at the tail of his steed, shoving it forward; and as she passed him, 'Hey! Miss Trail,' says he, 'Job never drave a cuddy! Gee-up! . . . ye — — r-rabbit!' "

I kept myself in hand, affecting not to understand the impudent rascal; and at that he broke out in anger, or in pretended anger.

"You are aye girding at me because of what I might have been, if I had—this or that. Where are your eyes for what I am? 'The facts' you are aye saying; 'look at the facts.' No. Half the facts, you mean. Hark you! If I am taken up wi' an entrancing deal in wits, is that less a fact than a well- or ill-earned seven-and-sixpence in your pocket?"

I was silent under his gibes, in my anxiety to serve James Clephane; and even there the rascal plumbed me, for he said—

"The man maun smoke the master's dottle! Now, good day. I'll be at the end o' the Bowes road at seven."

He kept his tryst. I was up in front with Mr. James, who was driving: he had a singularly fine pair of hands. When Rab leapt into the back-seat, James turned to ask very civilly after his com-

fort, and even lent a hand to tuck a rug about his spine. In a fret and deep depression of spirit myself, I was at a loss to explain Mr. Clephane's lightness. He had dined. But I think that behind a horse he was always like a boy in heart. By the fitful light of our lamps I saw that his hat was slightly cocked upon a slightly cocked head. He pointed his talk with a stiff whip stabbed into the darkness; and to us, in our share of it, he gave his ear only, not his eye. It was the unclouded talk of field and climate and his beast of the country-man.

At the Brig of Ord, some three miles out of St. Brise, a crowd round a gig with a wheel off filled the rusty blue stance in front of the smithy. James pulled up, inquisitive; and Rab, who had leapt down, was soon back with a story. Mr. Selcrig and Poute, the sheriff's officer, had capsized on a wood baulk while driving home from a temperance meeting they had addressed at Ord. They had borrowed another gig, and were on in front. "Ho-ho! An unco accident for teetotallers!" Rab cried. James gave me a dig in my ribs with his elbow as he drove on. I heard him cluck to himself, "I'll not go empty-handed o' news to Mr. Blelach," Rab said again. James's chuckle ceased on the instant, and we shot forward to St. Brise.

We drove into the yard of the Sir Andrew Wood, where Mr. Clephane saw his horse unyoked and stabled for himself. He made inquiries for his nephew, and finding he had not arrived, "Come, then," he said, still with the air of a man forcing himself to act against his judgment; and we followed him along the street to the open close which

led to Blelach's printing office. In the shelter of it, he pulled us up.

"Mr. Cook," said he, "before we go in, I will be frank with you. It goes against the grain with me —Mr. David here will bear me out—to ask this favour of you. Yet I would have you believe that I am grateful."

I admired him for these words, for I knew what it cost him to speak them: remembering Rab's temper earlier in the day, however, I feared that they would inflame it afresh. But he was like a chameleon in his mood: it changed colour while you listened to him.

"I am greatly beholding to you, Mr. James," he said, with an amazing insolence of imitation. "I cannot say that my stomach was sharp-set for the errand. Mr. David here will bear me out."

"But it's a tough job," he added, straightening himself up, and leading the way down the close. You would have thought that it was because of its toughness that he undertook it—and it may be that it was so.

The office of the "Journal" had extended its boundaries with the extended burgh of St. Brise: the paper was growing with that which it fed upon. Doors knocked out in solid walls, and leading to abutting outhouses and sheds, were signs of prosperous increase. "Peuch! Blelach's risen in the world since I was here!" Rab said, looking about him. We entered the business offices, now unoccupied and unlighted, the main one a dark porch for the machine-room beyond. Over these Blelach had had a sanctum erected for himself—a structure of skirting-

board and tiles—up to which ran a wooden stair, scarce more than a fixed ladder.

It was the supper-hour when we arrived—"lousin' time," Rab said. The machine-room was lit by tall flames of gas from whistling burners. In a corner where an upright boiler was fixed, a group of men, drinking tea from mugs, sat in the ruddy glow of the furnace; from the bars of which drops of fire fell with a "phit-phit" among the ashes. The machine was stopped; the machine man was fixing tapes on the arrested flapping fin, and a boy sprawled on the feeding-board, half asleep, with his face in a "Boys of England." One old man compositor, with grey hair flying, and looking like a moulted bird, peck-pecked diligently at his case. The foreman, the clicker, with a harassed air, peddled back and forward with lines of type gripped between rigid thumb and fingers.

All this we saw through the glass partition of the innermost of the unlighted rooms into which Rab manœuvred us unobserved.

"You seem at home here, Rab?" said I.

"Like the man who knew the place mechanically, only by having got drunk there. . . . Now you gentlemen had better wait, while I go forward and reconnoitre. Possibly there will be no call for the reserves."

We sat down in the semi-darkness to wait. I could not see Mr. Clephane's face; but I knew instinctively that he was uneasy, and inclined to jib at the whole business. He would be difficult to handle.

We heard Rab mount the stair. A door was

thrown open, and voices came flying out, spreading through the ramshackle structure.

"Rab! Rab Cuick! what are you doing here? How are you, Rab?"

"The very best!"

("They at least seem not to have heard the news," I whispered.—"Do you know them?" James asked. —I named old Rolland, the lawyer, and Paul, a merry, clever fellow, who had missed his vocation in becoming a painter. I could distinguish their voices; but not Blelach's. Blelach had a voice like a silver bell.)

"Sit ye down, Rab," cried Paul. "Blelach will be back shortly. I'm in the seat of the scorner, in his absence. He's at the Harbour Commission himself."

"Then Treasurer Tommy Pendreigh's on his feet to-night, for a moral."

"Right! You know the compact, I see. Blelach reports him in full, and 'Slippery Tommy' gives him the town's printing."

"Perquisites of the Press," says Rab.

"Cabbage!" cried Rolland.

"The tailor has his cabbage and the weaver his sprunt, Mr. Rolland, and if I were to give a name to a lawyer's trimmings . . ."

"Huts! You two! What's your news, Rab?"

"What's yours, Mr. Paul? You seem to be in travail over that sheet o' paper. Can I help you out?"

"Blue."

"What! not lapsed?"

"Eternally."

"You don't say dead?"

"As Habbie Simpson. And Blelach wants an obituary. Any contributions?

Ken you ought o' Sailor Blue.
Igo and Ago,
Always sober when not fu',
Iram coram dago."

"Death has removed from our midst a well known . . . pair o' thoombs. . . . Well, he was a notable!"

"The last of the Town's Worthies! And what a collection they were!

High o'er the rest 'The Craw' and 'Schlatcher' stand;
'Hawkie' and 'Blue'—the last of that bright band!"

"His memory will long be cherished in the community because of the prodigality and helpfulness of his oaths."

"He died a reformed character, mind."

"Touching that: bring in the story of him and his wife Bess. You know it? In his post-reformation days he took to reading the Book aloud to Bess—a chapter a night. He was reading of Paul's shipwreck—the Apostle Paul. . . . *'The sailors deemed that they were nigh unto land.* . . . Deemed! . . . Ay! Bess,' said he, shutting the Book, 'They've aye been a coorse lot, sailors!' "

"Good! Rab," cried the painter, "good. But I'm not sure that Blelach would put it in. It might *offend!*"

"Blelach's not reforming in his old age, like

'Blue?' Taken to look after the people's morals, has he?" laughed Rab.

"Wiser than some folk, he has taken to looking after his own business."

"Hoch!" says Paul, "if that's one for me, Mr. Rolland, maybe all of us are getting over old for this kind o' nonsense. It's a good Fife proverb: 'Like Willie Jamieson, it tak's you to mind your ain brewst;' and I daursay I'd be better at home myself, 'tending the shop, and putting past for the bairns. A man should settle down with advancing years."

" 'Should' 's a fallacy," cries Rab, "but 'does' is a fact. As sure as the blood runs caulder, the interest gets callous. Then you've got to keep squeezing at the bottle o' sensation, if you're not to die o' thirst."

"Blelach's going to make shift wi' Tommy Pendreigh's bottle."

"How so?"

"Don't ask me for particulars. Blelach doesn't intrust me with his affairs; though he is glad enough to have my advice."

"No! no one ever got fat on Blelach."

"I wouldn't say no one. I fancy our friend 'Slippery Tommy' will come out right in the bargain. 'He can pick his lone,' as some one said. It's not for nothing that he gives Blelach the run of his cellar, and finances him in all these extensions. Tommy will be running for the provostship one of these days—a wink's as good as a nod; and the motto here now is: All things to all men—excepting to Tommy's enemies. So," recited Paul—

"The tide of blood in him
Hath proudly flowed in vanity till now;
Now doth it turn and ebb back to the sea,
Where it shall mingle with the state of floods
And flow henceforth in formal—*magistracy*.

In other words, Blelach's turned away his former self, like Prince Hal."

"Oh, that's none so easily done. Depend upon it, his former self is there still, though under a cloud for the moment. You'll see that, should ever things go against him again."

"You're a shrewd man, Rolland," cried Paul. "You know what Heine says—and it's stark truth, and has often frightened me—'For cruelty there's nothing to beat a back-going shopkeeper,' says he, or to that effect."

"Heine!" cried Rab; "I've read him out the Mechanics' Institute. He's a dandy!"

"And he might have said that for ingratitude there's nothing like a newspaper proprietor to his hired bravos."

"Poor Blue!" said Rab, with a note in his voice, by which I could tell he was strangely moved. "They're in a bad way who never get into a straight file wi' the ruck o' folk. . . . Gie Blue decent burial, Mr. Paul."

"Are you dropping a tear o' pity for yoursel'," asked Rolland with a sneer.

"They don't call you the 'Skunk' for nothing, Rolland," Rab said savagely.

("Hear the rascal!" said James: he was evidently in a suspense between delight in the novelty of the adventure and disgust at his own participation in it.

"Nay," I answered, "the other is the rascal—or *a* rascal, at any rate." I was fretting in a depression deeper than ever, because of the talk of these fellows; look where one would, it was a glimpse of the disillusionment of life that he received; the strain of divided duty; and in this dejection of spirit I found myself suddenly in closer sympathy, or a closer understanding at least, with Rab.

My voice was drowned by the "cla-clack" of the printing-machine resuming work. The sound seemed to cast down the scale of disgust in James. "You ought never to have brought me to this place," he cried. "There's nothing to be done here. Come away!"—"Hush," said I, and pulled him back. The outer door had opened, and two figures bustled through the unlighted porch. "May I hazard an observation?" said a smooth voice.—"That's Tommy Pendreigh," I whispered.—"What is he doing here?" James growled; "I've bought my wine of the fellow for thirty years!"—"And Blelach," I said again, as I heard his voice like a bell in the machine-room."

The printing-machine stopped at his command; the voices above reasserted themselves; and Blelach and Tommy mounted. There was a second's silence on their entry; then a quick step across the floor overhead, and a sound of feet and of a falling chair.)

"That's for your paragraph!" came Blelach's voice in cold anger. Blelach, I learned afterwards, had stood in the doorway for a moment, taken in surprise at the sight of Rab there; then, stepping up to him, aimed a blow at him with his clenched fist.

He was a siccar little man. Rab stepped aside out of reach, and stood with his back to the wall, a twisted laugh on his face.

"Social feeling, gentlemen, social feeling!" cried Tommy, with the instinct of his nature and calling; while Paul slipped in between them. We could hear the voice of the Treasurer patting the hubbub in soaped-pig manner.

When the tumult fell sufficiently for us to hear again, Blelach was reading aloud.—"Under District News: Town-of-Tarvit. Here it is! *Fashionable Intelligence. A waft of romance has floated over the heighs and howes of mid-Fife this week. The Love god* . . . and so on, and so on. *We cannot mention names, as the parties have not formally announced the event; but we may say that it reunites two families whose properties march. The lady is a daughter of one of the great political Houses in Fife, and the father of the happy man is one of the best known personages in the County.*"

("Patience!" I cried. James had leapt to his feet; but he sat down again, quelled by the despair in my voice. Light had broken on me: Rab must have sent on that paragraph this morning.)

"And now Saddler Fleming tells me at the Council meeting that it's his journeyman, David Cook, that has eloped with Miss Jenny Clephane. This night's post brought a letter from him, from Edinburgh. . . . They're on their way abroad. 'Properties march,' forsooth! 'Best known personages in the County!' "

"Well, he is my son—though I've disowned him," chirped Rab.

"Is it true?"—"Are they married?"—"Where have they gone to?"

"To the best of my belief, gentlemen, married," Rab answered them. "And, to quote the Rev. Mr. Bannerman, 'waontingly ro-aming o-over the fields of do-omestic bliss,'—whatever that may mean. Beyond that I ken no more than that paragraph tells you."

"If I may venture an observation, Mr. Blelach," said the Treasurer, sweetly, "I think you've been hox-ed."

"I print what I like in my paper," cried Blelach angrily.

"Ho! ho! if I may venture an observation," says Rab, "it's me that prints in it what I like."

"We'll see about that," cries Blelach, running down the stairs.

"This is a serious business, Treasurer."

"It's not libellous, do you say, Mr. Rolland?"

"T'ch! you never know. It may mean a lot o' money. Can I take your brief?"

"It must come out."

"But how?" said Paul. "It's in the inside sheet, and printed off."

"But it must come out."

"It's an awkward thing for you, Mr. Pendreigh, this rumour getting abroad that you are at the back o' the paper. It'll involve you."

"And, I happen to know, the Clephanes are taking this affair very badly," said Rab.

"Is it so? Is it so?" cried Tommy. "We maun find a way out o' this."

"Here he comes," says Rab. "Suggest to him to heat the poker, Treasurer."

"Well?" said Paul, as Blelach entered.

"The inside sheet's nearly printed off," he answered, in vexation.

"If I might hazard a suggestion, Mr. Blelach, how would it do to heat your poker?"

"That's an idea, Treasurer!"

"You daren't do it," laughed Rab.

"Daren't!" Blelach cried; and ran down the stairs again.

"It's a very wrong thing to do," said the Treasurer, unctuously, "to prent what will offend the feelings of decent folk."

"It is," said Rab. "By the way, Mr. Pendreigh, I've got a fine rub for your friends, the teetotallers."

"Yes!" says the Treasurer, eagerly. "Yes!"

"Poute. And Selcrig."

"Let's hear! Let's hear!"

"Give me a pen . . . no, no, take it down, Mr. Paul. *Unfortunate accident. As we go to press we hear that our townsmen, Messrs. Selcrig and Poute, met with a serious accident last night. They had been addressing a temperance meeting at Ord, and when driving home, on reaching the Brig of Ord, their gig capsized, and both gentlemen were thrown out. Happily no bones were broken. We understand that both gentlemen were sober at the time.*"

"Capital, Rab, capital!" cried Pendreigh. "We maun get that in. Now, let's go down and see."

They trooped down the ladder and into the machine-room, as Blelach, with a red-hot poker in his

hand, came running to the file at the tail of the printing-machine.

"Out of this!" cried James, making for the door.

"Yes, I think we may go," I said, following him up the close, and into the High Street, whither the smell of singeing paper followed us.

We had not gone many steps eastward when we were overtaken by Rab. I saw that he was all in a perspiration, and extraordinarily excited. "He's done it! He's done it!" he cried in glee—"You have done it, sir!" said James sternly, and with a far-sightedness that surprised me; "proclaimed it tenfold by this tomfoolery!"—"Mercy!" cried Rab. "I was so keen upon the doing of the thing that I clean forget my intention in doing it!"

James said nothing to impugn him, but stalked in front of us to the Sir Andrew, where we found Richard waiting for us impatiently. He had ridden to intercept us with the best of Mr. Trail's advice, which was to have as little as possible to do with Blelach; but his nag had fallen lame, and he had had to walk it into St. Brise, and stable for the night.

He drove home with us, therefore, sitting in front beside his uncle, while I got up behind with Rab. I did not require Mr. Clephane's looks to tell me that I had been tricked into making a mess of things. I knew it only too well. Yet, deeper than my resentment towards the Rascal, who sat silent and huddled beside me, was an impression of the day's events which fixed me in a kind of correspondence with him. I understood in a vague way that the defection of Blelach was a blow to him; I felt as if in my

own misery I could companion him; and he was quick to interpret my feeling, and, I think, to resent it.

"You owe me something for this night's work," he said.

"Oh! we heard," I answered. "You sent in that paragraph."

"It's the getting it out I mean. . . . There's not another man in Great Britain could have made Blelach do yon."

"You're a pair," I said, in the abandonment of misery.

"Not a pair!" he crowed. "Not a pair! There's only one of us. . . . He has *fallen,* as the theologians say."

"But *to* Grace," I snapped.

"Aye sharp, Dauvid!"

"Follow his example," I said again; but without fight.

"Never!" he crowed; "never! Do you know," he said, edging nearer me on the seat, and with the intensity of his arrogance startling me into a new conception of the man; "I think I'm one among ten thousand."

James dropped him at the Bowes corner without a word.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DESCENT OF PARABO.

It was in the small hours that we reached Nochty. Miss Riggs had sat up for our return,—as doubtless she would have done in any case; but now she ran into the hall to meet us.

"Hey!" she cried; "that's the daftest man that ever I set eyes on!"

"Parabo is here?" Richard asked.

"Here and awa'."

"Awa'!" we all cried in a breath.

"Ay, awa'!" Tony answered. "Oh! Don't ask me. . . . He came louping in from the gig, carrying a big bass fiddle that he wouldn't let Sandy handle,—he has scarce a scrap of luggage else that I can see. . . ."

"A 'cello, not a big bass!" corrected Richard, laughing.

"Very possibly; and not more likely to hold his linen than the other," Tony went on. "'Ah, Madame!' cries he, taking my hand, and kissing it. 'Ah, Mees Reegs, you are blessed in a charming locality.'

"'You haven't had much time to judge of it,' I said.

"'I judge from the leetle, and I will see more,' he answered. 'I will go back this night, and see her, and listen to her . . . divine!'

'At first I could not understand what he meant. 'He went on: 'I drive along in your carriage, be- e Sandé. The porter call him Sandé. There was room behind because of my 'cello. "I will sit th you, Sandé," I say, "and you will tell me all I nt to know." We come round by your beautiful od,—the Bous wood, Sandé say. . . . And there heard that voice in the moonlight, among the trees. Halt! Sandé!" I cry. "What is that sound, andé?"—"You need not be feared," Sandé reply; the mare, she sooks wind—she sooks wind," Sandé ay—"themare!". . . O! *MonDieu!* . . . Andall the time that voice! and he will not listen! . . . "It is not the mare," cry I; "it is Euterpe herself, and the stars are standing still at the sound of it. Listen!" cry I. "Is it the lassie singing in the wud?" say Sandé, and pointing with the whip. . . . What a picture! Against the silver smoke of the little firs, with limbs and breasts of a goddess, and hair of gold taking the uprising moon, and a song—Jesu! —such a song! . . . "Who is she, Sandé!" I cry. —"Rabcuickscharlotte," says he,—"Ah! Rabcuicks-charlotte!" I cry. "Cannot we wait?"—"No," say Sandé, and bring me here. . . .' But I will go back and see this Rabcuickscharlotte!"

"Ah!" Richard Clephane broke in upon Tony's recital, with an intensity most unusual in him; "I always thought Charlotte Cook had a fine quality of voice; and now Parabo says so, and he knows."

At his words my heart gave a great leap to my throat. It was Charlotte they were speaking of—my Charlotte in the Den. She herself had set up a barrier between her and me this afternoon. Ho! at

most it was a barrier erected between us on level ground, and I did not doubt that I could surmount it. All our days we had been playing this recurring game of breaking down and setting up. But now, with a flash of illumination, Richard's words warned me that she might be carried into a world whither I could not follow her; where she would be unattainable for me. If, since last night in the Den, my heart had proclaimed Richard my rival, truly I was not conscious of it. Now I knew him for my enemy.

I essayed to speak, but James, who was working to a conclusion more slowly with his wits, put up his hand upon my words, and turned to Tony.

"So Mr. Parabo has gone out again?" he asked.

"Hours syne," she answered. "He went up to his room to wash after his journey—if he had cut his hair 'twould be no ill done. 'Will we stand your fiddle in the boot-room?' I asked—'My feedle is my vife,' he says with a laugh; 'she go with me.'—'Then Sandy will carry it up for you,' I says.—'I am a jealous hosband,' he laughs again, and takes up his fiddle himself. When he came down he would scarce eat a bite.—'Sit down,' I said, 'Rab Cuick's daughter will keep, but your dinner will not.'—'Yes, Mees Reegs,' he says, 'but—' "

"That will do, that will do," said James. "What kind of man is this that you have brought to my house?" he asked, turning very sharp upon Richard. "That steals out at night,—the very first night he is here,—after some village girl?"

"Oh! Parabo's fiddle is his wife, and his sweet-

heart, too," says Richard. "He will not make love to Charlotte."

I gave a twitch of my hand at the easy words.

"Or I might be jealous myself," he continued, wonderfully enlarged from his reserve.

"You would do well to be jealous," James said, "for Charlotte Cook is a connection of your family. And, by Heaven!" he went on in a sudden white heat, "the honour of your family can bide with you, Richard Clephane, and a bonnie time it will have of it."

At this moment there was a footfall in the avenue outside, and when Tony opened the door Rab Cuick was already on the step.

"Miss Riggs, your humble servant!" he said, as his way was. "Ah! Mr. Clephane," he continued, turning to one and the other of us all in the hall, "—and Dauvid. You hadn't looked to see more of me this night?"

"Indeed I had not," said James Clephane, the anger full in his voice.

". . . But on the way home I met your guest a little hankled in the by-roads, and brought him back with me. . . . Don't shut the door, Miss Riggs, please, or you'll shut him out. He has just stepped to the garden end, to see the Lomond hills by moonlight. He appears to have a wonderful fancy for the beautiful; but, I am afraid, little taste for proper times and seasons."

By this, Richard Clephane was out in the garden, where we could hear him "Paraboing!" in the moonlight. Presently he came back with the truant. I do not remember that I have described Richard Cle-

phane to you. He was tall, and dark, yet something sparkling of visage; and he wore his hair close-cropped, and his black beard also cropped, and always neatly pointed. He had a straight and clean-shaped figure and leg, and the wear of his clothes was always easy; and the colour of his eyes I forget, if I ever knew it. He stepped into the hall, in his quiet, masked manner, a contrast to the little, gesticulating man on his arm. Parabo wore his hair long, as Tony had said; his face was clean-shaven; in contour almost hawk-like, in expression bland and happy; and his eyes were blue like a child's.

I observed all this in a flash, and Rab eyeing them curiously, and James and Tony exchanging glances. But James Clephane almost always had a courteous way with him; when courteous, the most so of any man I ever met, I think; and he welcomed Parabo before Richard could make a motion to introduce them.

"Come away in, Mr. Parabo," he said, as if it had still been elders' hours.

It was clear that Parabo, as Rab had said, made no account of time or season. He offered not a word about being out so late; but evidently this greeting touched him, and he shook Nochty's hand heartily.

"You are kind," he said. "And this lady—she minister to me in your absence."

"You maun pardon our seeming neglect," said James. "My nephew will have sent you word that, by an unexpected happening, you honour my house instead of his; the same business took us away to-night."

"Ah, yes! I have heard—your niece! Let me

felicitate you on the happy circumstance. And you, Richard, your sister! I congratulate you!"

"Shall we go in?" said the young man with ill-attempted gaiety, and a plain look of anger towards Rab. The wind came into that gentleman's cheek again with the glint in his eye, and his fingers of one hand beat the closed knuckles of the other.

"Ay, take Mr. Parabo in," said James; "go in all of you. I have a word with Mr. Rab Cook here. . . . Whose son," he continued, in accordance with his resolve, which, it was easy to see, was a duty much against the grain with him, "whose son, David, is—the happy man."

To the strife and play of eyes and words amongst us Parabo evidently was blind. He shook Rab warmly by the hand when Richard would have marched him off.

"We will meet again, Mr. Rabcuick," he says, "and continue your agreeable talk."

We passed into the dining-room, while James went forth with Rab. He accompanied him punctiliously to the Nochty march; I never knew what passed between them precisely; but when James joined us presently his face was in gloom.

It was in this manner that Parabo first made his descent upon us—for he paid more than one visit to Clephane during the next week or two. His coming into our midst was like the advent of a rare bird, or like something more wonderful still,—a new kind of weather (if such a thing can be imagined). I never judged him quite as a man; rather he was, as Tony Riggs always spoke of him, showing thereby that she did not dislike him, "that daft crater, Para-

boo." Expert extraordinary on the 'cello he doubtless was; for anything else on earth, so far as I could discover, the town natural was not more feckless. Fiddle, music,—that was his world. He had not a suspicion, I am certain, of the troubles, and the tragedies even, of those households into which he had come,—Nochty, Clephane, Rab Cuick's: never a thought or suspicion of any that he himself might bring into them. To the serious facts of life, such as the consequences of an elopement, he was oblivious. In more than one talk which I had with him, for example, I would have explained how much the discovery of the minerals, and the skilful development of them, meant to his young friend; but my instruction did not fall on receptive ears. He could not follow me, or did not; but wandered off on by-paths more to his fancy. And chief of these was one leading to the discovery of a musical genius in Richard Clephane—a discovery so fateful for us all.

For this rare creature,—a casual visitant you might say, just alighting at Clephane and away again, in his flight across Fife,—changed all our lives. Save for him, it may be thought, the intercourse between Clephane and the Bowes household would have slackened after Jenny's elopement. That is possible; it was Nochty's conviction, though I am far from sure. But at Parabo's account lies Richard's going off that winter to London, with a plan —a wild plan only unfolded to us by degrees when he was settled there—of giving himself to a musical life. Of Richard Clephane's talent I have gathered an opinion, but have no certain knowledge. Of his

ambition, I cannot say even now whether it was long-rooted or deep-rooted, or whether it was only a chance spark blown by Parabo into a flame. I had not heard of it before; none of us, unless it were in the Back Bowes, know of it now,—least of all James Clephane, to whom the understanding of it came a month or two later like a blow in the dark; but whatever its lineage, it was developing into a settled purpose during those brief visits of Parabo.

Therein he was the accidental instrument which slipped us on to new rails of destiny; and had that been his only influence upon us, I should not be so greatly at a loss to explain it. But it is as a rare bird, or a new kind of weather; as a glimpse of a new country; a burst of youth in the blood, a touch of spring in the heart, that I would picture it. To us it was like the sight of the outward-bound ship in the Firth to Charlotte's mother. . . . "To us" I ought not to say. To Charlotte he was that. My Charlotte was like a bird: free, wayward, innocent of ill; and so I think may Parabo have been,—free, wayward, innocent. On Charlotte, howsoever it was, he worked a miracle in the enlargement of her spirit; and mine followed hers, even when my footsteps followed Aunt Sarah's.

All this I see now; but at the time Parabo was only a puzzle, which even James Clephane, in a fashion partly quizzical, partly irascible, set himself to solve. At first his presence was a strain on Nochty's temper. Richard's acquaintance with him was in his eyes a thing discreditable; like Jenny's alliance with a Cook, which had wounded him to the quick: though, perhaps, it

served as an antidote for the relief of that wound. The entertainment of Parabo took young Richard's mind still further off the estate affairs, which were occupying James and me from morning to night. And at all times Richard's indifference to them fanned his uncle's smouldering wrath. This was a fine back-end. The winter had been open, and the spring only moderately dry; there were no frosts or floods to kill off the young broods, and the partridges were plentiful and strong on the wing early. It was hard that in such a year he should have to give up his shooting on some days for estate business which his nephew showed no interest in; and always when he and I, down in the Den, heard the crack! crack! of guns through the misty weather, he began to fret afresh at Richard.

Nevertheless, I could see that, against his will almost, James began to like Parabo. "He's very harmless, poor body," he would say to me. Once Richard overheard him, and gave a half-amused, half-contemptuous laugh.

"You are talking of one of the greatest 'cello players in Europe," he said.

"I'm talking of a man as I find him, though he is but a fiddler," James answered testily, taking the wind out of Richard's sails.

It certainly was not by his music that Parabo won Nochty's favour. I think it was because of his fearlessness with the animals about the place that James was first drawn to him. The dogs, chained or unchained, never showed their teeth to him. There was in the stables at Clephane a vicious kicking brute of a horse whom, on that account, they were

trying to get rid of; and when Parabo went up to it, it laid back its ears, and let him do with it what he liked. The cattle-man was full of the incident, and told James of it.

"Some people are like that with animals," he said to me, referring to this; "and I must confess that I never knew a bad man one of them. But what a life for a good man!"

I knew that he was puzzling over Parabo.

"I have heard it explained that it lies all in the eye," I said. "Beasts look in the eye, and if they see it clear and untroubled they can understand it, and are pacified. That's why children always manage them. But most folks when they grow up are so troubled by the cross-currents and meaning of life that they carry a cloudy eye; and animals, looking into it and seeing something wild and uneasy, get uneasy and wild themselves. Some again, among all the cross-currents that toss them about, are never anything else than children. Maybe this Parabo is one of them. Morality," I continued, wading deeper in my borrowed theme, and somewhat pleased with myself, "morality is a needful thing for most people, to keep them on the straight path; but it may be there is a better state that some are born to, which you cannot call moral, because it is above morality."

James had stood still to look at me while I was speaking.

"Humph!" he said, walking on again. "That's doubtful, dangerous doctrine, Mr. Shirra. Where did you pick up that?"

"I confess," I said, "that it was Rab Cuick who first—"

"Rab Cuick!" he cried hotly. "He would suck virtue out o' the things of life till they're like a wizened nut. You do not mistrust the man sufficiently, Mr. Shirra. I have noticed that. Let me counsel you, for I like you. His talk is to the moral nature like the letting of blood to the body. Do not encourage the rascal, even by listening to him."

Nochty spoke as my father used to speak. Strange, that Rab always angered plain, honest men! But in this case they did him an injustice. It was Charlotte, not Rab, to whom I had listened.

Parabo, too, paid James the compliment, which no man can resist, of being enraptured with his entertainment. He was simple, enjoying everything like a child! He had never lived on a farm in his life, and the sights and sounds of it were a constant delight to him. He had travelled all over the world, knew its most beautiful cities, had seen all its most gracious sights, and here he was—and who would not have been won by him because of it?—getting into a rapture with this corner of Fife, and especially with the Den, where the beech trees climb so serenely to the sky.

There was one day in particular when Parabo in this respect was irresistible. We had played truant from our work for a day's shooting. James and Richard and I were the guns, and were out on the rough country westwards from Nochty with a brace of spaniels. We had expected Parabo to join us; but Parabo, it appeared, would not shoot, never did —couldn't bear to touch such bonny, living things; and Richard, unknown to his uncle, handed him over in the morning to Rab Cuick for entertainment.

Mr. Clephane was in a furious rage with Richard when he heard of it, but the sport soon mollified him. The birds were plentiful: we found our first covey in the grassy road at Nochty, where they rose and whipped like a spread fan over the hedge, giving a difficult snap-shot, which only James succeeded in taking; and that put him into a good temper instantly. We worked round the rough ground by the river, James shooting splendidly, and the spaniels, for spaniels, retrieving more prettily than I ever saw these dogs do; and when we sat down at the burnside on Nochty's north field, and pulled out flask and luncheon and pipe, Mr. Clephane was as merry as a grig.

The sight of Parabo and Rab Cuick crossing the field to us came as a cloud on his spirits.

"I won't have that rascal with us!" he cried, and would have risen had not we smoothed him down; but he could not have escaped had he wished, for Parabo was running towards us in a whirlwind of delight, leaving Rab to step it demurely far behind.

"Oh! what a man! Rabcuick!" he cried.

The rascal had cast his spell over him. He had taken him through the Bowes, introducing him to all its strangest inhabitants, every fiddler in it and every droll, and Parabo was in an ecstasy. James turned his back to us, frowning, and giving no sign of recognition when Rab came up. Some berries, still dewy in the eye of the sun, on the opposite side of the burn caught Parabo's sight, and he was off to the bridge to cross for them.

"What a man!" I cried.

"It's all a matter of whiskers," said Rab.

"Whiskers!"

"Aye," said Rab; "in a manner of speech, whiskers. You ken how a cat crosses a table of glass and things in the dark, overturning none, feeling its way with its whiskers. So it is with us. We've got whiskers that keep us straight over the difficult and chancy places in life. Whiskers for things. Shrewdness we call it sometimes; sometimes just common sense. There's Mr. James, now: he'll be driving through a part of the country he was never in before and kent nothing about; but 'Fine land for green crops,' he'll say, instinctively hitting the truth. Or it might be a kittle thing, a speculation or an investment: 'I don't like the look of it,' he'll say, and behold! the bottom is knocked out of it before a year is passed. Or maybe he'll cast an eye on a countryside and say, 'A likely place for coal,' and, sure enough, there's coal for the boring."

James hitched on his seat on the bank, for it was known he never dreamed of coal on Nochty until Rab pointed it out.

"That's his whiskers," Rab continued. "Whiskers for things. Now, our friend Mr. Parabo there has whiskers with a more delicate feel—whiskers for the invisible. Carse and den and burnside for him have their ain intangible, spiritual meaning—a melody, a bonnie inspiration. . . ."

"But," I interrupted, "Rab"—for I was carried away again by the rascal's words—"you yourself see both—the out-crop and the bonnie tune."

"I maun ha'e a double set," cries Rab, with a snigger.

"Give that man short cuttings—short cuttings, sir," cries James, leaping to his feet and red in the face with anger. "I have warned you before. Have nothing in common with him."

"He cannot help himself," Rab's mocking voice followed us as James carried me off to the stables, while Richard went after Parabo. "He cannot help himself. I have my eye on him. He's beginning to sport a double set of his own."

James turned to look to me, and I grew hot under his eye. I was feeling myself for the truth of Rab's words; and something told me they were true.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLIGHT.

THE deep-winter months succeeding the elopement of David Cook with Jenny Clephane, and Richard Clephane's entry into the life of a gentleman fiddler (James Clephane's phrase), were a season of blossoming in my own business career. My uncle, Mr. Trail, was beginning to break up. He was not at the end of his tether yet—it was tough in the fibre; but racing up and down Fife had worn out his body, and his spirit was unable longer to sustain that mass of untended letters and correspondence which all my energies could not prevent growing weightier upon his desk. More and more of the business was passing on to my shoulders; and in a corresponding degree I was gaining the ear and confidence of our clients. I seemed suddenly to have unfolded and to flower in the community. If I was not assumed partner, it was simply because, as all the world knew, when the time came for Mr. Trail to take the rest in the churchyard which he never would give himself in his own chair, there was none save myself to enter upon his various activities.

It was a peaceful growing time in Clephane estate affairs also. The development of the minerals went forward smoothly; and the threatened encroachment of the railway on the estate was arrested, pending the hearing of the Bill in Committee. Of

the young owner of Clephane, meanwhile, I heard little. Communications between him and us were on business purely: letters and deeds, which Mr. Trail handed to me to read and attend to. I never quite knew his mind upon them. Sometimes he would throw them over to me in a birse; at other times he seemed to approve the lad's conduct. Richard addressed us at first from Burlington Street, or perhaps it was from off St. James's Square; the Jermyn Street address, at any rate, came later; and as frequently as not his letters were from other people's houses, written on paper with imposing crests. Such as were not replies to ours on formal business connected with the estate were concerned with the drawing of money for his personal needs. Evidently the "gentleman fiddler" was enjoying himself.

It was difficult to procure more definite information of how he was getting on. James Clephane, when he called at the office, or when I was with him at Nochty (as happened sometimes still), refused to open his lips on the subject. I wrote to our corresponding agents in London, a firm of solicitors, and I asked them to give me any news in a general way of a Mr. Richard Clephane, from our part, who was presently in the metropolis, and had some repute as a player on the violin; and after a time I received from them a few cuttings from a Society newspaper, which told me little to the point. Rab had news, and went about displaying a corner or fringe of it in his conversation; but always when I would have had him uncover further, he gave a twist and was off.

"He's doing as well as could be expected," he said. "He's doing fine. Enjoying himself immensely—immensely."

"You don't believe, then, that he will succeed?" I asked.

"Succeed? Oh! that's where you are? Well, he might."

"If he work."

"Work! What's work without the inspiration!"

"And cannot he get that?"

"Get it? Get it? It's like what Shakespeare says o' mercy. Inspiration, I tell you, is like a sweat; you cannot be sure of forcing it, and yet it will never come by waiting."

Or he would fall into a fascinating rant about music: "As subtle and fine as a waft o' wind in a hot sun," he would say; "or like the scent o' the woods. . . . Have you a nice nose, Dauvid?" And then, before you could follow his twist, he was standing off, laughing at you.

I had a conviction that Charlotte also had a knowledge of her own of Richard Clephane, though his name was never mentioned between us. If I am honest, I will confess that my visits to Nochty, few as they were, would have been made less often but for the excuse they gave me for calling upon Charlotte. I used to go over that estate in the Den, with my heart in my mouth at every turn, in the hope of seeing a face that never came to meet me. And when I went to the cottage, though the end of the song was beating in my heart, I could not sing it. I could not. There was one day in particular: in the garden Rab had hailed me in her presence with

mother," cheeped the parson's wife. "I remember in my young days all the men found something in her to talk about."

"She was a connection of yours, Mr. Shirra, was she not?" said the lawyer Leitch, once a clerk with Mr. Trail.

"A distant connection," I answered the fellow.

"That would account for your acquaintance with the daughter," said Edith to me. "I'm more curious than ever to see this Charlotte," she continued to her uncle.

"You shall, my dear. I want to see her again myself."

"Perhaps you haven't heard the very latest news of Rab Cuick?" he asked, addressing the table, which had turned to him with curiosity.

"It happened like this: Edith's father, you know —run on the Darling Downs—The very estate, I am told, where John MacArthur raised the first crop of wool sent home to the home market—Great judgment as a breeder, John MacArthur—Imported cashmeres, and bred from merinos bought from the Governor at the Cape. Just like that!—Brought new blood for his stock from England—Escurial breed, from George the Third's own flock at Kew.—First shipment of wool—what do you think? Two hundred and forty pounds! Two hundred and forty. And to-day? Nearly five millions—four hundred and eighty-six million, nothing, nothing, eight thousand, nine hundred and fifty-five pounds, to be precise—or was it nine hundred and forty-five? My memory's not what it was."

Edith recalled him to Rab Cuick.

reflections on my case; scarce to be distinguished—so slightly distorted were they—from those of some wise man determining my dilemma. And always, in his statement of it, there was a glance, aslant, at Edith Duncan in Fallowfield.

So engrossed, I missed the signs, which otherwise I must surely have detected, that things were not going well with the Back Bowes household. Rab was driving on the rocks at last; while I, in my selfishness, wondered only how much he knew of Richard Clephane, and fretted because Charlotte seemed posted in news of him, possibly by Richard himself. Revelation of the true state of matters came to me in the notice that a debtor's warrant had been issued against Rab; and then all Fife was laughing at another of the rascal's exploits.

It fell out through Poute, the sheriff's officer. I knew the man well—a great stoop of a Baptist Conventicle and a spouter of Radical doctrines: things, many thought, ill-becoming in a man holding a public office. He was of the order of busybodies in virtue—positive moralists much affected by vanity; and of course he was a teetotaller, which probably seemed to him so strange in a man in his position (as indeed it was) that he imagined all the world ought to have remarked it. Between him and Rab there had been several passages at arms; affairs of ordinary burgh humour; the last of them over the notice in the "Journal," on the occasion when Poute and Selcrig were tipped out of their gig at the Brig of Ord. The sheriff's officer had been ill-advised enough to attack Blelach in the public street for that report; and had come badly off with a "Well, you

were sober, were you not?" for answer; and this made him more than ever incensed against the rascal who, by first giving a malicious turn to the report of the accident (as everybody knew), was the fount of all the derision which he suffered in the matter.

It was with more than a professional eagerness, therefore, that Poute set out to put an indignity upon Rab by serving the warrant upon him. He hired a gig at the Bell Inn to drive him up to Bowes, taking with him as witness that old hunchback Baldy, whom I see always, as I have explained already, hanging from the scaffolding like a stable lantern. They reached the village in the quiet of the afternoon, and drove up to the garden gate of the Back Bowes cottage.

Whether Rab was expecting them or not, there is no telling. He had an instinct like a landrail for any one on his heels. He was in the front room, at any rate, with Charlotte when the gig stopped at the gate; and whether surprised by their appearance or not, was ready for them in a twinkling. Poute had jumped down, and had his hand on the latch of the gate when Charlotte caught sight of him.

"Some one calling," she said, for she did not know him.

"Mr. Poute from St. Brise," says Rab. "It's a sharp day for driving. Take him into the fire and bring out the mercies for him while I'm changing my clothes. He's a shy man, and will not be for taking it. But press him, press him. Make it a good stiff glass, for it maun be perishing in a gig."

So he said, and stepped, as Charlotte thought, upstairs. She flung open the door for Poute, and

answered his inquiry with the news that her father was at home, and would be down instanter. She brought him in and set him down by the fire. All very dignified and courteous, you may be sure. Then she fetched the bottle from the press and set it before Poute.

"None for me," says he, unctuously; but Charlotte, remembering only her father's instructions, pressed him, which sent the officer into a fit of virtuous indignation.

Suddenly there was a noise at the garden end, and behold! Rab had mounted the gig beside Hunchy Baldy; and taking the reins and laying the whip on the roan horse's back, was away along the west road as fast as the beast could carry him.

Poute swore and stamped, and denounced Charlotte as an accomplice; and by-and-by, thinking of action, was down at the Swan begging for a beast and a trap to pursue the runaways. But though he tried all the stables in the village, not a horse could he hire. Rab shook the reins and birled through the village merrily; and in a twinkling the folks seemed to understand the meaning of the sight, and they would not have spoiled the fun by letting out a horse, not for its sale price by the hour. By the time Poute had finished the round of refusals, Rab had pulled up in the middle of the Star Moss, a good seven miles away, and handed Hunchy Baldy the reins.

"Mister Baldy, sir," he says, jumping down, "we've had a great drive; but now I must be back home again. You know the road? Haud even, and you'll be at St. Brise before dark."

An hour later the farmer of Bramaird found Baldy trying to coax a horse out of a peat-bed, and he drove him into St. Brise, while Hunchy kept assuring him—

"Yes, sir, it was a trying experience, beyond a' doubt; but he's a diverting conversationalist, yon Rab Cuick!"

A night or two after this escapade of Rab, when the county was still full of it, there was a dinner party at Fallowfield. Edith Duncan's visit was coming to a end. Her uncle was loth to let her go: he could not hide that his hope had been fixed on finding some one to keep her in Fife near himself. In this, however, it seemed he was to be disappointed; and she was going to her Uncle Gerald in London for the season.

During dinner, of course, the story of the running away with the sheriff-officer's gig was retold. Edith looked down to me.

"This must be a dreadful person, this Rab Cyk or Cuck, or how do you call him?" she asked.

"A terrible man!" I said.

There was a laugh at my earnestness, and Edith attempted again to pronounce the rascal's name.

"But his son, who is in Queensland—him of whom Ted writes, uncle: he has a name that any one's tongue can manage? 'Cook,'—that's easy."

"And the father's name is easy too if you have a Scots tongue in your head. Say 'Cuick.' Just like that!"

"But—but," says Edith; "I don't understand. How comes the father to have a different name from his family."

"The father, you must know, is a very distinctive person, Miss Duncan," said Mr. Lindley, the English clergyman at the Earl of Anstruther's chapel, putting up his monocle and speaking across the table to Edith.

"There are a great many distinctive people in Fife, I find, Mr Lindley," Edith answered.

"Ho! ho! We're daft!" explained the jolly laird of Reres.

"And Rab's family are only plain cooks. Ha! ha!" said the parish minister of Tarvit,—a silly man.

"Not at all," said Ben Duncan. "Not at all. The daughter's not plain. A particularly handsome lass, I call her. And a clever and a good lass, too, I think. You shall see for yourself, as I promised you, Edith."

"A family honest but not distinctive," Lindley said across the table to Edith again. "Not the staple of Fife apparently."

"That's a challenge to you, Mr. David," said Edith to me laughing.

"They take after their mother—a superior woman, and very honest," I answered, nettled at the man's tone.

"Ah! You know them," Edith cried. "And do you know this fine girl Charlotte whom Uncle Ben is going to take me to call on? Perhaps you too, like him, are an admirer?"

"Yes, I know her," I said. . . . "Everybody here knows every other body," I went on, my face getting red under Edith's eyes.

"There was a story, some mystery, about the

mother," cheeped the parson's wife. "I remember in my young days all the men found something in her to talk about."

"She was a connection of yours, Mr. Shirra, was she not?" said the lawyer Leitch, once a clerk with Mr. Trail.

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"To be sure," he said. "Well, Edith's brother Ted has gone north. Queensland—sugar-planting. Fine place. Oh! I tell you the sun never sets on our house. This place of Ted's makes the thirteenth Fallowfield, all with Duncans in them, scattered here and there in all latitudes: not one of them, I'll warrant, but is grander and better-doing than these cauldrife acres here; yet, gentlemen, there's not a Duncan of them all that wouldn't sell his tomorrow to save this place from the hammer. It's from these bit biggins in the old country that this great Empire draws it spirit. Empire! Intelligent affection—that's the secret of Empire." He was at full gallop on his hobby now.—"When we take to acquiring territory, like the French and Germans, that we know not the name of on our post-marks, you may talk of decline and fall; but so long as in every square mile we add there's somebody thinks enough of us in auld Scotland to sit down and write to us, I'm not afraid. If only the clever, stupid bodies that manage the country could recognise the binding power that's in the sight of a kent post-mark, they would establish the penny post through the Empire, quick enough. Just like that!"

"In other words," said Edith laughing, "my brother Ted wrote me from Queensland. I got his letter this morning; and, as it was unstamped, uncle had to pay up double postage for it. And there was a message to him about this Rab Cuck or Cuk's son."

"David!" I cried.

"David, and his wife Jenny Clephane," Ben Duncan took up the story. "They've got out, and are settled in Brisbane, and likely to do well, he says.

'Tell Uncle Ben,' Ted wrote, 'that if he sees Jenny's uncle in Nochty, she would be remembered to him, and both David (who, by the way, seems an excellent fellow), and she are hoping that some day Charlotte will come out beside them.' I put Edith's letter in my pocket this morning, and rode round by the Bowes, thinking it a good excuse to have a laugh with Rab Cuick over this last escapade of his. I knocked at the door, and his lass opened it.—'My father is not at home,' she said.—'Well,' said I, 'if you're his daughter, it's you I've come to see. I've news of your brother David.' The lass was handsome, but with a scared and dead kind of face. Now, at mention of her brother's name, it lighted up like a fallen-in fire.—'He's doing well,' I said.—'Our David can't do ill,' answers she.—'Ah! he's married: that's crucial,' I said daffingly.—'He's got a good wife.' 'He *took* a good one,' answered I. Just like that! In three minutes I was on friendly terms with her. I took the letter from my pocket. 'From my nephew, Ted,' I said, 'and if you will ask me in on this cold day, I'll read something in it for you.' I could see that she hesitated for a minute; but she bade me come in, and I read the letter.—'Thank you,' she said, 'that's good news. Came you this length on purpose to tell me it?' I never saw a bonnier smile.—"Deed I did,' said I, 'and maybe I might ask for some refreshment before I start for home. Your father keeps a bottle, I've heard.' The smile went out of her face. She went white, white. I had quite forgotten how she pressed a dram on the teetotal Poute. But now I remembered. 'My dear,' I said, 'I've got a free and outspoken way, being al-

most a Colonial, though I bide at home, and accustomed more to Colonial ways than to our own. I've come to see you because I thought this bit of news would gladden you; and though I break it in a queer way, you'll be at no loss to understand it, if only you'll believe that did my heart speak in lucidity there would be no double meaning in my words.' I never saw a cleverer face.—'I believe it, sir, and I thank you,' answered she. 'And I will tell you also: some of us in the Bowes do queer things, and sometimes they look queerer than they would if folks had more discerning eyes.' Just like that! I tell you, I emptied my glass, and said good-bye to her, and came away as if her Gracious Majesty had been kind enough to ask after the whole family of Duncans by name."

"I must certainly see her ladyship," said Edith, rising; and the ladies retired.

"A clipping girl," Ben mused, as we sat up to his end of the table. "And her father's laid by the heels this time."

"Do you know, I'm rather afraid of it," said I.

"Oh! I ken it," he cried. "When I left his lass and got to the village, it was all clecking that one egg. The police came from St. Brise this morning and lifted him."

"Is that true?" I cried.

"As true as death," said Ben; and a great cloud fell on my spirit.

Charlotte and Rab—between the two my heart was torn. The conversation wandered away to other matters, and I sat there scarce following it. The thoughts in my mind were all of pity for Charlotte,

the right of harbouring which supported me in a happy resolution. Then they would come back to Rab, a never-failing jest; and my resolution sank under that terrible indignity.

To-morrow I was due in St. Brise, at a meeting of Road Trustees; and I would go to Rab and offer myself for legal aid. And on my way to St. Brise I would go round by the Bowes, and inform Charlotte of my intention. She would know the value of my help, and it would comfort her.

I was glad to get away from Fallowfield. All night I lay tossing, with Charlotte's anxiety in my mind; waiting impatiently for the day.

Next forenoon I left my trap at the end of the Nochty road, to walk to the Back Bowes cottage under less curious observation, for Charlotte's sake; and told the coachman to pick me up later at the Bowes corner. Charlotte answered my knock, and stood in the doorway when we had shaken hands. She did not bid me enter. Her face was very pale; the skin white and very clear.

"I have heard of your misfortune," I said. "I am now on my way to St. Brise, and I came round this way to say that I am going to see your father. He will need legal advice."

"I thought it would ease your mind," I said clumsily—for her silence disconcerted me. "He never valued my advice very highly, and may refuse it now; but if he will have it, it is his, welcomely—for your sake and your brother's, welcomely."

"It is very kind of you," she answered, somewhat scornfully, I could not miss.

"Oh, Charlotte!" I cried, chagrined and pitiful.

"We are friends, . . . cousins. You did not doubt that you could count on me."

She looked at me, startled. What invisible hand plays upon our mood, stopping it to bygone airs. I was a boy again in that High Street house, swept by this same emotion; and "I am proud to be your cousin," I burst out. I saw her blood mount like the rosy flush of dawn, and she turned in the doorway in a paroxysm of tears.

"Charlotte!" I cried, "bid me come in. You must not stay here, crying so."

I put a hand upon her shoulder and urged her in. She resisted my pressure for a minute only, and then let me enter the kitchen with her.

"What is it, Charlotte?" I asked. "What ails you? What have I said?"

I could scarce speak, in my tumult of pity and love.

"It's nothing—nothing," she said out of her tears.

"I was a boy," said I; for I remembered, and sought to reason my own mood. "I meant no hurt to her then, and none to you now."

"Nay! nay!" she said. "She valued it, above all."

"And you?" I cried. "Oh, Charlotte!——"

She interrupted me suddenly.

"Must I appear at the trial? Must I go into the witness-box? I will not; I will not. Was it not enough that she did it once? My God, I will not!"

What she meant I did not know exactly; yet there is an insight greater than understanding, and it came to me now. I took her hands and drew her to me. She was nearly mine. I would have drawn her to

me, and bade her come out from the yoke of her mother's history and live her life with me. I think she would have come.

There was a sound of clattering hoofs, and Edith Duncan flashed past the window, her uncle after her, and I could hear their voices in the garden.

I drew back into the recess of the kitchen.

"Do not ask them in," I said to Charlotte.

A fire burned in her face, and, like the sun in the heavens, dispelled the rain-clouds in it.

I heard her greeting to the visitors.

"This is my niece, Edith, Miss Cook," came Ben Duncan's voice. "Daughter of my brother—Alick—run on the Darling Downs, you know—same estate, by Jove! as John MacArthur raised the first crop of wo——"

"You must excuse my uncle's abruptness," Edith interrupted. "He comes too quickly to the point."

I could hear her laugh: I knew how her face twinkled when she laughed.

"It was my brother Ted," she continued, "who sent the good news of your brother and his wife. They are neighbours of his, as neighbours go in our country. When I return to Australia, I'll be visiting him, and I would like to tell your brother that I had met you, and maybe carry a message from you to him."

It was prettily, tactfully done; yet I knew from Charlotte's "Thank you: it is kind of you," that it failed to please her. There was silence for a few seconds. Edith spoke no more. Ben Duncan seemed to feel that Charlotte was not supporting the character he had given her. He attempted to incite her to retort.

"Miss Cook might be out with the news before you, Edith," said he.

"There's more than one young man eager to keep her here," he nodded to Charlotte; "or you might be carried off—keep up the traditions of your family."

"Wonderful thing," he continued, taking shelter from her silence in his favourite subject. "Empire gets wider every day—every day brought nearer. —You here.—Me here. My brother yonder.—Your brother yonder. Edith plays hop, skip, and leap between the two—a bridge over half the world.—Just like that!"

He bent his riding-whip into an arch. "We—them—Edith so."

Still Charlotte held her tongue, waiting upon them in a chilly silence. I heard their good-byes, Charlotte's level and quiet; then the sound of the horses in a trot.

Charlotte come into the kitchen beside me again.

"Who is that?" she asked.

"You know, do you not?" I answered. "Mr. Duncan."

"The girl!"

"That," I said, like one seeking to rebut an accusation—I know not what—with a jest. "That is 'the girl in Fallowfield.'"

"I do not think she saw you," she said, with ineffable scorn.

"Charlotte!" I besought.

But she had turned aside and stooped to look from out the low window. My eye, following hers, saw the flying figures focus in one of the small panes

before they vanished round the bend of the road to Tarvit.

"I think you can get away now without their seeing you," she said next.

"Charlotte, Charlotte!" I cried; but she was gone, leaving me to show myself out.

Torn with resentment and humiliation, I walked to my trap, and drove away to St. Brise. Charlotte was cruel. Too proud and disdainful. She had not shone beside Edith Duncan. Edith's temper was reasonable, level, sympathetic. There was something of a felicitous ripeness about her. . . .

We were nearing the edge of the plateau of Fife where it dips to the sea. A winter sun sparkled in the sky behind us, and shot the grey Firth with streaks of pearl. A midday stillness lay around us; in the shadow of the hillocks in the hilly grass-fields the raindrops hung poised upon the blades, so windless was it; the sea-gulls dipped and rose gently towards the sea; as we drove by them, the little birds clustered in the hedges shot through the air in the cold sunlight with a circular flash. Away in front of us, out of the deep square of russet and purple leafless wood, rose the brown roofs and towers of Stenton mansion; a thin clear shaft of smoke standing up from them was lost where the sky dipped to the sea. With such a home accorded Edith in my mind—gracious, orderly, mellow. Such a home might be mine, with her. Trees, roofs, the grey and rugged sea, were like an old piece of Gothic—strong, gracious, with the same crumbled and virtuous skin of age. Edith!

Over the lip of the plateau we descended upon

the shore. A wind blew in our faces steadily, without a gust. Between the tree-clumps I caught sight of the sea swelling in a fluid lump, with white embroider between the rocks, unbrokenly, as if the tidal influence had been arrested for a time. Beyond the rocks it lay in large patterns of green, shot with myriad shades of blue and purple and yellow. Above it westwards, great flocks of gulls, screaming and chattering, hung over a darker streak that stretched from St. Brise. The roofs of the town clustered in a cloud of coppery smoke. There was strenuous life —work, competition, poverty, the damnable corrosion of mean endeavour. That spire, beyond the church-tower, on which the gilded weathercock glistened constant, rose above the jail where the rascal Rab was now lying. The rascal! And Charlotte, in her misery, unlovely and ungracious.

My mind rose in violent revolt. It was foolish, unwise, unworthy: yet I had to grip the side of the dog-cart to keep me from rising and calling it aloud as we drove through the town. "Oh! cruel and unwarrantable Fortune! that in the struggle of living, of dutiful living, the one and only life given to man in all eternity, humbles the bravest spirit, demeans the proudest self-respect, involves the simplest mind, blanches, sears, disfigures the bravest beauty of mind and body!" St. Brise High Street as we jolted through it was jammed with traffic. Carriers' carts stood piled, the dogs beneath them stretching on their chain to see the sky above the load. White aprons twinkled in and out of the doorways. Women, baskets in hand, did their shopping, fingering here and there, and coming out to the pavement

to hold some fabric to the light. The fanners beat upon the ears as we passed the mill, with its open windows clagged with fluff; the smell of yarn was in the throat. The rattle of a crane followed us along the street from the harbour. Public-house doors swung upon the slouching shoulders of the loafers. Farmers stood in groups in front of the Town House: here with noses deep in a sample of grain; there, hands in pocket, poised on their heels, throwing back red mouths to the sun at a jest. "The world is mad!" I could have shouted. "There is sky and sea and green and ripe-smelling land; there is a sun and fresh wind; grain and fruit and fish in the sea and the wild game; to each man his own honest labour and sweat and happiness; a whole world to live upon, yet in the mean and filthy burrows of our own construction we grovel and fight!"

In that foolish passion I got down at the National stables, and without a word in answer to passing greetings in the market stepped to the police-office below the Town Hall. Little Messum, the jail officer, with a cock of the head and whiskers and a lithe step like a mouser, met me with a laugh in his green eyes. "Rab had been before the magistrates this morning already, and was remanded. He hadn't been taken back to the cell yet. No. He was in the charge-room now."

The sibilation of laughter reached me as I went down the stairs to it. A roaring fire burned in the grate, and sprawling about it were half-a-dozen policemen, Rab in their midst. They lay back in a guffaw. One on a bench in the corner spluttered with laughter into a cog of porridge.

They lumbered to attention as I entered, and Rab come forward to meet me with an easy "Mr. Dauvid!" on his lips.

"My legal adviser," he said gravely to the policemen, who fell to different duties, and he led me into an empty corner by the fire.

"I was just passing the time giving these gentlemen some of my early recollections of St. Brise jail," he said. "In my young day it stood on the other side of the street, and had a window handy on the market, through which criminal persons could speak a word with their friends outside. There was just one jailer, Molly Laurie,—one woman to do what it takes all these strapping gentlemen to accomplish. Yet they say we progress! A tinny always hung out to the passers-by, and when it contained the price of a mutchkin, Molly went round to Tammie Bain's for it. Did you ever hear of Martin Boyd the smuggler—long before our day, of course—who was always clapped in jail whenever a smuggling smack was expected, and went like a lamb; and in the night he took a stanchion from the window and was at the landing of the cargo, and back again before morning, and was discharged with an official *alibi* to his credit? I've heard——"

"Rab," I said, only now able to master myself, "I did not come here to hear these stories."

"I am sorry, being only a guest myself, that I cannot offer you entertainment more to your mind."

"Listen to me," I cried. "You're here for obstructing the sheriff's officer."

"Worse than that," he answers. "I thought you were a cleverer lawyer—here for stealing a horse *and gig*."

"You are here on a criminal charge," I went on, not heeding him, "and I am here to offer my services to defend you against it. I came round by the Bowes this morning to promise Charlotte that. I left her—I believe I left her with her heart broken wi' the shame of this."

"And yet I hear all Fife's laughing at the fun of it. I'll warrant you laughed yourself—God's sake! if you could have seen Poute's face.—Not that I saw it; but I can imagine it. Imagine it! I can *be* Poute for the nonce. . . . There's an argument in my defence, Mr. Shirra, Poute's face,—for I accept your services with gratitude; the more, that I know their value. With your standing and repute, I'd force the siccarest judge in Fife to own it was no more than a diverting escapade. Man—take a note o' this for your use—to convict me would be to put a premium on dulness of wits."

"Humph!" said I; "you were born a century or two before your time."

"After my time," cries Rab, eagerly. "After my time. Here's the proof of it; I have to explain myself. I'm Romance with a pin in my hand, compelled to prick my own bubble."

"You are," I said, as I left the jail, "the damnedest rascal unhanged."

There was nothing more to be done that day. My meeting over, I drove back to Tarvit, and on Monday morning rode over to the Bowes to hear from Charlotte's lips the circumstances of Rab's exploit. When I reached the cottage the windows were barred, the door was locked. Charlotte was gone!

PART IV

THE CONQUEST

CHAPTER XX.

LOST.

CHARLOTTE was gone: whither, none of us knew for certain, and none save myself, after the first wonder of it, greatly cared.

I learned that she had received a letter from her brother David. It contained money, a good round sum of money, part of which (although this I did not know then) Charlotte left, addressed to her father, in his desk; from where, in exchange, she carried off a patch-box with a bundle of letters, papers, and odd trifles belonging to her mother. It was taken for granted, therefore, that Charlotte was gone to her brother. I myself believed she was. Rab professed to believe it. When the Rascal's trial came on, the fiscal mentioned that one of his chief witnesses, the prisoner's daughter, had left the neighbourhood,—it was understood for Australia; and the Bailies, not being particularly anxious perhaps to lay my entertaining client by the heels, dismissed him with an admonition.

This was all a nine days' wonder on the wagging

tongues of the county; then it took wings and floated away. With me only it remained, burned into my heart. Never a day that Charlotte was not in my thoughts. Never a morning dawned but I awoke to the sense of loss, the sense of what I had allowed myself to lose.

So the bud of spring blossomed into the flower of summer; and then there came the scandalous rumour, the damnable lie, that set the country tongues wagging afresh, and the blood in my heart on fire.

The rumour was brought to us in a fiery cross manner by James Clephane.

With the warmer weather, life had flickered up again in Mr. Trail. Auld Nick, Rab Cuick said, had just given him a squeeze between the thumb-nails, by way of a reminder. He had, indeed, let him go for the minute only. The spunky man took to his country-louping afresh; but this was his last kick. One night, coming off the train, he called in upon me at Roselea (so the house was called that I had built for myself) to talk over business, and particularly over the Clephane railway bill, which was due for a hearing in a few days. We were sitting over a glass of port by my window, which was flung open upon my little bit of lawn, with the flower-beds and vinery and hothouses,—all signs of my successful doing that I, poor fool, was still so proud of. The gloaming had fallen; the white night-moths were wheeling about us, attracted by the lamp standing on the sideboard in the depth of the room, and we were conversing somnolently. Suddenly Mr. Trail stopped me in the middle of a sentence with a *prise* of snuff on the way to his nose.

"That's James Clephane's trot," he said, brightening, and cocking his ear to the road. "It's an odd time for him to be riding out. . . . And birsy, too, I can tell by the going."

We sat listening for the peddle of the mare which his ear had detected. It had ceased; and before we could fall to talk again, James Clephane came round by the house-end, and stepped across the flower-beds to us in the window.

"I never saw a man like you, Michael Trail," he began, in a high-pitched, excited voice, "never. How you managed to make a business beats my comprehension. You keep your clients flying after you all round the coast, and the last place they'll look for you is in your own office, if they are wise men."

"Which evidently some of them are not, else they wouldn't be coming away disappointed from it now," Mr. Trail answered. "What have you done wi' the mare?"

"Come round to the front door, and I will let you in, Mr. James," I said. "Then you will speak with Mr. Trail better than out there."

"I'm fine where I am," he answered brusquely. "The mare's at the gate, and I'm off. But first tell me between you,—Where's that—that lass, that Rascal Rab Cuick's daughter, Charlotte Cook?"

My heart was a ball in my throat.

"You don't know!" he cried. "Neither one nor other of you knows, though I pay you well to mind my business. But I will tell you."

It came to me that he had had ill news of Charlotte; that maybe she had been on a ship that had

gone done; and I was blurting out my anxiety, forgetting to be prudent, when he silenced me.

"I'll tell you—for you, Mr. Shirra, ken nothing about it," he cried. "She's in London—in London, with that fiddling nephew of mine, Richard Clephane."

He stood there, among my flowers, cracking his finger and thumb in the air, and with a passion of anger and triumph glowing in his white face,—a grotesque figure, telling his tale to me!

Mr. Trail, still seated, gave a little low cough and looked at me askance; and that brought me to my senses.

"For any sake, Mr. Clephane, speak lower!" I cried. "There may be folks about."

"So you believe it, do you? you believe it?" James Clephane cried, jumping about from side to side by the window. "And you sit there, the two of you, like a pair of—— Bah! You, Mr. Trail, who are so fond of the road, why are you not away wi' the night-mail to London to stop this disgrace if you can? God! Jenny was bad enough, but this is harlotry."

Mr. Trail gave me a look that commanded me to be silent.

"Where had you all this, Mr. James?" he asked Nochty quietly.

"Coming home from St. Brise to-night. I met Fallowfield, and rode the length of his place with him."

He had begun his explanation in a subdued tone, in harmony with Mr. Trail's; but his temper was not proof against the recollection.

"That feather-gull old wife,—him and his Colonies," he broke out. " 'Heard from Edith'—so he hailed me—'Edith, you know—brother Alick, Darling Downs.—Staying with her Uncle Gerald up in London—my brother Gerald, General Gerald, you know—Mutiny—Lieutenant at Kolapore—ought to have had his V.C., but didn't—Retired ten years ago—Great man among the Y.M.—what-d'ye-call-'em—Preaches, addresses, Exeter Hall, you know—fine voice—always had—we used to call him Lammerlaws because of his voice—old story of my father's—Lammerlaws a farmer in the Howe—voice like a fish-crier—used to bawl his orders from the stack-yard to his workers i' the field—just to bother him they would pretend his voice didn't carry their length—then you could hear him across half Fife asking himself if ever sic a set o' deaf——! Ha! Lammerlaws Duncan 'll make a London congregation keep awake, I'll bet. Preaching? Man, you should hear him tell how they blew the black men from the guns i' the Mutiny!' . . .

"Huts," continued Nochty, breaking in upon his own recital. "I mind Gerald Duncan fine—dafter than Ben!"

"Ay!" said Mr. Trail, to help him in his explanation.

"Well, I rode with him to Fallowfield east lodge, where we parted, and glad I was to be rid of his rusty clapper on such a fine night; but when I reached the west lodge he was coming tearing down the avenue to intercept me. 'Clean forgot what I had to tell you,' he was shouting. 'Edith's letter—went out of my mind.—Just like that!' . . .

"His news won't go so quickly out of my mind," Nochty added on a lower note, half to himself. Now that I am able to think of it quietly, I can be sorry for him. Edith Duncan, it seemed, had met Richard once or twice, and once at least saw him and Charlotte—"that girl in the Den"—driving together.

"Pooh! Pooh!" said Mr. Trail; and I, all amazed and stunned, "Charlotte in London!"

"Ben Duncan's a gabble," Mr. Trail went on, pausing to rest a second's inquisitive look upon me. "And he's not alone in that! . . . There's nothing remarkable in her being in London, or in the two young people, meeting there, being friendly. Two —in a manner—you must remember——"

"Do you think I am likely to forget it! Related? I couldn't prevent Fallowfield reminding me of that. . . . But surely I can buy silence about it in my agent!"

He fired that at us before disappearing round the house. Mr. Trail was taking up snuff violently. In a second Nochty was back, speaking over the window-sill,—

"You'll see that this goes no further! I have Fallowfield's word for silence. He's a gentleman!" and again he was gone.

"You hear that, Mr. Shirra!" said Mr. Trail, and double-rapped his ricochet shot home on his snuff-mull.

Thus a lie was conceived and was born and lived; and it lives—it lives still, I know, besmirching as white and delicate a soul as ever harboured in a woman. It is true that my Charlotte was in Lon-

don; true that they saw her there with Richard Clephane, as they said. She herself has told me all, and I will tell you some of it. That is why I am writing this history—to tell you some of it. Her story flows as pure as her mother's milk. There are many who smile at me. I know them! You must know their kind. Why did she run away from the Bowes and to London? these ask, and wink and shake their heads. I might say that she went off so that the chief evidence of her father's guilt should be removed; but I do not say that. Charlotte, I believe, never thought of that. She was Rab's daughter, and it was from Rab's disgrace she ran away. Her brother David turned his back upon it; and nobody blames David for that. For years Rab had lain upon her nature like a weight of snow; now that the sun shone upon her she burst into a maturity. I know her now, and can read her in the light of knowledge.

She was true daughter of Rab, and true daughter of the romantic and original woman, her mother, the elder Charlotte: and she had a craning neck for the world, like Rab, with a dream, like her mother, of the Happy Islands. The romance of the world called her as the ship's horn in the Firth called these sailor lads from their farms in the heart of Fife. . . . It was Richard who called her? Richard Clephane was the spring of that romance?—There are some eyes for whom the opal of a woman's heart gleams only with amorous fire. . . . And if it were Richard Clephane whom she heard calling, whose was the wrong? I know this: I was mute when he called to her listening ear; and his uncle railed as he did, and Mr. Trail laughed, and the country-side gabbled

its scandal; and I, who loved her, did not rise and throttle the scandal, but clung to my business and my flower-beds and my mean ambitions.

Charlotte has told me (or I have learned from her, at any rate) how: on that morning she arrived at King's Cross, having put her box in the cloak-room, and washed away the stains of her journey, and breakfasted at the cold slab of the refreshment-room; she went out to seek a lodging in the great world of London. The sense of being away from the Bowes; of being able to look out upon the world with open eyes, without having to avert them sickeningly at the recollections which life with Rab brought constantly to mind; and the exhilaration of her first long journey, strung her nature to the highest pitch. She suffered no fear. For her—for all that family—the troubles of everyday living hitherto had been mainly those which could have been averted easily by common prudence, and by those shifts which their neighbours contrived to make; and so she stepped out on her new life with something like contempt for the troubles that might meet her there. I think she was just a little daft, as we all are daft at our best and happiest moments. If alarm ever assailed her, Richard Clephane was here. He lived in Jermyn Street: the number, she had observed, the first time he wrote her from that address, was the number of David's old master's shop in the High Street of St. Brise; so she could not forget it. She could not have forgotten it, whatever it was: she had heard it whispered by the tall Den trees through the dark nights of winter,—those trees that have

whispered Charlotte's name to me a thousand times. She would not go to Richard immediately. Before she wrote to him or told him she was here, she would find a situation and a roof of her own: that was her plan. But the fact of his being here gave her a sense of security—such as the lights of a known port must fill the mariner with who sails past them down the coast. So she stepped into the Euston Road, all fearless. It is the world's wonder that the brave hearts of women can ride so serenely at unsafe anchorages! My Charlotte was brave.

She turned her steps, fearing nothing, westwards along the Euston Road. We traced her route, on a later day, she and I, very happy, hand-in-hand, like very happy London lovers. She was too happy in her present self, I thank God, to be thrilled with any recollection. Yet on that later day she confessed to me that the road held none of the glamours which it did that morning of her arrival; when the wine of novelty was in her head; and the squares with their bits of trees looked like wonderland, and the tall white church-spire of St. Pancras glistening in the winter sun brought to her eyes great buildings she had seen in pictures; and she rambled through the gardens and squares and side-streets, and into the very slums, delighting in all this variety of estate.

Towards Portland Road, I think it is, there is a section of street full of gravestones and chimney-pots. All the sculptors and plumbers in London seemed to be gathered here; even as—it flashed on her—in our young day all the shoemakers in Fife seemed to harbour in the Bowes. It was this sudden flame of association in this dreary waste, I can see,

that first discovered for her that she was a stranger in this great place, as yet without a lodging; and then she told me, in the reflux of laughter, about the policeman whom she had met a little farther on, and we went along the Marylebone Road, laughing, to see if we should meet him again. She had seen the name Marylebone Road printed up, and that recalled to her the only address in London, save Richard Clephane's, which she had ever known; and that was David Baxter's. This Baxter was a Bowes man, long settled in Marylebone, and he and his family were the last people she wished to meet then, but the thought of seeing them fascinated her; and she stepped up to this policeman, and asked to be directed to David Baxter, the baker's. It was in Marylebone, she said: she pronounced it Mary-la-bonne, pleased with some beauty in that original form, as she imagined it (wrongly, I daresay) to be. The man shook his red head, and she had to repeat her question.

"Murrlybone! Murrlybone's an unco big place," he answered, still shaking his head; "and there's a routh o' bakers intil't.

"But I'm only poorly acquaint' with it as yet," he went on; and when she thanked him, and would have stepped upon her way again,—

"I'm thinking," he said, "you come from the same quarter as mysel', lassie?"

"Oh, do I?" she answered with a little flutter,—and now she noticed how unfamiliar was all the speech about her. "Do I? I come from Fife."

"And I come from 'e Carse," said he,—"and I wuss I were back intil't. Woman, this place gangs

like St. Dunning's feeing-market, day and nicht, all the year round."

On his red, raw face, which carried her back to the Bowes fields, the alien sat so clearly that she felt a pity for him.

"Is it so bad?" she asked.

"Bad!" he said; "I haven't tasted good brose sin' I entered it. Woman, they haven't the meal!"

This was the story Charlotte told me, laughing. We did not meet its hero in the Marylebone Road on that later day—we had only pretended to think we might; yet, strange to say, a night later we ran across him on duty at Baker Street. Or, rather, he recognised Charlotte, and hastened to her.

"Yon's the lad!" he cried.

"Who?" asked Charlotte in surprise.

"Mr. Baxter, your friend. He keeps the real Kilmarnock! As good meal as ever I got in Inchture."

"Then you are not away back in the Carse?" said Charlotte, struggling with laughter.

"No," he answered, "no. I'm reconciled to it. Ho! the place is no' that bad. So long as a body gets his proper meat, he'll get used to anything."

Charlotte hung closer on my arm as we went away, and her laugh trembled on her lips. "Some folk find life easy, David," she said.

After her meeting the policeman from the Carse in the Marylebone Road on that day of her arrival, Charlotte turned into some side-streets and wandered, her eyes never without a feast of wonders.

She was arrested before an archway, on the side of the street opposite from her, which gave upon a

courtyard. Its wooden gates were flung back, discovering two men upon a cart pitching hay into a loft. The sharp and frosty sun bit into the floor and walls of the yard, chequered with the shadows of chimneys and eaves; and it fell with a pale brilliance on the yellow load, and illumined the figures of the men working with it; the whole picture framed by the gateway having a crystal quality against the dark and shadowed line of the street. She stood upon the kerb, consciously refreshed by the sight. At a sound on her ear it vanished. Two men were passing behind her. One of them was speaking; about canaries, she was aware—about a mule bird he had gone to Chipping Norton to see; and he spoke with a tang and a persuasive intonation that brought St. Brise and set it down in Marylebone. Instinctively she followed the speaker, a little, trotting, punchinello man, with swinging arms, and a spring off his toes that lifted the tails of his shiny black surtout an inch or two higher on his dusty trousers at each step. It was David Baxter, the baker. She recognised him at once. It did not seem to her unnatural to see him here.

Following him at a distance, she saw him part with his companion, and turn into Crawford Street, and presently disappear into a corner shop, which, she observed, bore his name above the doorway. The shop had a little old-fashioned flat-bay window, into which she peeped cautiously. A low red blind was stretched across it at the back; in front, and stood against the glass, were caraway biscuits and penny-ladies and gingerbread-men, just as in the baker's shop on the causeway of the Bowes. She noticed,

too, that as in the very oldest shops she could remember in St. Brise or Town of Tarvit, the counter ran round the outer—the street—walls of the shop. At the back, separated by a partition with a panel of glass in it, was some kind of living-room. A red baize curtain fell over the glass panel also; and hanging beside it on the partition wall was an almanac, with a portrait of Queen Victoria, and the inscription "Charles Bonthrone, grocer, Back Bowes," printed upon it: the neighbour of the almanac that hung beside the fireplace in her own kitchen in the Back Bowes!

She had a sudden, fierce vision of the Back Bowes cottage as she had left it; as it stood there, left by her! The key was turned in the lock, on the outside. As a matter of fact, she had hid the key where she and Rab always hid it for each other, in the worn groove on the flags under the coal-house door. But in this picture of the cottage, deep-bitten on her inward eye, the key stood in the lock; its polished oval handle out of all proportion, large and glistening in a winter morning's sun; in its aggressive violation of the mere physical truth, marvellously interpretative of the spirit,—the resolve, animating her in that moment of leaving, to turn her back upon it all.

Out of this momentary absorption she was recalled by a movement within the field framed by the window, from which she had turned her eye inward upon that vision. The baker had come into his shop from the room at the back. Quick as a trout's shadow her mind darted from this man associated with her past to the intention of cutting herself off

from the past which underlay her flight. She hurried away down the street, laughing at her own fear; knowing well enough that he would not recognise her even if he had caught sight of her; yet hurrying away. She felt suddenly tired and faint. She was hungry, and the smell from the bakery made her feel faint.

But when she had eaten, and stepped refreshed into the streets again, the morning's sense of the wonderfulness of things reasserted itself. Everything here, at any rate, was wonderful! Everything! . . . Her last glimpse of the baker slipped into the field again. The black surtout was gone, leaving grey flour-dusted clothes, and a grey collarless shirt open upon his short rosy neck, the rosy flush on which mounted to the attenuated Kilmarnock cap that crowned his baldness. He was busily scraping his loaves; with a dignified air which recalled the saying of an old man in St. Brise that if the Scots had been the chosen people, the patriarchs would have been bakers. . . . Here he was, fitted into this new wonderful pattern before her eyes, yet so immaculate in his own native Fife!—that was the most wonderful of all.

Instinctively she turned her steps towards Crawford Street again. She must find a lodging. She was not conscious, perhaps, how far a wish to be within hail of this baker's shop determined her in seeking a lodging near here. David Baxter had come out to the pavement with a customer, a woman, with a black American-cloth bag, bulging with bread. They were laughing at parting. The woman, when she had gone a step or two, looked

back to fling a laughing, parting shot at him. . . . He stood for a minute looking after her before going back to his shop; and in a sort of bravado Charlotte walked on past him. He was talking to himself. . . . "There's a fell amount o' goodness in you, Mrs. Peters, woman, but an awfu' want o' principle," she heard him say. Then the bell on his shop-door "pinged" as he flung it to.

Charlotte moved away up the street in Mrs. Peters' wake. She was a tall, ripe-looking woman, with a leisurely, almost handsome carriage, despite her fleshiness; and Charlotte followed in her steps. By-and-bye they turned into Homer Row, and Mrs. Peters entered a house in it. As she would have passed on, Charlotte observed in the window of this house a bill intimating a bedroom to let. It was a small storm-window, like the storm-windows in the wynds off St. Brise High Street; and Charlotte wondered what gales blew here that these were designed to withstand.

Acting on an impulse, derived from that associate recollection, Charlotte went to the door and knocked, and soon was negotiating with Mrs. Peters for the vacant room.

"Mine's a respectable 'ouse," Mrs. Peters said.

"Oh! It ain't no business o' mine, my dear," she continued, as Charlotte fired angrily. "An' I don't blame 'em,—leastways indiscriminate. But I must 'ave my 'ouse respectable."

On closer view, the ripeness of the woman became, in Charlotte's eyes, a kind of fermentation; yet there was something in her, easy and compliant, that appealed to the girl's susceptible mood. She went to

King's Cross and brought back her trunk, and that night confided to Mrs. Peters her desire to get a situation. She had hopes especially that a place might be found for her as a sewing-maid; for the Lady Charlotte's skill and taste with the needle had descended to her through Aunt Janet and her mother. Mrs. Peters introduced her to Miss Tippet, who kept the registry round the corner, by the Vine and Grapes, and at the end of the week Miss Tippet had found her a place as sewing-maid with Mrs. O'Sullivan in Leinster Gardens.

Mrs. O'Sullivan herself was at the sea-side with her little girl. Mr. O'Sullivan, The O'Sullivan of the Stock Exchange, one of the wonders of the Kaffir market, was travelling up and down to town daily; and only now and then slept at Leinster Gardens. The housekeeper's instructions were to give the maids plenty of freedom and fresh air.

"It's a great cure for the blues, fresh air is, and the blues comes to everybody in service," Mrs. O'Sullivan said. "I've been in it meself, as 'appy as most, before the boss an' me made it up,—an' don't think that 'appiness comes wi' bein' mistress any more than the blues wi' bein' the maid; but the mistress has 'er kerridge, an' champaigne, an' music 'alls, and Margate, an' it's her own fault if she don't scetter the blues, but wi' the maid what's cooped up, they stays an' they breeds, maggotty-like."

"Them were Mrs. O'Sullivan's sentiments," Charlotte was informed by the servants at Leinster Gardens; who profited by them, and laughed at a mistress who could entertain them. "But, Lor'! You knows a laidy when you sees 'em!" It was quite un-

derstood downstairs that Mrs. O'Sullivan wasn't a laidy. She had been, as she took no trouble to hide, in service herself, and as a "general," too; which settled the matter. If further proof were wanted, there was the house in Camberwell, where the O'Sullivan establishment, before the clown of luck somersaulted into notoriety in the Street, included three single gentlemen in the City, with bed, board, and extras all provided within the sovereign. It was known that the housekeeper had been engaged expressly to supply the knowledge which the mistress lacked; as the mistress herself put it, "to run the show proper and stylish."

All this was a fresh page of wonder to Charlotte, accustomed to the appropriate order, as of Nature, in the Big Houses in Fife, and particularly in the Den House under the Lady Charlotte, the repute of which had percolated to the girl through three generations.

A new world lay before her, and she had time and freedom for its discovery! She wrote to Richard Clephane now, and with him she explored it. O, the wonderful unfolding of that Spring! Early sundowns sinking through tall pine shafts upon the purple and olive mysteries of Hampstead; then a concert, or a theatre, with a drive out of the throng along the quivering line of Piccadilly, westwards—an intoxication; splendid lingering days later of the sun's pageant, spent on the river and away in Sussex and in nearer Surrey valleys and down in Essex flats and forest; vast, tender nights in London lanes, blent with the murmur of whose leafy silences comes in the larger cadence of the town;—scenes of new

and varied delights. Stolen delights, Charlotte thought! She was fearful lest Richard were giving her too much of his company; bestowing his time upon her instead of upon that fury of musical practice and study which she conceived to be his work.

He had only to hint at this preoccupation to send her away from him. And then she would see another side of this new world, in other company. There was a girl, Nelly Whippet, a maid with the Hon. Mrs. Ward next door, with whom she had fallen into closer acquaintance than with any of her fellow-servants. When they went into town of an evening, they were joined by Nelly's brother, Joe, who tore himself from his angling club, but brought with him its conversation; and by Mr. Figg, the great Mr. Figg, who wrote for the papers, it appeared, and knew all things that were worth knowing, and could name all people who were worth naming, and procured an entry for himself, and sometimes for his party, into lock-fast places which seemed to fly open at his magic mention of the Press. Mr. Figg's condescension upon the domestics of Leinster Gardens was explained by the great man himself to be due to a *pâng-shâng* which he entertained for Miss Whippet.

Charlotte had discovered a new world. She had found a niche in it. It was all aglow. There was spring-time about her and in her heart. The knowledge of life came to her then clothed in glamour. Her work was easy and pleasant. All about her she saw a generous wastefulness: to her, coming from the penurious estate in Fife, it seemed only bountifulness, the richness of life. Her companions in ser-

vice lived happy in the moment, and she, sustained by a never-failing hope for Richard's future, imagined that it was in the moment that she also was happy. It was a world of wealth and gaiety and joy in which for a time her nature found that which it had craved for so long. She was carried away with the flush of the life about her, and the compromising air of London fanned her insidiously.

"It seemed all so fresh and free and generous," she has said to me, explaining that time. "I used to walk across the Park, when the summer was young, and the gloaming was pink and rosy and white, like a well-cared bairn, and my heart has thumped in me with happiness. I have caught myself singing 'Happy! happy!' till the folks looked round at me across the grass."

My Charlotte had a high way of feeling. You do not understand it perhaps, as I do not in myself, or save in Charlotte. Her mother had it; in a way, I believe, Rab had it. But it is given to few.

This life opened out for her, I fancy, like a day breaking in rosy splendour; the sunny blood pulsating in her as the sunny strokes of dawn beat the sky, so that you seem to see and hear them beat it. And the grey clouds that trailed in the wake of morning had canopied her before she guessed that the sun was gone. . . .

She had overcome, somewhat quickly, a repugnance which she had felt at first to entering public-houses with her party in these jaunts into town, and was able to assume an appearance of disregarding talk and badinage that sounded foul in her ears.

Nelly Whippet and the others disregarded it easily; and Charlotte discerned in their attitude a quality of honesty and freedom and cleanness which won her admiration. Conscious of her own occupation with it, she chided herself for prudery; and she condemned the prudery of her own mind the more because the superior Mr. Figg also was preoccupied with the coarser conditions of the life and company, and caused her to wince and flush at them by a kind of unspoken comradeship which he seemed to claim with her in the recognition and demur of them. She had an instinctive distrust of this man and repugnance to him, which was a cloud in her sky, though as yet she did not feel the chill of its shadow upon her. Another cloud, small at first, but quickly swelling, was a *pâng-shâng* for her own company on the part of Joe Whippet. This was, all unreasonably, a blight and disillusion of her delight in Joe's fresh and child-like nature, which she had dimly noted as typical of the Londoner—the virginity of Cockney virtue to which she was specially susceptible in her present mood of generous revolt. That Joe's *pâng-shâng* was undeclared in its tenderness chilled her more, because of the reason of his silence. Nelly had plainly intimated to her brother that Charlotte had another and a finer beau. In Charlotte's own presence she dropped hints of this beau,—of whom indeed she knew little or nothing definite. Out of Charlotte's very reserve about the friend whom she had in London, and met often, the sharp Cockney girl drew an understanding that he was of another class than that they belonged to; and she came to pronounce this word "friend" with an easy smile,

half of badinage, half of generous envy, which inspired it with an innuendo that alarmed Charlotte, and filled her with shocked resentment. Observing this, Mr. Figg made overtures of an understanding and sympathy on his part; all the while, keen on the scent of a mystery, insinuating himself into her confidence by questions to which she strove to give only evasive answers.

She was different from them. Better or worse, she was different; and just the recognition of this, with its resulting sense of perplexity and isolation, clouded her new world for her. Chilled a little, her high way of feeling having suffered a fall, she withdrew from her old free association with them, and fell back upon the company of Richard Clephane; only to perceive in him, as she had not earlier, discords which chilled her still more.

At first, perhaps, it was her own disquiet which she found reflected in him. She still took his work seriously. There was a chatter of music in the O'Sullivan household. Conscious of noting that his name had no place in it, she laughed at herself for imagining that the O'Sullivans should care for the refined talent that was Richard's. Why, they did not even talk of Parabo! She divined that in music —and in all things in this great London—there are circles that do not touch. Yet her quick instinct had told her also of a freemasonry of knowledge and appreciation which links them all; and now the troubled recognition came to her that no circle containing Richard had ever come within her ken, though she was like an astronomer, always watching the field for the appearance of the expected star.

Richard, as a matter of fact, was at the moment coming off the top of such wavelet of success as he achieved in London; and coming off it acquiescently enlightened about his own talent. He was a riddle: "a well," his uncle called him; but, indeed, there were no depths in him. He was a riddle to us, because we were confused by the conflicting emergent qualities in his character. There was this unhardy shrewdness about himself, for example; his rawness to the touch of ridicule; and the quality in him, whatsoever it was, that caused him to tempt inevitable failure in a musical career, and to accept it with so little vexation. There were a hundred others, good and bad, and all small; and over them he wore the enigmatic mask, which seemed the largest thing about him, and, in its apparent balance and simplicity, confused us most of all. We were deceived into thinking it the tonic of his character; whereas it was only the bitumen, meretriciously mixed with the colours of the artist, by which the picture at first takes on the appearance of a unity, but inevitably in time cracks and falls to pieces.

The cracking process in his character was showing already. It showed just in his wise perception of his own failure as a musician: he took it too complacently, and found too mean a consolation for it. Every step in his decline was registered on Charlotte's sensitive nature. I can only guess at their feelings. On his coming to London, with these Den nights warm in his memory, he may have thought of marriage with her. Parabo had praised her voice. A wife with a voice was the wife for a musician. She would be "the right thing." I can believe this

of his selfish but still naïve mind. But now his unstable mind, contemplating with a pitiful knowingness the conditions of the new life about him, leapt to an extreme licence in them for the pose which it would be "the right thing" for him to affect. So I read him. Any one could see how incompatible with the social success opening out before him was Charlotte as a wife. The thought of that was long dismissed by Richard; but—I declare I know it from words I have heard from his own lips—he fidgeted in his mind whether even a liaison with her might not be incompatible with it.

Charlotte, on her part, was still strong in her resolution and anxiety that no occupation with her should interfere with his career. Yet, now, when he scarce dissembled that the engagements to which she so readily gave way were social engagements only, she was conscious, for the first time, of a disappointment that about his, their, future, he had no bursting word of hope or desire. She was silent about his music; whereas, earlier, she would have cheered and urged him on with her enthusiasm. To her "I should like to hear you play. When shall I hear you?" he had given laughing assurances; but now his answer was different. "What did it matter about playing in public!" he said; and fell to talk of the professionalism of music, and of his own imperfect training; of the hopelessness of all attaining greatness, and the uselessness of any save the chosen attempting it. He could not understand why she took it so badly. He did not understand that this which he was tearing down had been for her the flag and symbol of all that had called her to him.

"Parabo? Parabo was daft! I'm a very creditable violinist," he said, "but that's all: why should I trouble? I do not need to play for a living."

In his anxiety to persuade her out of her silence to acquiescence in his view, he broke through his usual reserve. "Music is a craft—first and foremost a craft—and it must be learned," he said. "You have to be apprenticed to it, as you would to the making of shoes; and there are only one or two snabs better than the ruck, you know, and fit to be put on to a lady's pair."

"You nip me like an east wind when you speak so!" she said. It was like her that his going to the Bowes shoemakers for an illustration increased the hurt of his words.

"After all, what is Art?" he persisted. "Life! Life and the colour of it! The joy of living. . . . Charlotte," he whispered, "Charlotte, we never felt the sun down in Fife."

"Stop! stop!" she cried, surprising him by her passion of regret and humiliation.

There was nothing in this talk to have affected her so, had she not peeped behind the gaiety of this new world, and caught a glimpse of the strenuousness of the life that seemed so easy. She had a suspicion of the coarseness behind its freedom, the grimace behind the smile; and in the light of this experience she read the subconscious intention lurking behind his words.

"Stop! stop!" she cried.

Yet, after the first blast of humiliation and regret —even in the midst of it—his words had an appeal. Just because she was on a lower level to which this

new experience had brought her, she was conscious of the force of their appeal.

She was still conscious of it, and suffering self-reproaches for it, when she heard of Madame Biatrucci. She heard of her from Mr. Figg. He had followed Charlotte one night, when she went to meet Richard, and thus identified the "friend" of whom Nelly Whippet had spoken; and by inquiries, easily pursued, wormed himself into a knowledge of Richard's condition and manner of living. It was immediately after this that there happened the affair with the Biatrucci: the visit with the adventuress to her cottage in the country; the walk after dinner, prolonged, by entanglement in by-paths, however else, beyond the departure of the last train for town; the arrival after midnight of the lady's brother, putting a high price on his sister's honour, in default of its vindication at the altar.

When this ridiculous story (the gull's part might well excite laughter!) skulked, masked, and cloaked, through some baser society papers, a hint put Mr. Figg upon the track of Richard as its hero. With a less disguised and more sensational paragraph in his pocket, addressed to the editor of a scurrilous rag, he called on Richard, who, in affright of ridicule, temporised with the blackmailer. Charlotte, too, was embraced in the machinations of the scoundrel. He revealed the story to her, with recognisable proofs in Richard's own handwriting, and scarce veiled hints about her own virtue. The horror overwhelmed her. Brought up at the knee of constraint, she had escaped with a blithe mind into the amplitude of freedom—and suddenly this horror over-

whelmed her. Broken and proud, she left Leinster Gardens, to hide herself deeper from all who might know of her humiliation.

But of all this, so near and vital to my own life, I was ignorant, of course, when the rumour which linked her name disgracefully with Richard's stole upon us, like an easterly haar from St. Brise.

At the first feel of it I had wished to start for London at once. The Clephane Railway Bill, as it happened, was to come before Committee ten days later; and I was going up then with Nochty, who, sorely against the grain, was taking Rab Cuick also with him. The rascal's evidence on march-dykes and rights-of-way, indeed, was the core of our case. I was restless to be off at once, however, and suggested to Mr. Trail the expediency of my going South before the others.

He took me up with surprising sharpness.

"Mr. Shirra, you know well enough what is in the interests of our clients. It's possible, indeed, you conceive of a higher duty. You may propose bringing this lass of Rab Cuick's back among us as mistress of Roselea?"

"Oh, no!" I cried, caught in confusion and fright.

"I thought not," he answered me with contemptuous incision. "I never reckoned you among the Quixotes. . . . Very well, then. Better bide here."

"But," I protested, seeing it was useless to hide my design, "this affair of Richard Clephane and Charlotte concerns . . ."

"It concerns the two of them, in the first degree; and in a less, Mr. James Clephane and Rab Cuick.

James has been persuaded to be prudent and to sit still, and Rab . . . Have you been feeling Rab's mind on the matter?" he asked with an extreme inquisitiveness.

"I would not speak to him of it!" I burst out.

"Wise," said Mr. Trail. "Wise. For it concerns you not at all."

"On your own showing," he continued, when I would have spoken. "There's no room for Platonics, if you're honest."

"Richard Clephane . . ."

"Richard Clephane, so far as I know, has never denied, as you did a minute ago, the intention which alone gives the right to look after Charlotte Cook. And if he has . . . phew!" He tossed off a huge pinch.

"You compare us!" I cried, stung with shame.

"And why not? Though, as a matter of fact, I did nothing of the kind. It is your own showing and avowal that you have no *locus standi* here . . . And he has; you must remember, he has."

"I am her cousin," I blurted.

"Have you not been a long time in finding that out?" he said, stinging me to a prickly heat of humiliation.

The appearance of Nochty in the office doorway spared me further suffering at this downright tongue.

"What! what! The twa corbies cast out!" he cried, looking from my hot face to Mr. Trail.

"We have been having an argument in which you, I'm sure, will take sides with me. Come in and sit down. I have been holding, against Mr. Shirra

here, that all the great men in the world have been great because of never having had a weakness for any woman."

"And a decrepid old sinner like you, Michael, has little credit by the contention," answered James.

I joined in the laugh at the retort, and, casting about for a further show of composure,—"It's worthy of Rab Cuick!" I said recklessly.

Nochty was on his feet at the name. "I distrust that man," he cried; "I distrust him. He's a thwart —a moral thwart—and I distrust him. . . . I can't endure him, and won't . . . so there, Michael!"

Mr. Trail's eyes were looking at me explosively over the ball of red handkerchief at his face. I had fired fresh rebellion to his plans.

"Oh! I'm with you, Mr. James," he met it, with his indomitable patience in important matters. "I am entirely with you, on general grounds. But at this particular moment, if you can't suffer him for the next fortnight you had better stay at home; for if any man's evidence is to win your case for you, it is his. Take my advice. His help is necessary in this business."

"We must consider this," I broke in, seeking to rectify my blunder, "and conciliate the man, Mr. Clephane."

"Would you mind particularly conciliating me by holding your tongue, Mr. Shirra?" said Mr. Trail, breathing hard.

"Conciliate!" Nochty was crying, stamping about the room. "Conciliate! I had as soon that he had the reversion of Nochty as that I should conciliate him."

"You must allow this about Rab," Mr. Trail said quietly, "that neither one nor other of you two virtuous gentlemen could do it."

In the end, however, Nochty was recalled to reason,—the Clephanes, it must be said, always saw very well how the wind blew; and Rab went with us to London. On the Saturday before our departure we all met in Mr. Trail's office. Nochty and I were arranging to travel by day—on the following Wednesday or Thursday, we had not definitely fixed which—and Nochty, a little importantly, was jotting in his memorandum tablet.

"I'm very pleased to give you every assistance in my power, Mr. Clephane," said Rab, fingering a pencil and a scrap of paper; "but my affairs will not allow me to be away a day more than I can help. I maun travel by night."

James Clephane gloomed.

"You might miss more by being away by night than by day," Mr. Trail interposed, with a sly look, suggestive of other people's turnips and the like.

"A hit," chirped Rab. And Nochty rose to go.

Out in the lobby, at the street door,—"A moment!" I delayed them. It was to put up at the "Westminster Palace," James Clephane in old quarters at the "Tavistock." "And you, Rab, where are you staying?"

"Me?" cried he. "D'ye mind Hugh Coyle in St. Brise, Mr. Trail?"

"Fine that!" The recollection evidently held some humoursome treasure.

"Well, I'll you a story about Hugh. He disappeared for a time,—in Perth Jail, for shoplifting in

Newburgh, we all knew,—but when he won back he gave out that he had been in London, and we made believe to believe him for the sake of the great stories of London life that he retailed. But there was a stupid body, who had been in London; and by way of showing how he could trip up Hugh,—'Where did you bide when you was in London, Hughie?' he asked him. 'Sure,' answered he, 'on the left, just as ye go into the town yonder.' . . . And that's where I'm going to bide, Mr. Shirra—just as you go into the town yonder!"

James Clephane, with a twisted face, stepped into the street. It was still crowded; the farming folks were driving out of the town in their gigs, or paying last calls to pick up parcels at the shop doors.

"Good day!" Nochty called to us, with a flourish of his riding-whip, as he threaded his way across to the "Salutation."

"Good day!" we answered; and Rab, raising his tuneful voice to carry to him,—"And—eh—we'll meet at the House, Mr. James, come Monday week!"

Nochty's hand tightened on his crop.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SEARCH.

We travelled up to London on the Thursday, and I planned, for my earliest business the next morning, to call upon Richard Clephane. As his lawyer, with this Bill case on hand, it would be well to see him at once. That was my excuse. My purpose was to beguile from him the whereabouts of Charlotte. Let Mr. Trail say what he might, that concerned me as well as Richard in the first degree.

On the Friday forenoon, therefore, after a short consultation with our solicitors, I set out for Jermyn Street—according to appointment, however, taking the "Tavistock" on my way. I found James in a shortness of temper for which I could discover no reason save the strain of travelling; until, about to take my leave, I mentioned that I was going on to Richard. Then his temper aired itself, with snarlings at the ill-guided and undutiable laddie, and lamentable growls about something doubtful in his conduct.

It appeared that, being up by six o'clock—as he was every morning at Nochty—James walked to his nephew's lodgings, to be informed that he was not at home.

"Not out of bed, I suppose?" James said, with a tolerant knowingness.

"If you please, no: out of town. He had gone out

of town over the Sunday. I think, sir," his man had added, "if you are Mr. Clephane, Mr. Clephane expected you yesterday."

Pressed by James's further indignant inquiries, he explained that his master had only gone late last night after dinner. He left word he had gone for the week-end, should Mr. Clephane call. The man added that he had left the same word for Mr. Biatrucci.

"Betrucchy! Betrucchy!" James cried. "Another fiddler?"

Of that the man had no knowledge—intimated skilfully, indeed, that such information would be an impertinence, as the request for it possibly was. Nor did he know where in the country Mr. Clephane had gone to; only that he was returning to town on Monday morning.

James varied his blasts against the ungrateful and ill-guided master by others against the polite insolence of the valet. "The man knew more than he told. He had an unruffled, shiny face, and was a rascal." So James. Charlotte was a morbid spot on my mind, raw to the touch of every suspicion. James's hint of something hidden inflamed it. Was the destination in the country Charlotte's dwelling-place? Was she being smuggled out of London in view of our arrival? From these unworthy suspicions, which held a conniving Charlotte in their mesh, I was glad to fly to consultations on the Clephane Bill. James Clephane gave me an appointment to expect him at my hotel on Monday morning, so that we might call together upon Richard.

For the remainder of that day, and all Saturday,

I was kept busily at work. There cropped up some worrying points, in clearing which Rab's help would have been invaluable; but he did not report himself. The fear that he might fail us was a fresh trouble. And always stretched across the background of my mind loomed my anxiety about Charlotte.

On the Sunday morning I attended service at the Abbey, bringing away from it, instead of the serenity I had hoped for, an agitation of mind which Mr. Trail did not fail to remark in the long reporting letter to him which occupied my afternoon. Dinner over, I stepped out to take the air. Happening eastwards, I crossed Parliament Square, drawn by the line of pale lights over Westminster Bridge. Perhaps there was an unusual beauty in the night: Nature must have her extreme moments. This was my extreme moment, doubtless, when I was all unnerved by the strain of this law case and the thought of Charlotte. The sight of the gold and purple wonder of the water-reaches between the bridges filled me with a feeling inexpressibly poignant. I have never before, or since, suffered so exquisite a weakness. What they must endure who are myriad-stopped pipes upon which Nature is ever playing! I am thinking of one especially: I understand her better for that night.

I pushed my steps along that crowded and noisy road that leads dismally deeper and deeper into the squalid pit of South London. Worn, and sunk in a depression, I kept on; enduring the weariness and staleness of the spectacle, because of a foolish hope springing up in me that in that great crowd I should see the face I was looking for. I knew it was folly;

yet twice or thrice I caught, as I fancied, a quick vision of Charlotte; but always when I came alongside of the figure that had drawn me, my hope looked into unkent eyes and died. Until at last, towards midnight, the spectacle sank away, and I found myself retracing my steps among only the dregs and echoes of it. I shrank from the show of the river from the bridge, which had arrested me on my way across, as from a majesty and beauty too piercing for my blear mind, and when I reached my room I threw myself on my bed, all the spring and sap gone out of me.

In the morning I had recovered tone and self-respect; yet so insufficiently that when Rab Cuick was shown to my room I shirked from handling him as I had determined. Instead, I welcomed him with some show of sprightliness.

"So you have arrived?" I said. "And what do you think of London?"

"Oh, it's a great place," he answered; "a great place—I can see that. Though the noise of it is a bit in my ear still, and I cannot quite master the tune."

"You haven't had a great deal of time," I said.

"But I've made the most of it. How d'ye think I was occupied last night? Expounding the doctrine of Predestination, sir. A Voice crying in the Wilderness. A friend of mine carried me off to his Angling Club."

"You have friends in London—relations?" I asked. "I hadn't heard?"

"You hadn't heard?" he said. And then, as if he were afraid of the effontery, in his tone rather than

in his words, of this reference to Charlotte (as I understood it), he slipped at once into his story again. He talked like one excited; or fired in his wits, at any rate, by the novelty of his surroundings. The enthusiasm of the pure sensibility in him, increasing rather than decreasing with his age, was the most wonderful thing about this wonderful man.

"There were a dozen or twenty men," he said—"a dozen or twenty, coming and going, in a cold room in the upstairs of a public-house. The walls were hung with stuffed fish, with records in gold letterings; not trout, you know, but pike and perch, and roach and dace and bleak that we never see in our country. . . . Carters, time-keepers, mechanics, working men and a publican, smoking and drinking . . . with considerate manners; wherein they differ from us: the younger men 'Mistering' the older, wi' an inflection of the voice that is the touch of the hat in speech; the grey-beards very frank and friendly, and acknowledging the deference paid them with a fine bit touch of consciousness . . . queer little 'I drink to you, sirs,' done wi' dignity, punctuating their conversation,—which was all about fish. All about fish . . . bran-paste and ground-bait. We wouldn't call it fishing up North,—yet there's a knack in it. Of course, I kent there was a knack in it; but it's finer than I thought. I saw something of it on Saturday: I ran down to the Lea with my friend in the afternoon—a curious and interesting trip. Still, Lor'! it's only poor sport . . . That's what I cannot understand in life: how so many get engrossed wi' the small fishes. Small fishes,—sma' triumphs, sma' sowls. Talk about this

great country o' ours! It's an inheritance from hardy spirits,—hardy and reckless,—and bloody spirits if need be,—whom the man wi' the dream could get to follow him. Did ye ever read about Drake and a man Doughty?—Great, sir! But are we fit to handle a weapon forged in that spirit? The mere fact of their living in a great city does not make folk great. Here in London, the wonder and marvel of the world, thousands of men—they tell me they run to thousands—engrossed in catching half-pound roaches!"

He paused to look sharply at me, before running on,—

"Their conversation, just like their fishing,—exactly like it,—for there you've a marvellous fine figure for their conversation. Just a pool, wi' little sparkle, flowing nowhere; and ilka one clapped on a seat, sittin', sittin', keeping his own little float bobbing in't. No fire, no break-awa'. Even if there was, ilka one lifts his lines the moment the clock chaps his bedtime. . . . Man, I had a fine time o't last night. There was I, bent on—what d'ye call it? —sociological study? . . . keen at any rate to explore the heart of this great people. For they are a great people,—that's the funny thing: by their fruits you ken them. . . . And not an entrance could I find. I could cock their ears, and raise reminiscence among them, wi' stories of Eden trout, and pike taken out o' Kinghorn Loch,—wi' the otter, too, though they looked down their noses at that. But for a thought beyond? . . . I tried them wi' music; I tried them wi' politics. They never stirred. Thinks I to mysel': 'I'll put a cast o' flees

over you that never fails to raise folk wi' us in the North—especially at night when the liquor's in'; and there was I casting delicately for all I knew wi' Foreordination and Foreknowledge and all the subtleties of the Catechism. Mercy me! never a nibble! They were as shy of ideas as a trout of a shadow. A fine companionable folk. But for argument wi' them—it's as heart-breaking as chopping touchwood. . . . I tell you I went home last night very greatly in need of a dictionary to explain their meaning to me."

I recalled my own home-coming last night. This man, said I to myself, in bitterness, must know of the rumour of Charlotte being here. Of course he knows; yet here he was drinking in some public-house, and endlessly chattering about it.

"I expected you to have called on me earlier," I interrupted him, resentfully.

"I meant to," he answered, unmoved; "but you see how I was occupied. I called on Mr. Parabo, though!"

"Parabo!"

"Ay! Parabo. He's the same old body."

"And what did he tell you of Richard Clephane?" I asked eagerly.

He marked his appreciation of my eagerness by the exaggerated indifference of his answer.

"To tell you the truth, now that you speak of it, we did not mention his name.

"I think," he went on, as I looked at him abashed and doubtful, "you do not understand Parabo and his kind. They are not like us solid folk down in Fife. Every day to them is a new picture-book.

Parabo, I could swear, has met wi' fifty geniuses since he discovered one scraping in my kitchen at the Bowes. It's his business; leastways, it's his instinct and occupation,—bright and light and happy cratur that he is.

"Yet I suppose there might be a cannibal butterfly," he went on.

He was pacing my floor, talking with the modulation and significance of voice that was his gift. It constantly charmed even me out of my defence, as I listened; though I knew only too well that he was seeking to get under the guard of my mind.

"For man, if you consider it, artists are just cannibals. They feed on their own kind. They're like man-eaters: when once they've tasted human blood, you cannot let them. Only the tiger takes to it, they say, when old and mangy; whereas to them the taste comes young. It comes to the laddie sitting of a winter's night by the warm fire with all the folks round it, smelling homely; and they pat him on the head, thinking he's nodding to sleep, he's so quiet: and all the time he's feeding on them. There's our friend that you mentioned, Richard,—though he's not a very ferocious genius. . . ."

I must have made a little movement to attention.

"He interests you?" said Rab, stopping to face me. "Oh—getting on? Aye harping on that! getting on! . . . I've told you before, as a fiddler he doesn't count. . . . For the other kind of getting on that you have in your eye," he resumed his walk, —"well, he's quick to imitate, and has his trick or two of fingering, as I know (Rab spoke with a little crow) "and, moreover, is a gentleman, with address

and a name, which, I gather, counts for more up here than we have any notion of; and dresses well, which counts for most of all. In fact, weel equpped on the outside. He could never get on in the humble profession of fiddling. He hasn't the resolution, and he hasn't the necessity. There is no compulsion in his blood, and none of his own belly or a family's, to drive him out among the patient and proud crowd that herd on the lower slopes o' Parnassus, never to mount, yet aye keeping a pretending eye upon the summit. Poor devils! Oh, they get on, many of them; if by that is meant that the road is through green pastures and quiet waters by. . . . It's o' nights, when folks cannot see them, that they lie clawing their failures, spite o' their soft bed. There's that amount of nobility o' fabric in them. . . . But Richard Clephane—he'll see the world and have his fling, and when the bubble is burst, he'll come back to Fife, and for once we'll have a laird o' Clephane who is not unsophisticated and sincere as a peat. Provided, that is, by the grace of God, we haven't one that is a wastrel—there's the MacNab blood, you know."

I sat listening in a kind of lull of terror and disgust. This man whom he painted, this was the man whom Charlotte was said to be with, and he knew it. He was bound to know that rumour.

"It depends on his fortune wi' women," Rab went on.

Ah! There he had got home! I dug my nails into my palms, and was silent. I was tongue-tied. It was like awakening out of a nightmare when

word was sent up to me that Mr. James Clephane had arrived.

The first thing I observed, when he was shown in, was his well-groomedness. In the country, his dress was like his manner,—personal, but never without the cast of the laird. Now, it was correct; you might almost say fashionable. But when I looked further, to his face, I saw that something was wrong. It was grey and shrunk—like a fire that has caked at a white heat. To Rab he made no signal that I could see; even to myself, his "good day" was only a gesture. I dared not think what the news was that he had to deliver. Yet I must get rid of Rab at once.

"Well, I will look for you at the same hour to-morrow," I said to him. "Mr. Clephane and I have some special business now."

He was already on his feet.

"Good day," he said, very blithely; but I could see a dangerous brightness in his eye, and the wind playing in his cheek. "Good day."

With his hand on the door-knob, he turned.

"By the way, Mr. James, I was just telling Mr. Shirra here that I saw your old friend, Mr. Parabo. He was full of his respects to you."

Rab's words were like poker strokes in a glowing mass.

"Stop!" Nochty cried, flinging round and facing Rab. "I have a question before you go. Where is your daughter?"

"My daughter doesn't take me deep into her confidences," said Rab, stepping back into the room.

"Nor am I so keen to press her for them as some folks are."

"You knew she was in London?" said Nochty again.

Rab patted the air, simulating remonstrance, with his head cocked towards me.

"Mr. Shirra is my lawyer," snapped James.

"And I have the honour to employ him on occasion," chirped Rab, with a sudden change of manner. "So we can discuss this family matter wi' freedom. . . ."

"Family matter!" James flung out his hand. "By Heaven! stop your tricks to-day, Rab Cuick!"

Rab's chirpiness shrivelled up at the blast of James's anger; but a tenseness of passion took its place in his own words, or seemed to. For me it was only horrible that they should waste time on temper-play, if, between them, Charlotte could be found.

"Rab!" I cried; "if you know anything of Charlotte . . ." but he took no heed of me.

"You are hasty, James Clephane. . . . overly hasty," he said. "Suppose I said to you that the whereabouts of my daughter is a question I should have demanded of you any time these four months past."

James staggered under the straightness of the blow. The sight of its effect seemed to put a curb on Rab's anger; now, at any rate, it was jockeyed by his old mockery.

"We're not in Fife now," he said. "By favour of Mr. Shirra, we're in a room at the heart of the world, and . . ." he laughed, "I'll tak' dunts fro' naebody! I have to thank you and the nous of your

lawyer for bringing me where I can indulge i' the luxury of saying my say."

"No, no!" he continued, maliciously, "don't suppose that I am shutting my nieve on my railway evidence till I've taken the price of it out of you in plain speaking. . . . God!" He hesitated a moment. "This is more a family matter than you conceive of. If I shut my hand on any knowledge connected with Clephane and its affairs,—or Nochty, either; it's because of my own interest in them. . . . and I'll see my own profit out of so doing, you may depend. . . . Now, look you! You are kind enough to have a very poor opinion of me, and not to hide it. I am doing my best to pay off my debt to you in kind. It seems I am wanting in the office of a father. I've been neglectful o' my family, as you have not been slow to tell them. They have come out from under my disreputable roof-tree: I didn't ask them, but they went wi' a benediction from you—I say you, as symbolising the sentiments of all that's moral and respectable in the parish. . . . Well, now, Mr. Clephane, now that you find them straying into your private preserves, it's for you to whistle on them, not me. . . . Good day to you, good day!"

"Horrible!" I said, as the door closed on him, "horrible!"

Nochty was white and trembling.

"Air!" he cried. "Open the windows on the rascal. . . . We'll walk through the Park. . . . But just a minute! Not so quick on his tracks that we can smell him!"

We walked in silence through St. James's Park,

behind the Horse Guards. In the middle flight of the Duke of York's steps, James stopped for breath.

"Have you no questions to ask?" he said testily.

"I fear you have some ill news. . . ."

"Ay! I'll tell you when we get to the top. Who was it used to say, on the Porter's Brae, 'they make no provision for the flesh here'?"

He stood at the top again, taking long breaths, and looking about him with the half smile of the short-winded. But when we moved on across Pall Mall, and up Regent Street, temper, though a chastened temper, showed in his words.

"There was truth in what the man said, Mr. Shirra, though his neck ought to be wrung for saying it. I've been unmindful of the private preserves: they were my brother's trust. I let them be poached once, and it's notorious that there are gangrels in them again. . . . Why! her name is linked with his at the Club . . . in the very street, sir!"

"Oh! it is not true!" I cried.

"Isn't it? I was in the Row yesterday, walking, and I saw Gerald Duncan. The girl, Edith Duncan, was with him, . . . a nice girl that.—'Glad to see you!' he says; 'not often you're up in town?' I told him it wasn't.—'I came up about the case, you know, —my brother's laddie's.'—'Yes, yes,' he says hastily. 'We must get on, Edith;' and away they went. But he swung his horse round beside me again.—'Sorry for you, Clephane,' he says.—'What do you mean?' I asked.—'Oh,' he says, 'I know no particulars. I'm out of touch with gossip, my life's devoted elsewhere. But I hoped the story was mostly

smoke.' And he rode off after Edith. What do you make o' that, Mr. Shirra? . . . the fussy little . . . Devauted! That's bad enough—here's worse. See this letter. I was in my Club, sitting in the reading-room, when Charlie Mapleton looked in. The Mapletons used to be in Dun's Muir thirty years syne,—Michael Trail 'll remember them well . . . He saw me and went out again. I knew I wasn't mistaken. By-and-bye this letter is brought to me from him. Hopes I'm well and remains . . . never forgotten his old friend, my brother Dick . . . Had just heard this story, and that it was Dick's boy that was meant . . . And then blackguards me for broken duty in letting my nephew come up to London, a fiddler instead of a gentleman. Asks what was to be expected but this mess . . . There, Mr. Shirra! It's all over the town. When I come up here for the first time for years, it's to be cold-shouldered, sir, for that, that . . . Heaven! Mapleton's not pukish. The scamp must have flaunted the girl under their noses to cause them to take it like that . . .

"But here we are!" He brought me up, mazed, at the Jermyn Street door . . .

"Observe the face!"

Absorbed in his latest news, I did not for a moment grasp that he was alluding to the valet. He was stamping on the step with an impatience that was partly pleasurable anticipation; and when the door was opened I felt the knob of his cane in my ribs, adjuring me afresh to observe the face, and approve his judgment. The valet showed the way up-

stairs. James was flourishing his cane behind the man's back. "A rascal! a shiny-faced rascal," he chortled, not too lowly, to me.

Richard Clephane was awaiting us in the doorway of his room. He had heard our voices, he said. There was no heartiness in the greeting between uncle and nephew; still, there was affection, a kind of clannish affection, and it startled me. Through James's fulminations all morning, I had fallen into a way of regarding him as the champion of my cause—as Charlotte's champion. But now I wondered.

"Uncle! Come in! . . . Ah! Mr. Shirra. . . . You feel it warm here, uncle? Butt, pull down the windows an inch."

Richard's eye, I observed, had left his uncle's face and was running approvingly over his figure.

"Never mind, never mind," James was telling the man; "you can go." He pulled down one of the windows himself, while Richard, with apologetic protest, moved to the other. Nochty walked to the door which the man had closed behind him as he went out, and flung it open. "All right," he said, shutting it again. The thing was done with a little conscious flourish of knowingness; and Richard's cool, quiet "I can trust Butt" was like sticking a pin in a bladder. James, conscious of some collapse, sought the inflation of temper.

"I daresay. He's deep; and it seems you have much that needs hiding.

"But it's not hid!"—he got hotter as Richard made a motion of protest. "It's flying from mouth to mouth like a shuttle between the shuttle-boxes.

It's waved in my face in the Park, sir, in the Club. Your father's friends upbraid me, write letters . . ."

I was watching Richard under James's sudden attack. He had gone white. He showed very white under the black beard.

"Where is the girl?" James was crying. "Where were you on Saturday, instead of being here to receive me?" He made a great deal of Richard being away on Saturday. "You might have published the banns of your intrigue, the town is so full of it. Here's her father even tells me I must whistle for her—and he's right, by heavens! he's right; though if Rab Cuick weren't—weren't just Rab Cuick . . ."

I was still anxiously watching Richard. I could see he was puzzling over something. "Rab Cuick?" he said. "Rab Cuick?" There was a sincerity of surprise in his voice that put heartening into me.

"There is a rumour—a rumour," I interposed.

"You are speaking of Charlotte Cook?" he said to his uncle, ignoring me.

I caught a flash in his face—a flash of relief. "Then it's not true!" I cried.

"What is not true, sir?" he turned to demand of me. The blood had flushed back to his face. His voice had found mettle, his manner assurance. "What is not true?"

What was it? The impossibility of this story being true of Charlotte broke on me the moment I was asked to put it into words. At the same time, the possibility of such a story being true of Richard became a certainty. It angered me to think that he—he, should reproach me with a doubt of Charlotte.

"I never believed it of her!" I cried. I never really had believed it.

He checked at my vehemence for a second; but he was riding his high horse recklessly, in his relief at finding his uncle on the wrong scent.

"Mr. Shirra, you see"—he turned to James—"Mr. Shirra is kind enough . . ."

"Oh! I wasn't thinking of you!" I interrupted him.

He looked at me resentfully, doubtfully,—but, indeed, I was not thinking of him. I was thinking that we were wasting time. James had harked back to his various encounters—with Gerald Duncan, Mapleton, Rab Cuick. Must there not be truth in a rumour doubly, trebly corroborated so? There must be. He turned to me now to tell me fiercely that there must be truth in it. I had said I didn't believe it; and evidently it was his turn to feel that he had been deserted. He addressed me as well as Richard: as if I had left his side and gone over to the enemy. In reality, my mind was clearing to see that James never had been on my side. He was ranged with Richard. It could not be otherwise. They were ranged on this eternal question of Clephane reputation; and to me that was waste of time. It didn't count. It was Charlotte only who counted. It was myself and Charlotte only who counted. I awoke to a momentary perception, though still dim, of the great, the tremendous, rights of self. It came to me fiercely that all this time—it seemed to me all my days—I had been mixing them up with those of others. To every claim of petty duty I had been true—never to myself. And, therefore, never to

Charlotte. In this brief second I came near being true to Charlotte and to myself.

"Do you know where Charlotte Cook is?" I broke in impatiently.

Richard narrowed his eyelids in a second's contemplation of the course to which I had given him an opening.

"Why, yes," he said, widening them again to great frankness. "I'll tell you." He began with his absence over the Sunday, for which he had quite a good explanation. An engagement of long standing—and he had expected his uncle to arrive a day earlier. Richard had the air of making a clean breast of a story which was to turn out to contain not even an indiscretion. This stupid *canard* about Rab Cuick's daughter, he said, was no doubt based on his recognition of her as an old acquaintance—"little attentions—returns for Back Bowes hospitalities—attention to a girl, consider, accustomed to the freedom of the Den, suddenly cooped up in service in London. . . ."

"In service?" asked James.

"You see yourself how ridiculous it is," Richard said swiftly. "Why, up here——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted James. "I've lived in London. Men seduce servant-girls every day."

But there was a note of relief in his voice.

I declare I heard them now without understanding. Charlotte was lifted again high aloft in my mind and their words could not reach her. I only knew that I wanted her.

"Her address?" I demanded of Richard.

"I don't know," he said, stiffening—"I don't

know that she would wish. . . . Oh, well——" he changed quickly, and gave me the address at Leinster Gardens. He did not know she had left. I noted it eagerly. "As I had to give her father it when he called for it. . . ."

"Rab Cuick!" James cried, and I suddenly realised.

"Certainly, Rab Cuick," Richard said. "He was here on Thursday."

"He must have travelled up on the Wednesday night," James gloomed.

"Of course he travelled on the Wednesday night," I echoed him. My thoughts were racing back to Rab that morning, to all he had told me, still more to all he had not told me.

"Before us, after all," said James.

"Before us, after all."

Ah, that was it. Rab was before me. He had got Charlotte's address, and was before me. I got to my feet.

"That's true," James said, observing my action. "We can't keep Mr. Shirra waiting all day, Richard, while we discuss your private affairs. To business! What do the lawyers say now? . . ."

I sat down in my chair again. My moment of release from duty and selfishness was over. I was still Clephane lawyer before everything else.

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE SILLY ROACH."

WHEN at length I was able to set out for Leinster Gardens, it was with a weary sense that Rab was in front of me. I had an apprehension that before I could make up on him he would, somehow or other, whisk Charlotte away; and I daresay this softened the news of Charlotte's fresh flight awaiting me at Mrs. O'Sullivan's. So prepared, indeed, was I to find her gone that it took me some time to understand that she had left before Rab called for her. The housekeeper at Leinster Gardens was certain about that. She remembered Rab's visit very well. Why, then, had Charlotte left?—suddenly, at a moment's notice, the woman said. Richard did not know she was gone. I was certain of that: I could not doubt his sincerity in giving me this address. The housekeeper could throw no light on this, I saw; but her curiosity was piqued. When I asked that I might see the lady of the house, she was a little haughty in instructing me that all such matters were left to her; but I had my way. Mrs. O'Sullivan, with her pink and paste complexion, yellow hair, bediamonded fingers, and voluble Cockney sympathy, was a new type to me—at least as lady of the house. I had thought of her type somehow as always detached, without any ties. Mrs. O'Sullivan brought into the room with her a pale, delicate-looking girl,

over whom she fluttered. They had got quite attached to Charlotte, she told me: she told me in such a way as made me believe it. "They called her Charlotte instead of Cook, to distinguish her from a far more important personage downstairs,—Grumpy!"—(This with a lifting of the eyebrows and a blowing out of the cheeks to Moira.) "Eh, Moira? Moira was sorry Charlotte was gone—wasn't she? Moira darlin'! had cried.—Hey! Poppit!" She suddenly flung her arms round the child and pressed kisses on the white little face, which the tears were beginning to stain.—I had learned something about Mrs. O'Sullivan, though she could tell me nothing about Charlotte.

I went on to Miss Nelly Whippet, next door, and found her being interviewed by a gesticulating elderly gentleman with sloping shoulders and very flat feet. There had been a deal in a gold bangle some months before—on the instalment system. I could not help gathering so much, and that the eloquence which my appearance arrested was about an overdue payment. To me, consequently, Miss Whippet was effusive, but flustered. At one straw in the swirl of her talk, however, I caught. Her brother Joe and Mr. Figg were friends of Charlotte. "Joe—poor Joe! . . . But Mr. Figg! The gentleman—the man—who was here last week inquiring for Charlotte, seemed to think as Mr. Figg might know something. She had told him where Joe and he were to be found, most nights as likely as not—the 'Opeful Piscatorials at the 'Golden Last,' Hackney. The man—the gentleman—here last week spoke as if he would seek them there. . . ."

Of course, Rab had sought them there; and had found them, I could not doubt; though in his endless chatter to me about the Angling Club there had not been hint or syllable of his real errand to it. In all my inquiries, I was conscious of following in Rab's footsteps. He had impressed these people. "The gentleman—the man." And evidently he had not discovered his relationship with Charlotte! What was his design in that? O! It was useless to seek to fathom his designs. It was enough that from this point again he had the start of me, and that the girl had put me on the track.

On Wednesday night I sought the "Golden Last." It was in a quiet backwater of the thoroughfare, somewhere in Hackney—near a church, I remember, with an old square tower softened against pink horizontal cloud-bars. Summer twilight bathed the street. The hum in the air was rhythmic, with the ripple of a barrel-organ and the soft beat of dancing children. In windows and doorways heads nodded in time with them.

Half-way down the street was the "Golden Last." Joe Whippet was not there. He had been, earlier; but had left. Mr. Figg, however, was upstairs in the club-room; and he came down to me, scattering some scraps of paper on the sawdust. He was tall, unhealthy-white and gaunt of face, a youngish man, with a black cloak flung upon his spare figure. I had a boyish impression of a conspirator—Guy Fawkes, perhaps, or something still more fantastic. It was this touch of the fantastic that prevented me misdoubting the man from the first. He drew me into a low dark compartment, with a wooden settle on

which we sat to talk. Through a window behind me, a gleam of the dying sun shot across his black cloak, and I could not keep my eyes off it: it seemed to lull me into a sense of security in feeling my way to his information. Joe Whippet, he told me, had gone off shortly before with a friend. It turned out that the friend was Rab. I discovered this when I brought round my inquiries to Charlotte's disappearance, cautiously, mentioning Nelly Whippet's name.

"You are a lawyer?" said Mr. Figg.

I nodded.

"And for the girl?"

"For whom else?" I asked him sharply.

At that he began to wag his head. He had a way of wagging his head round his thin neck—like a toy-donkey. "Oh, if you don't know, I don't, of course," he mumbled—almost truculently, I thought. At the same time, he threw out hints of what he might be persuaded to tell—"given a proper exchange of *bona-fides*," he explained. "But not now," he added, when I assured him I was all right. Now, he had to go to town—he said to Fleet Street. A journalist was at beck and call at all hours, night and day. I had a feeling that he wished to gain time, and yet was loath to leave me; and I suggested that we should go back to town together. He acquiesced eagerly in that. We could pick up a 'bus near by, he said.

We walked down the street, in which the twilight lay scarce a shade duskier than when I entered the "Golden Last." There was nothing in it of the piercing melancholy of the previous Sunday night:

it was the ripe twilight of full summer, when all the world seems achievable, and even achieved. I felt that assurance springing in me. All the time Mr. Figg was talking in my ear about a journalist's work. Little things and great things composed it, he explained. Mr. Figg did some sporting notes. There were the angling club reports. I had called him down in the middle of doing them. That, of course, was one of the little things: to be knocked off at odd times—on a 'bus-top, or so. He did start "knocking it off" when we got up on the outside of the 'bus. His seat was in front of mine, and clouds of smoke came back to me from the pipe which he was mouthing and puffing violently. An old saying of my father, "The pot's on," flashed through my mind; unconsciously, however, reflecting a doubt upon the pretensions of this journalist. He had a pile of paper slips on his knee, which he tore up one after the other when he had written on them. He seemed sometimes to write several lines on them, sometimes a word or two only, before he tore them up. There was a litter of little pieces about him, when the seat next mine became vacant, and he joined me.

"Knocked it off?" I could not resist asking him. I was almost in a gay mood. The immensity of London, as we rumbled through street after street of it in this perfect summer night, affected me upliftingly. Perhaps an assurance of being able to master the fellow, to read him to the farthest ben corner (Rab's phrase, Rab's assurance!) ministered to my gaiety.

He wagged his head and slapped his breast dark-

ly. Then he propounded a plan. "Why shouldn't I go down with him to the Lea the next day? We could have our talk. Joe and Rab were going—a day's fishing. He could go in the afternoon, if I could join him. Not to fish, of course, but just a talk and the fresh air. And meet Joe—if not before, then at the 'Silly Roach' at night. What said I to that?"

Before he was finished asking me, I had made up my mind to say yes. It was not a becoming excursion, and the company was not very becoming for Mr. Shirra of Tarvit Town; but under some kind of inward compulsion to go I cast these considerations aside. This fellow knew something—whatsoever it was; and, whatsoever it was, I would draw it from him. Money would draw it from him if nothing else could. I had guessed that already, and it gave me confidence. I knew how to handle a man who would stick at nothing for the sake of money. The man, I feared, was one who would stick at nothing to gratify his wits—a man of terrible wits. And Figg's plan would give me an advantage over Rab. I had a feeling that when I joined the Rascal down there I should have overtaken him in the search; so physically real a thing to me had the pursuit of Charlotte become.

We went down from Liverpool Street; leaving London by its backdoor, it seemed to me. From the slop and dust-heaps of the city we drew off by-and-by into a green and homely country, with low heights steeple-crested and trailed with red-roof clusters. Beyond that, drowsy, slovenly flats, and every here and there the lumpish river gazing

unwinkingly at the sun. We passed the station for the "Silly Roach." Mr. Figg pointed out the inn in its cool poplar shade. His programme, he explained, was to come off at the next station, and to pick up Mr. Cook and Joe Whippet on the walk back. Mr. Figg, in fact, wished to converse. He had wares to sell me, I surmised, of a kind that he would prefer to spread out under the unechoing vault of heaven.

He began to display them, cautiously, as soon as we stepped on to the widely flung meadows, through which the pollards traced the path of the river. I know now that he had nothing save the Biatrucci business to barter, and that he was at a loss to gauge its worth to me. His oblique revelations of it left me at the same loss. He had said we were not coming here to fish,—but, 'deed, fishing of a kind was our sport throughout the walk. As I listened to him, alert for all the threads of his devious rigmarole, I unconsciously stored some clues to Charlotte's relations with Richard which, later, guided me to the truth. At this moment, it was Charlotte, herself, I sought. From the first I felt almost certain that he could not bring me to her; yet it was terrible to leave the shadow of a doubt whether or not her secret was in the keeping of this man.

For I was beginning to understand something of him—a little. His talk was coloured by an enormous egotism. It appeared he was a slighted inventor. He had a notion for the application of electricity to the detection of the identity of criminals—an anticipation of the Bertillon system or that of Galton's thumb-marks. The criminal was to touch

an electric bell, and hey, presto! he discovered himself forthwith! "No two men ever ring electric bells alike," Mr. Figg said, wagging his head. I said I could believe it. He eyed me darkly when I inquired if he had constructed his registering instrument, and had patented it. An old St. Brise story flashed on me, how Watty Kiddie in Torrie Town, when his demonstration of the perpetual-motion cradle he had invented failed, offered to give an affidavit that it was all right in his head. "Never patent," was Mr. Figg's wiseacre advice to me now. "Never trust officials. Take the word of one in the know." Ours, he assured me, was the country of official oppression of the clever poor man, who, in consequence, was sent in ship-loads to the free land of America. He quoted words to that effect by the hon. member who made Mr. Figg the subject of a question in the House of Commons. And, mark you—corroboration!—the Speaker had stopped him. I gathered that the occasion was one when, having pestered Scotland Yard with Figg's Electric Detective beyond the bearing strain of patience, the inventor was, as he himself expressed it, "thrown out," and for that discourtesy was awarded later farthing damages against the Chief Commissioner. In consequence, Mr. Figg gave me to understand, vehemently, the police had a "down" on him. Guessing as I did that a design on my pocket underlay this reminiscence, I was astonished by the passion with which he told it. Black blood suffused his ordinarily wan face, save for a thin line of white under and round his nostrils. Nevertheless, he calmed to explain, in spite of official contumely,

there was a fortune in his idea if only a little money were put up to give it a chance. Look at its wide application, almost universal—burglars, safes, tills, . . . great leakages in tills, public-house tills especially, he had been told . . . and so on. For a good thing like that a lawyer could always raise money—a little syndicate—and perhaps it might be worth a certain person's while to take it up in return for information received. . . . And a commission, of course,—a large commission. . . .

He was still furtively discovering for me the hugeness of the commission when, in a little rough glade of pollards at a bend of the river, we came upon Rab and Joe Whippet. Rab was seated on his roach-box, eating something from a newspaper. Mr. Figg put a finger in my back at sight of him. "Strict confidence!" said he. A comparison glanced upon me between the fatuous immoral fool at my ear and the Rascal whom I had once again to encounter. What would Rab say when we met down here? Or, rather, what was I to say? All the way hither I had been shirking an answer to that thought, trusting to an inspiration at the moment. We had threaded our way round the trees, and were close upon him before he saw us. I could tell that my appearance there took him by surprise, but he remained, to employ a saying of his own, "as cool as a crab." Eating my piece, Mr. Dauvid," he grinned, with a full mouth like a St. Brise schoolboy, and speaking as if it were fuller. He nodded casually to Figg. The nod I interpreted as intimating to myself his poor opinion of the instrument with which I was seeking to circumvent him.

Beyond that, however, he gave no indication of his feeling. Indeed, he turned again to his fishing with a surprising enthusiasm, explaining to me the uses of paste and ground-bait, morsels of which he placed on hook and line, and becoming absorbed as the tip of the stiff pole hovered close over the float travelling down the swim. It was with difficulty that Joe, who had packed up on our arrival, persuaded him to leave off.

Yet, as we crossed the meadow to the inn, he was apparently consumed by a new interest. "I'll show you," he said, attaching himself to me,—"I'll show you a character in this 'Silly Roach' we are coming to—the landlady. Weight and age, an easy first . . . the nearest thing to Nance Pouce i' the Bowes that I've met in all my travels. You mind . . . but no, it was before your day. You'll not mind how Nance's sharp face used to appear round the door when orders were coming too slowly. 'Were ye duntin', lads?' she would ask. As keen as a razor; and so is this ane, but on a more lavish scale. I had a great passage with her last Saturday." It seemed to me that at this he quickened his step, in anticipation of another passage with her. The man had a happy life.

The "Silly Roach" fronted the road, to which it showed through its screen of poplars a wrinkled old-world face. Creepers patched the dull saffron walls, framing the latticed windows and crowning deep eaves. A backwater of the river, with a few pleasure-boats on it, crept through the gardens behind; these were velvet-turfed, and relics of formal hedge and terrace were visible among the indecorous tents

and summer-houses of a London holiday resort. The twilight air was clamorous with the cries and laughter of lads and girls, their spirits bubbling over to horse-play, while serving-maids and waiters flew about among them.

Entering under a low-panelled door, we found ourselves in a long and wide bar; beyond it was the bar-parlour, in which I could see an enormous woman, seated, and with some clothwork idle in her hand. She was directing, as we came in, the lighting up of the place, the plan and extent of which were perplexing, because bar and parlour were reflected, in unending vistas, in the mirrors hanging round.

From her chair in the middle of this web of interest, in which she sat like a huge and watchful spider, Mrs. Righton caught sight of us.

"Come in 'ere for your drap," she called out for her greeting. "Come in, if 'ee canst, for the mess."

"I'm glad to see 'ee again," she said to Rab, with a visibly brightening eye, as we trooped into her parlour. "And you, Joey. Introduce me."

"Mr. Shirra is a gentleman from the North whom I've brought to see you, Mistress Righton," Rab said; "in London on business, and to see the sights. Mr. Figg—ah! you ken him? My acquaintance wi' him is a short-lived pleasure, but long enough to fathom his worth."

I saw Mrs. Righton's eye respond to his irony as promptly as Mr. Figg's Detective was to respond to criminal touch. She was tied to her chair by weight of body and years—I judged her to be over eighty; but she looked, sitting there, a store of conserved

energy. The cumbrous impression made by her figure was dispelled by the witch-like vivacity of her features,—the sparkling eyes, the shrewd and clever nose.

"How is the temper?" Rab asked her. "Has your new batch of maids arrived to ruffle it?" This was some reference, I guessed, to Saturday's passage of wits between them.

"Better, better!" she cried. "I loaned your receipt . . . funny man! Laurd bless 'ee, maister, I'm glad to see ya. All time ya was here, t'other night, I was thinkin', 'Oo is it tha play-ways put me in memory of?' Then I remembers. It was Purchase, my first man. Laurd, a widow wumman, wi' three husban's under ground, had need o' a good memory, an' mine is short. I get mixed among 'em."

"It's not every ane has the felicity to forget their wed partners," said Rab. "You should try a fourth —just to correct the confusion."

"Thee beest a widower, I'm thinkin'," said Mrs. Righton, slyly.

"Lord, madam, yes,—but still wed to a memory."

There was a swerve in his speech, as I caught his eye. I could have struck him for the speech.

"But here's a choice o' pretty men," he says, pointing to us. "Pretty men, wi' their affections roaming. Marriage is a kittle thing. The thought of it a specially kittle thing—eh?" He looked to me again, but I would not acknowledge the gibe. I made believe to be busy with the sandwiches I had ordered. It was a long time since I had lunched. Figg had gone into the bar for some food.

So they went on bantering. I followed them with my ear. My thoughts were wandering: Rab's callous speech had thrown them back on Charlotte. There was an incessant movement in the mirrors, too, that was distracting. . . . "It wur over a wumman my brother Simon an' me caist out," Mrs. Righton's voice fell on my ear. Her speech was soft and humming, as if made for the open sunny air; except in the endless sharp interruptions to direct the business of the bar, from which her eye never strayed for long. "It's fifty years sin', though it dwant sim so long. All about a wumman—an' it wes as 'issterday. . . . To dap back,—as I wes sayin'—I was barned and bred up a'most i' the fam'ly at Wear; and when I wes housemaid, Purchase was butler, an' we scrope and scrope so as to git wed . . . Hur wes serving Mrs. Park as maid, an' Mr. Park wes i' the House, an' so we cum up to Lunnon often. Simon wes a maister fly-rod maker there, an' 'ee cum to see me, an' falls i' love wi' the maid; an' all the time we knew hur wes meetin' the young Captin' an' tossin' hur head at Simon, an' wouldn't look at him, who I said wes a great fool to give so many chances that hur wouldn't take. The Captin an' hur, it sims, had been beknown to each other i' Scotland. . . . Well, Purchase an' me wes wed, and took public at Penn Mill; and wan day the Captin writes me a letter, wud I take in a young leddy—hur wes out av a situation—and wud be t' better av country air for a month or two. "'Tis a babby,' I ses to Purchase; 'mark my words.'—'You knows wummen's ways better nor me,' ses he.—"'Tis men's ways,' I ses. . . ."

My eye had wandered to a stucco piece that decorated the ceiling—a representation of the Five Senses—clouded with smoke, and in its allegory; and I puzzled myself resolving its parts, giving half an ear to the woman's story the while. It ran on: The girl arrived at Penn Hill, and it was the lady's maid, as she had imagined. One morning, not long after, a chaise drove rapidly over the bridge, and stood at the door, and the Captain descended. Mary Purchase, as she was then, was in the bar, and he flew ben to the girl. He was getting the packet at Weymouth: running off to France. The Jews were after him: his gambling had come to that. He kissed her a hurried good-bye. As he left he put money in Mary Purchase's hand. "You'll look after her—she's my wife." "She's my wife" or "as my wife," the Captain had said. Mrs. Purchase was never sure which.—"As good as married," Purchase interpreted. That might be as might be: she was a proud, flinty maid, and nothing was to be got out of her. The next they heard of the Captain was the rumour of his death, a fortnight after the babby, a maid, was born; and soon mother and child were away to the North. Simon came down a week later, and because his sister could not give him the address, he quarrelled with her, and she had never spoken to him after. . . . There was some story that the Captain's body had to be smuggled home from the Jews; and she went North. . . .

Mr. Figg had returned in time for the end of the story. "Who was the Captin?" I heard him ask. The question framed itself as my own—my mind.

like a child's, half unconsciously working out a problem.

"Ho!" cried Rab, getting to his feet; "it's too old a story for a paragraph, Figg."

I rose with him, my mind all of a flutter. I stood up, and there, in the glass, was Charlotte! I looked into her eyes. All around me, in a score of reflections, were Charlotte and myself. I looked into her eyes, and she looked into mine. We stood staring at each other, this story in our eyes.

"MacNab. Captain Hector MacNab," says Mrs. Righton. "Christian Tullis wes the maid's name."

At the words I blinked for a moment, and in that moment Charlotte was gone.

I stepped forward. My cry of "Charlotte!" was frozen in my throat.

"Ba 'ee seein' a ghost, maister?" cried Mrs. Righton. "Ya ba es white es a sheet."

"The heat! the heat!" cried Rab. "Come out into the air. Moreover, what about our train?"

"I 'ear the whistle," says Joe Whippet, waking up. "Better run!"

And in a loose string we all ran to the station.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MEETING AT DAWN.

I RAN to the station with the others in a mechanical step, quickening the pace when, on the bridge beyond the "Silly Roach," the whistle of the up-train again reached our ears. Thought was whirring in my head. I was a tenter to my own thought; as to a machine set to a pattern which I only dimly discovered. The train was at a standstill as we stepped on the platform, and ran along looking for seats. Scarce conscious of my own artifice, I allowed the others to tumble into their carriages, and, undiscovered by them in the dusk, was left behind on the platform. Before the van-lights had focussed to a speck, I was back in the avenue which led to the inn.

The wonder of finding Charlotte had swallowed up the lesser wonder of finding her here. On reflection, her presence in the inn explained itself easily. She was one of the "extra hands" of whom I had heard Mrs. Righton so garrulous to Rab. There was nothing so remarkable in Charlotte's being here —save the coincidence of our being here also. If it was a coincidence! Had Rab known where to find her? And had Rab any inkling of Mrs. Righton's acquaintance long ago with Christian Tullis? And was her story true, in whole or in part? These were

the questions churned in the revolutions of this flying machine in my head; and always there was audible, like the fixed and level hum of it,—Charlotte would take flight. To return in the morning would be to find her gone. She would escape under protection of night. I could not have explained why she should do so: possibly something in Figg's talk threw me forward to a conclusion without realising the progressive steps. But I had no doubt of it: it was the one certainty evolved from the whirl of speculation in my run for the train; and it prompted me to this artifice of remaining behind to keep vigil at the "Silly Roach."

The night was sultry and dry. Not a breath of dew clouded the grassy seat among the trees in the hollow of the road from which I watched the movements at the inn. The holiday parties had left; but there was still some traffic of villagers at the house, flickering its lights. Grey figures in twos and threes crossed the bridge, passed me, and entered. I recognised them on their return. At length the door was flung wide and a noisier congress of voices issued. The block of passers-by thickened for a space, and then tailed off. Stragglers passed, in deep discourse. There was a pause; then two men came slowly along the road and stepped on the bridge. At the parapet nearest me they halted. I could hear the monotonous waver of their voices, and even catch a word or two.—"Jaick's dead."—"Jaick at Cager's lock?"—"The same."—"Hum! He was over-excitable."—"Over-avaricious, I would say. . . ."

The lights were going out in the "Silly Roach."

One by one the bright shafts striking across the roadway among trees around were sheathed. Still the two men's voices reached me. There were sounds of doors being shut and barred. The clock in a distant hamlet hummed the quarter. Within the barred inn there was still movement and the clinking of glasses, and the two men on the bridge talked on: all sounds sharpened in the stillness that had fallen on the night. The minutes passed, and midnight sounded in the village tower. The voices on the bridge raised themselves to a farewell note, and were silent.

From all the chinks in the lower storeys of the inn the lights had disappeared. Two candles shone in two small windows under the eaves. . . . One shone long there. . . . I was alone.

Fortune had set me down in a world of which I knew nothing. To the left, where the train had disappeared, lay London. I fancied that I could see the faint glow in the sky far off over the city. All the rest was dark to me,—not a landmark or a road familiar. Even the sound of the clock in the village was strange. Somewhere in the dark inn over there was Charlotte!

I stepped out from under the trees, upon the road. Even there it was dark for midsummer. My memory leapt to Tarvit, where all through the June nights Day crouched, wakeful, on the northern horizon. And from that, with a thrill of associate perception, I came back to Mrs. Righton's story.

I strove to review, reasonably, in order, the fragments of the old Legend that had struggled to piece themselves in my mind as I listened to her recital:

the Major, dying in the house in the Den, full of fearsome lights and sounds; young MacNab's body, smuggled to the St. Brise shore, and brought under cloak of night by the runners to the vault prepared for his father's; Mirrin MacNab and Lizbeth Tullis at the Major's bedside, sharing the secret of the night, and Robert Tullis desperately restraining the village from probing it; the foundling in the wicker shallop in Aunt Janet's milkhouse. . . . And here in this fishing-place was a vagrant tale, carrying back to the germ the source of it all; and not of the Legend only, but of all this family history in which I was so strangely involved, with the cloud of Rab's hints and gibes, the cloud of his personality, enveloping it. . . . Why—why, Dave Cook might be the heir to Nochty, if Mrs. Righton's story was true! Up to this moment I had associated its possibilities with the elder Charlotte only—but now!

I paced the road in excitement. The MacNabs . . . Aunt Charlotte . . . my Charlotte. I was working out the consequences to Charlotte, if the story were true. I was not conscious of the relief that was stealing into my mind at the thought of its truth; or of how it coloured my waiting for Charlotte. . . . Why, even if it were only partly true: though that marriage were no more than a contingency, unresolvably doubtful. She was still granddaughter to a MacNab. . . . Even if there never had been a marriage,—the bar sinister gilds with time. . . . I would probe that story to the bottom. . . .

I came back at length to my bank among the trees, wornout and drowsy. Fluid and inquisitive thought

congealed into a kind of tough endurance. How long I sat there I do not know. It was a band of water-cress gatherers on their way to work who aroused me, and I leapt to my feet.

The day had not yet signalled its coming. Night was still over all. Nevertheless, the world, it seemed, hushed itself in an expectancy. There was a breath, a sigh, a restlessness. Then silence. By-and-by I seemed to hear Day coming up the East. . . . It was like the muffled approach of an army. Across the sky, high up, were subtle flutterings; a trembling beat of light. . . . Like the sound of a mighty orchestra playing on muted strings, was its coming. I could have imagined that there was a tramp of feet to a dull ear; I could have imagined that there was the roar of a million youth somewhere just within the range of hearing. Silently, suddenly, imperceptible, the saffron shaft pierced the East. Up and up it came, while night stubbornly fought its approach. Inch by inch it came; and the fight was fierce, and only the groan and thick breathing of the battle was audible. Till, when the battalions of night were rolled up and fled, it seemed as if the Day must give voice to a great shout. He was flinging his arms about, stretching his arms, his limbs, rushing victoriously—up! up! up! but always silently. Then the victor stood up in his glory. Golden bugles shook his triumph. The great expanse cleared, azure strewn, for him as his victorious car leapt into the heavens!

Suddenly, in this awakened world, I heard the rub of a door, a gate clicked, and in a minute Charlotte appeared, issuing upon the avenue. With all

the exaltation of that daybreak in my veins, I stepped out to meet her. "Charlotte!" I cried. So certain had I been of her coming, so full of her had been my mind, that as I stepped out to greet her I felt like one keeping a tryst. It seemed to me that we were keeping a long-deferred tryst, and I looked for her arms to be held out to me. Instead, she hung in her walk when she saw me; until, when I was at her side,—

"O! The world's big enough for me to go my own gait!" she cried.

"Charlotte," I said; "it is not big enough for you to hide from me!"

"I did not hide from you!" she cried passionately.

"No, no, not me," I answered, assured, and flushed with the finding of her for whom I yearned; in my pity for her forlornness, forgetting her imperious heart, and mindful only of my own that was now trumpeting its love for Rab's daughter. "But he—and all—are forgotten."

She asked, breathlessly, "Cannot you understand?"

It was an appeal, wrung from her, to some finer self of understanding which she still hoped, desperately, to find in me; and I was irresponsive to it. Yet I was filled with an overweening confidence of understanding.

"I know all," I said. "I know all. And I have come to seek you, and to find you. I have found you."

She misinterpreted the triumph of my words as exultant knowledge of her relations with Richard.

"I know you, David Shirra," she blazed on me.

"I know you, spying on our affairs. I do not forget the woodyard. I do not forget . . .

"Nay," she said, the flame of her anger going out, leaving a tenderness so new, so clamant of a new experience, that it wrung my heart with unenlightened pity for all that she had passed through.

"Forgive me, David. You have been kind and well-meaning.

"You are well-meaning, but you are not always kind," she went on, and it seemed to me that the sun of laughter was not quite out of her sky. Yet, "What do you here?" she overclouded instantly.

The wings of my assurance weakened for a moment.

"I thought you would want me," I said, on a dropping note.

"You might have known me better."

She stung me to recovery.

"I think I know you better than you know yourself."

"And you?" she said swiftly, as if divining that, in understanding of myself, rather than of her, my ultimate failure lay; ". . . you . . . you, yourself?"

"I wanted you."

Surprised by that declaration, which she might seem to have asked for, she bit her lip, and from the white indent the blood rolled up to her brows.

"I know myself," I said eagerly, penetrating to the doubt in her heart, but stumbling on it like one who has lost his way. "I think always . . . though you would always make me doubtful. . . . But now

at least I know. I am here because I love you, Charlotte."

She flushed a deeper confusion. Pride at bay snatches at any weapon.

"With my father?" she countered me. "And Joe Whippet," she laughed scornfully. "He too. . . ."

"Oh!—Charlotte."

"And the other. . . ."

"You mean," I said vacantly, seeking to bring her speech into a focus worthy of her; the injustice of it stood up out of all proportion,—"You mean the fellow, Figg?"

She made a quick, shrinking movement from me; the lids had fallen over strained eyes; I heard her sharply in-drawn breath. The naming of him even lightly was a blow.

I was confounded by her sensibility. Her mobile moods left me helplessly behind. I could not keep in touch with them. If I could have come into some simpler correspondence with her; could have held her in my arms, eye to eye with her doubt!

I put my hand on her shoulder, compelling her to face me again. "You do me wrong, Charlotte. . . . You do us all wrong. . . ."

"No, no!" she flung off, fiercely reproachful.

"At least you do me wrong," I revised.

I said, fretfully, once more unable to follow closely the curve of her mood, "*I* am not clever." But I added, "Yet . . . yet . . . *I* found you!"

It was a spark struck out by triumphant contact, mentally with my old enemy, Rab, whom I thought I had outdistanced at last by the finding of Charlotte here. But the next instant my mind passed back to

herself. She, too, was clever, impatient of all crude fingering; matching, in the extraordinary sensibility of her nature, all his subtlety and cunning of wits. "I'm proud of handling the affairs of many folks," I said, with a feeling that this admission of Rab's estimate of me was some concession to her; "but folks themselves I still handle clumsily. Am I?"—as he said—"maybe I am so rude an instrument myself, that I cannot judge the fine stops of others. Yet you, I think, Charlotte, you are too apt to think offence. We have all been up for the Clephane Railway Bill, and, hearing the rumour of your being in London, we looked for you."

"I looked for you," I changed protestingly; "I have not been a minute in London, Charlotte, but I thought the next step might bring me to you, and I took it eagerly. I came down here with your father and the others—they were fishing. I should not have come, save for the occasion it gave me of speaking with the man who seemed to know the road to you better than I did. Finding you here was an accident only. At least it was to me. . . . Of course it was an accident. I saw you in that glass last night. I saw you when they didn't. I allowed them to go back to town, and I stayed behind. I have waited here all through the night for you, Charlotte."

"Here! By yourself!"

"You were here."

She gave me a swift look, and edged closer among the trees. I pressed after her eagerly. Dayspring was in her eyes. The clouds still on her brows would clear.

She took refuge in a lighter note.

"Cousin David," she said, "why do you not go back to Fife and forget me?"

"Why do you not go back? You can be happy there."

"For them who are made to be happy there," she added, with a sudden wistfulness, "how good and happy they might be."

"Oh, Charlotte, how happy we might be!"

She flushed again—I think with an astonished pleasure at that asking. She looked at me. There was yielding in her eyes. I thought to blow that compliant spark into a flame, and I blew it out.

"Forget all this miserable business," I said, "now I have found you. I have loved you; I love you. . . . Charlotte, life is all before us—a new life. Forget the past and all that has happened in it. . . . All the things folks may say," I cried. "As my wife, all tongues would be stilled. Come back with me. . . . What can they say?"

Even in the moment of triumphing over the obstacles which had held it back hitherto, my resolution was seeking the encouragement with which Mrs. Righton's discovery had subtly heartened it.

"You heard that story last night?" I said. "You see what it means—about Nochty? For Dave—and for all of you, what it may mean. . . . Even your father. . . . Oh, I will probe it to the bottom. . . . Come back with me."

I looked into her face to see the flame of love and acquiescence, and they were dead. "If I go back, it will be to my father," she said. "But I will not—I will not!" she added vehemently.

"What is it, Charlotte?" I cried. I felt already that I had lost her. I could not tell why. "Not to your father—to me. I love you."

"I almost believed it," she whispered on a quick breath, as to herself.

"I tell you."

"Telling, telling," she said.

"How can I prove it?" I demanded.

But she was not listening. "Nochty," she was saying, scarce above her breath. "Nochty. . . . What does it matter to her now!"

I followed her thought to her mother, but only on mundane wings to her mother's place in that story. In fatuous absorption in self, I still harped on the salve to my poor pride contained in that story.

"Do you not see . . .?" I asked eagerly.

"O, yes—I see," she said. "And you will probe it to the bottom," she added scornfully.

"I said you would be happy in Fife," she went on, her voice back at its proudest and coldest. "And so you would. The folk there are like you, and you are like them. They, like you, would be glad, doubtless, to welcome Nochty's sister among them. I am not Nochty's sister!" she cried passionately.

"You are Aunt Charlotte's daughter!" I answered, again urgent on the clearing up of this story.

"O!" she said, taken unawares by her bitterness and scorn. "I do not think you have forgotten whose daughter I am."

And she was gone back to the inn.

I made no attempt to follow or arrest her. I was

too humiliated and chagrined. She was unjust, cruel. After this night of waiting—this week of longing and waiting! Unjust. Say there was truth in her words,—and something in me said there was; —the small amount, no more, of truth in them was the measure of their injustice. Was it likely I should forget she was Rab's daughter? Was it possible? I had not forgotten, yet I had asked her to be my wife. She taunted me with allowing the change of fortunes, which we seemed to have discovered last night, to outweigh the obstacle the Rascal was. My resolve to find her had been taken long before that. I persuaded myself that the resolve to bring her back with me had been taken before that: that even when Mr. Trail had surprised that denial from me, I had taken it. I had searched for her, and waited for her, out of the love I had to her. That story last night had heartened me. Was that not natural? Was it not only right? Yet she wished me to forget it and to forget Rab. I persuaded myself that that was what she wished. She asked too much! I had not yet attained to the understanding of how love asks all and gives all. I had not yet attained to an understanding of how much I was keeping back.

A market-train to town, the one Charlotte had intended travelling by, was running into the station as I left the avenue. I shrank, as yet, however, from the throng of life, and turned along by the river.

Disillusionment flooded the morning for the wounded spirit seeking seclusion on the meadow path. So that was the end of that! An opiate came with the reflection that my failure merged into the

vanity of all earthly things; for so the humiliation I suffered in it was shared by all mankind. In the universal experience of disillusionment, work is the sovereign balsam. In Fife was a lawyering business, great and growing. Since any honest balsam was the requirement, there was no need to ignore the fact that the business was more likely to grow great because Charlotte in her injustice had refused me; but I did ignore it. The rejected of Love was going home to Tarvit, to seek forgetfulness in a fury of work!

Out of this cloud of flummery sentiment I emerged laughably. From the meadow on the opposite side of the river a horse, a raw-boned grey, had slipped into the water; and there it was, in the early light, a misty skeleton wading in the mud, its vertebræ hideously floating on the surface, and its head and neck straining foolishly to the bank. A boy on the path in front of me had set down his milk-pitchers, and was bombarding the brute with pebbles, heading it back from the central stream. It was just beyond effective range; but now and then a stone rattled on rump or ribs, and sent it to paw the steep bank helplessly. Something in the brute and its actions, the ugliness, the futility of them, stung me to a mad irritation; in which, solemnly, and without a word to the boy, I gave him shot for shot. Rivalry spurred the boy to fresh endeavour, in which I followed him with increasing zest; like him, eagerly searching in a widening circle for flint and pebble imbedded in the pathway, and actively loosening them with toe and heel. I had found an occupation to my hand, to take the place

of that work which I had imagined myself falling to furiously for forgetfulness. Here I was, at any rate, hot, perspiring, arm shot out and coat-tails flying, lips parted before my panting breaths, in operation against this monstrous gaunt backbone that lay on the water, moving a slack head up and down like a nodding ass . . . like Figg! For all the world, it nodded its head like Figg! At that thought I desisted.

"That's no good!" I said to the boy, in lame exculpation.

"No," he said, with a grin. "You never hit it but once."

"Hem! Do you know the brute?"

"Righton's."

"Ah! At the 'Silly Roach.' I had better tell them."

And seizing on this excuse, I went back to the inn to see Charlotte.

I felt better. Stoning this unhappy quadruped had exercised the blood in my body, and I was another man. The events of the night and morning rose up in my mind afresh, but now set in a clear, dry air, swept of all clouds. I would see Charlotte again, and bring her to reason. In my new mood, it seemed to me impossible that any one should resist reason. Then breakfast! I was horribly hungry; and to be hungry with the knowledge of meat is the perfection of the reasonable state. Huts! If only people would be reasonable, how sweetly would the tangle of life uncoil!

Passing trains, to and from town, carried my thoughts forward on the same curve to the Clephane

Bill. The Clephane Bill was another case of a crooked place awaiting only the adoption of a reasonable course to be made straight. This afternoon there was to be a consultation on a scheme of compromise which I myself had suggested. . . .

In this changed mood, which brushed aside any misgiving that Charlotte might have escaped me meantime, I turned into the inn-yard. A sibilant hostler was yoking a roan into a go-gig. In the misty light I could see another figure lending a hand in drawing tight the belly-band. I had not taken two steps within the yard when this figure rose clear of the beast, and I saw that it was none other than Rab Cuick.

For a reasonable, hungry man, within sight of love and breakfast, here was a tangle to unwind sweetly.

What was the Rascal doing here? It was only too easy to guess, I thought: this story of the woman Righton. He would pump her as dry as a speldin. There suddenly flashed upon me a vision of Rab back in Fife, with the information so gained; fastening like a leech on the Clephanes, and suck-sucking at them. How well I knew him, yet how shallowly I fathomed him! I pictured James Clephane, the honest man, under that ordeal. And Richard Clephane. The possible effects of this discovery on the fortunes of Richard Clephane stood out clear as day for me—and I realised, for the first time fully, how I hated him! Probing this story became for me a scheme of revenge. Let Rab probe it, and do his worst!

This rascal here had now become for me a fresh

object of fascination and revulsion. He had become a temptation, because of all that he might be able to do for me against Richard Clephane. Richard Clephane was my client, and Rab stood for dereliction of duty. He had become a temptation, which I personified as fastened to my mind with white sharp teeth. I caught myself making a disgusted movement of the arm, as if shaking off a vermin thing. I resisted an inclination to slip away from him. I would remain to fight him. Any moment, too, he might come face to face with Charlotte. I still felt the glow of triumph at having, as I thought, discovered Charlotte when he had failed, and it warmed me for this fresh contest with him. I would take him away with me, instead of avoiding him. Besides, he had seen me. We were too far apart for me to read signals of recognition in his face; but I was certain he had seen me. He was an unnatural kind of creature, who communicated with some by-ordinar sense in one. I clenched my fists in a firm resolution to give nothing away to this man—nothing of my own, nothing of my client's. I kept repeating Mr. Trail's words, "Your duties to your client," as I stepped across the yard to him; like a man going into battle with a charm on his lips.

"Ah," he said.

"Well."

"A fine morning. A real June morning,—and that is the pick of them. Give me June for a month —the virgin Summer with all her bursting charms. I cannot rest in it—and you, too, I see, are early across the door. I left all London slug-a-bed. But country habits stick to us even in the town."

"Town or country," said I, seeking to reflect his manner: I would be as cunning as he. "Town or country, it's always the early bird that catches the worm——"

"Not always," he broke in, with the old whistle out of his teeth, "not always. There's a kind of bird that steals awa' to hawk when its neighbours have gone home to roost."

"Is that so?" I said, pretending not to see his drift. "I never studied natural history."

"No," answered he with a laugh; "nor ever, I suppose, did the birds I allude to."

It was difficult; but in the hope of beguiling him from this place, I dug my nails deeper in my palms and tholed him. The question was, How to get him away? He was an eel for subtlety among motives.

"You are not forgetting that we are due at Westminster soon after noon?" I asked him.

"In other words," he answered with a laugh—"in other words, wouldn't we better be stepping. Ah! Dauvid Shirra, you for a lawyer. Aye going, like Cortes, wi' beard on shoulder. Well, I own myself beaten. You've outflanked me, lad, stolen a march on me. Lord! It was a stroke of genius to send me back to London, and stay ahent wi' a clear field o' inquiry to yourself."

I thought I detected a note of soreness in his words, and was elated. I had the whip-hand of him this time! Evidently, as I had believed, he knew nothing of Charlotte's presence here, and considered that I had manœuvred only to draw off for myself all that was in Mrs. Righton's cask of recollection.

"Well," I cried, peremptorily, "are we going?"

"Well, *are* we going?" he answered—an open flout.

I was glad to meet it by telling him briefly about the horse stuck in the river farther down. "Wait," I said to him, and dived into one of the stables, as if in search of the hostler. Tearing a leaf from my notebook, I wrote three lines to Charlotte, begging her to await a letter from me. Stepping back into the yard, I met the man coming out of the coach-house, whip in hand, and buttoning his long blue jerry.

"One of your horses has strayed into the river down by," I told him, walking him away out of earshot of Rab.

"Um! Grey and rumpy? Bag o' bones?"

I nodded.

"Thought so. Meg. Flighty bitch."

"Turn-BULL! Turn-BULL!" Mrs. Righton's voice sounded from somewhere in the front of the inn.

"Ditto," said Turnbull, jerking his thumb in its direction, and turning to go back to the gig.

I stopped him, to push the folded note and a coin into his hand. "You have a girl here called Charlotte. Give her this note."

"Have we?" he grinned. "She's in great demand."

"TURN-bull!" sounded Mrs. Righton's voice again; and Turnbull, jumping into his seat, drove round from the yard.

"Going awa' without any adieux?" says Rab, when I came up to him where he stood, and motioned him down the road.

I glanced at him sharply; but he was looking about on the fine morning, no *arrière pensée* on his face.

We walked to the station in silence. A train came up almost immediately.

"Jump in," I cried, as he held open a door.

"Na, na, laird," grinned he.

I laughed myself, wershly enough, as I got in.

"Honours even," he cried, making a pretence to shut the door from the outside, as the train moved off; but the next minute he was in beside me, with a broad laugh. It was a relief to have carried him off, even at the expense of a gibe or two—even though I had had to leave Charlotte to do it. I rose involuntarily to look out of the window upon the "Silly Roach," where I was leaving Charlotte.

"And now, back to London," says he, with a pretence of a great sigh. "Back to business—to wark. Wark! That's the salve for the wounded heart." Here was the echo of my mood by the river, the rascal! "I never kent it fail; and in my time I've seen a good wheen bereaved folk, widowers and siclike, terrible down wi' grief. Ane or twa took to drink; but most to wark, and picked up wonderful, and had a whole heart to offer in a twal'-month and a day. It's marvellous, the recuperative power o' the heart."

His mockery held a meaning that filled me with uneasiness. I sat in my corner with my eyes closed, to conceal any exhibition of its effect on me. I was no longer confident of the whip-hand. Worn out with the night's vigil and the morning's disappoint-

ment, I fell asleep, and slept to Liverpool Street. Rab woke me up."

"Twelve-thirty at my hotel, remember," I said to him on the pavement.

"You can depend on me. There's nothing now —nothing that'll not keep,—to tak' me into the country again."

I called a hansom, angrily. He mounted on the steps to close the wings on me.

"It's no use trying to deceive you, Dauvid," he said. "You might as soon try to deceive me. You ken why I turned up at the 'Silly Roach' this morning?"

"You know best," I said, with lamentable failure of dignity.

"O! *I* know. But didn't you see my daughter Charlotte in the bar last night?"

I sank back in the hansom. I would not ask the question on my lips. But he read it in my eyes, and he laughed in them.

"Your *billet-doux* wouldn't be delivered."

I sat forward on the seat.

"No, no," he said; "I didn't see her. I daursay you had the weather-gage o' me there. Turnbull told me she only left this morning for London town. She and I maun ha' crossed."

"Westminster Palace Hotel!" I roared up at the cabby, and Rab leapt off the step.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. FIGG.

FROM the moment that Rab left me at Liverpool Street I was in a fever to have him within sight again. Away from me, he had me at an advantage: even with me, in truth, the advantage was all with him. But face to face with him—greatly as I abhorred the situation—I could at least have an inkling of his next move, to checkmate him or to try to checkmate him.

He turned up at Westminster at midday, and on one pretence and another I kept him engaged with me throughout the afternoon. James Clephane joined us for an hour. I was conscious of a stiffness in his manner to me, which I could not explain by the presence of Rab Cuick; for towards the Rascal he showed, if not graciousness, at least a tolerance that was surprising.

Thereafter, I asked Rab to dine with me. So long as we were in London I would not leave him an hour alone if I could help it—of that I was determined. If he was to hear Mrs. Righton's further story, I would hear it. What puzzled me was that he was so readily persuaded to remain in town, instead of running off to the "Silly Roach." "You'll dine with me?" I had said; and he was ready. "It's our last night in London," was my explanation of the un-

usual invitation; but I made it without any belief that it threw dust in the eyes of Mr. Rab Cuick: and if I had, his manner of accepting the invitation must have disillusioned me. I would not dine him at my hotel; and while I was humming and hawing as to where to take him, "Have you been to Fenton's?" he said. It was a restaurant in a little street off Piccadilly Circus, or maybe it was only in that neighbourhood; it was Rab who led the way to it. He had been there late one night, he told me; had supped there . . . with . . . with . . . He did not complete the information. "It's not like your hotel," he said; "it's a quiet place—so far as respectable folk, the like of your friends, go. You'll not ken yourself there, Mr. Shirra. Better!—nobody'll ken you. It's a bit gay, and full of life. But it's our last night in London,—so *you* say,—which is a handy excuse for a multitude of—extravagances."

Among the cloud of his impertinences that phrase, "so *you* say," stung me sharply. My scheme of compromise had been adopted, and my work in London was finished. I was free to travel down to Scotland the next day, and certainly Mr. Trail would expect me to. There was a plan in my head of going down to the "Silly Roach" the next day and travelling North overnight; Sunday morning, at any rate, must find me reporting to Mr. Trail. But I had no reason to assume that Rab would return home so soon. I could make certain that his expenses would not be allowed for a single day longer; but the man was a marvel in his handling of ways and means. As he said himself, when the

worst came to the worst, he could live by snuffing up the east wind like Job's cuddies.

I was tired and sleepy. I had only snatched another hour's sleep before midday. Yet I cannot deny that I found the meal diverting. I think he laid himself out to amuse me. He had his choice of wine, and made it discreetly. "The privilege of hospitality," he said, "to pay the piper without having called the tune. It puts the table upon a moral basis. This is the pure Pineau, the real Burgundy," he went on, fingering his glass; and then fell into an entertaining prattle about wines—about vintages, and comet years, and the quirks of national tastes—that made me wonder. "It's gracious of you to pretend to forgetfulness of my being a bit of a connoisseur," he said. I ought to have struck him a blow of filial indignation for his audacity in referring to his smuggling days; but he only tickled me. The pure Pineau, it is to be feared, was compromising my virtue. I said, "You've had a multifarious career."

"In my time, in my time!" crowed he. "Did I ever tell you o' my jaunt to Holland?"

I shook my head, determined not to admit acquaintance with my grandfather's story. But of a sudden the conversation in the woodyard fluttered into my mind, as if it were seeking an entrance into the story that was building itself up in my mind, and I, half consciously, pricked up my ears. He was a man who, you could imagine, was able to see you prick up your ears.

"Maybe I will—some day," he continued. "A voyage of adventure that,—adventure and discov-

ery—my first and last! Till in the autumn of my days, with life in the fall, you gave me this trip to London. A kind o' weather-breeder, as I doubt: there's foul weather to follow. . . . Well, well, I wouldn't ha' missed it for the world."

"Look at it!" he cried, with his eyes sparkling at the coming-and-going movement of the place. "London! it's like a book, a novelle, though so homely with it all that you seem to read it by your ain fireside. When I go back to the North, preserve me! it will be with a fountain o' gaiety. This week here has debauched my sobriety of nature." He began to speak about Scotland. The people there had grown wersh, he said. Their laughter had aye been of a kind that waits to laugh at a man, be't ourselves; never at folly, but aye at a man seen in the daft light of his foolishness. And nowadays only the nat'rals are daft, and them we shut up in the poorhouse. "So that a body, impatient like me," he added, "wi' a taste for the essence of the thing, maun aye be compounding mischief for myself if I I'm to get satisfaction. It was wont to be a different place, Scotland—a daft, jokey place. How the change cam' beats me. Gone out wi' the oatmeal, maybe. Maybe folk are like trout, that turn from rainbow hues to mud through a change o' feeding."

A lull had fallen on the traffic when he rose from the table. "I maun make a move," said he. "I promised our illustrious friend on the Press a call th' night."

"Mr. Figg?" I asked. He nodded. Well, the further pain of Figg's company should not interfere with my plan of shadowing Rab. When I pro-

posed to go with him, he hesitated for a second only. "We've driven on an errand to the Press before!" he said, gaily, and called a hansom.

Mr. Figg lived somewhere among a nest of squares off the Pentonville Road. The house at which we pulled up, with its face deeply veiled by the summer gloaming, had a country, tea-rose simplicity of air; so that the squalor discovered when the door was opened to us distressed me as a coarse word would in the mouth of an apple-cheeked wench. Mr. Figg's appearance on our summons was preluded by his voice somewhere up in the shell of the building, mixed with others, women's, rising and falling to the opening and shutting of a door. I thought I should like to see Mr. Figg's womenkind. When he came downstairs he was flinging his cloak over his shoulders.

"I won't ask you in," he greeted us. "There's a restaurant in the Upper Street. A cab! Cabs! for three of us." He slapped his trouser-pocket, which jingled. "Walk, say you? On, then! You can understand,"—he turned to me, with a curious mixture of apology and defiance,—"the like of me—out in the world all day—content with a plain nest to creep to o' nights."

I begged him to put himself to no trouble, as we had just dined.

"But you'll sup? We would not? Nor, then, would he. He had lunched—lunched late. The fact was, it was rather an important luncheon. We would wonder, he said, at the strange things people in his line are aye having little birds whisper in their ear."

"But we'll open a bottle," cried he, leading the way into the restaurant, with a swaggering fling of his cloak.

The indifference he assumed in throwing down his paper note showed that the Bank of England's indebtedness to him for five pounds sterling was of rare occurrence. He grew louder and more swaggering, and gulped down the champagne. It dawned on me that the man was tipsy. What deceived me, making me doubtful, was a dissoluteness of nature, a hysterical drunkenness, not of wine, such as I had not met with in life before. Rab, I could see, was watching him with a deadly interest. He would etherise his mind with a flattering word, and then stick a feeling-needle into it, as a doctor will probe an abscess in search of vital corruption. The man's talk was the bubbling-up of all the disaffection of ill-condition. I had never conceived the like. It overran society, and religion, and love, and all the sacred tokens of the hearth, heaping upon them its sickening, filthy abuse. It was anarchy, and epileptic. I remembered Charlotte's disgust at the mention of the man's name. To think that she may have suffered this!

With the mounting wine the man began to vapour about himself, discovering a frightful and hysterical egoist,—himself the skeleton whom all his ill-conditioned, crapulous opinions were designed to cover. There was more money in his pocket, it seemed. He flourished it, flushed by the triumph of possession. Out of his incoherent swaggering, however, I seemed to be able to piece a not entirely incoherent reference to the subject of my own thoughts. I was

instinctively conscious of Rab's needle, still delicately and surely at work. Yet I could swear that even in the process some understanding, as to the reticence made necessary by my presence, established itself between the experimenter and his victim. The money the man was flourishing was the price of silence: I did not know enough then to label it blackmail. Silence about what? about whom? I could not gather. Rab's research seemed directed to some other end.

It was time to be going, Rab said at length, and I found myself in the crowded street of Islington, with a tipsy man's company added to the burden of the Rascal's.

In the open air, however, the vinous swagger vanished, and Figg fell into an amusing, gloomy and dignified step. From that he was aroused presently, apparently by the sound of singing that reached us; for he uttered a fierce snarl, and strode off with us at his heels.

We were again in the maze of streets and squares off the Pentonville Road, and at a corner of one of the busiest of them found an evangelistic party singing a hymn lustily to harmonium accompaniment. There was a fountain or statue or lamp-post—I forget exactly what—with a strong flanking of steps, beside which they had entrenched themselves. Backing on it was a harmonium, at which a man sat playing. In a semicircle round him were the singers,—eight or nine women, and a man or two; beyond them an outer semicircle of auditors, two or three deep. On the steps a tall, thin, old man, with a reverent chin on his breast, swayed on broken

knees in an affecting, drunken emotion, which expressed itself in a cheeping repetition of the chorus. At the point where we touched the crowd, Figg had already made some commotion, and I edged a place or two round the circle.

"See their sanctimonious faces!" he shouted. The hymn swelled louder, evidently in accordance with a well-known expedient for overcoming dissent. The faces of the singers were long and earnest; at another time I might have called them sanctimonious. It was Mr. Figg who called them that, and I was ready with a defence of them in my own mind. How would he have had them? You don't sing hymns with a grin on your face! Was there anything, indeed, so pathetic and absurd and heroic at once as the assurance of this dozen of commonplace people seeking to be a leaven in the immense mass of London! Mr. Figg was so greatly on my nerves that these were my thoughts.

The man at the harmonium had begun to speak. Beside me, I observed, between me and Mr. Figg and Rab, was a middle-sized, dapper, horsey man,—horsey in feature and dress. An Irish horse-couper, or an Irishman and a horse-couper born and bred in London. A switch was stuck under one elbow. His fingers were busy cracking nuts, deftly scattering the broken shells and flicking the kernel into his mouth, which at the proper moment opened to receive it, seemingly automatically. He had a cool and critical eye, which never was taken off the speaker by so much as a wink. The mouth and the eye seemed to belong to different men.

The speaker was of the order Militant—militant

Protestant. If we embraced the religion to which he invited us, be sure, he said, we should be reviled. Once, when giving his testimony, he was nearly killed by a flower-pot flung at his 'ead. It was down in a narrow street, Westminster way, off Stratton Ground. His 'ymn-book was knocked to smithereens, and the top of his 'armonium stopped in. The flower-pot was thrown from a third-floor window by a Roman Catholic. "An' served you bloomin' well right!" I heard Mr. Figg in comment. That, continued the speaker, was only one of the attacks he had suffered, in doing his Master's work, from the Catholics. The Catholics . . .

"Stick to your own religion, guv'nor," said the man with the nuts, tapping the speaker's shoulder lightly with his switch over the row in front of him.

"Hear, hear! Hear, hear!" rose Mr. Figg's voice.

There was a slight commotion in his corner. Two evangelists were trying a conciliatory "My good man!" upon him, and Rab was whistling rebellion in his teeth.

The speaker gave Nuts a good-natured nod; and, leaving controversy, took up the Gospel story. Nuts slipped his switch under his elbow. His mouth began to chew again, and his eye fixed the speaker with deadly neutrality.

The old man on the steps, meanwhile, took to groaning with so much unction that the two evangelists, leaving Mr. Figg, ranged themselves by his side. "Ay! Ay! It's the joy. Hallelujah!" His voice in corroboration of the speaker rose to a high quaver, and the two evangelists tried to quieten

him. "'E's all right! 'E's all right! I'm 'ere!" cried Nuts dispassionately, tapping them with his switch, but never lifting his eye off the speaker.

Rab, in his corner, had discovered a drunken Scots tramp engaged in a theological disputation with himself. He addressed a word to him in the boadest tongue, and the tramp, emboldened by the sense of a countryman's support, changed his muttered debate for loud argument. "I'd like to ken whaur the salvation comes in! . . . Hairvest! . . . Hairvest! Ay, the agricultural labourer . . . To h—— wi' religion! Be a gen'leman! What does Robbie Burns say? . . ."

The two evangelists came flying from the unctuous grey-beard on the steps to the ribald Scot. In a second the man's disputatiousness took a new shape, and he was meeting the zeal of the evangelists with an unsteady squaring-up to them in a revolution of closed fists.

"Hands off! Hands off!" shrieked Figg in his rear. "The man has as much right to speak as you. I know the law! It's a free country!"

The tramp, mistaking his champion for the enemy, had turned, and now worked the revolving fists towards Mr. Figg. "I'll free country you, ye scarecraw Macchiavel!" he was crying, and Figg beat a retreat to my corner.

Rab followed, ranging himself on my other side, chortling. I was laughing myself. The speaker had finished, and seated himself at the hamonium.

Nuts stepped briskly into his place. "I would like to say a few words, gen'lemen! . . ."

Crash came an opening chord on the harmonium, and the singers dashed off into the first verse of a hymn.

Nuts coolly cracked a shell, and stood critically surveying the performance.

"Shame! Shame!" Figg began again. "It's a free country."

"Look out!" cries Rab; and Figg backed in terror of a fresh advance by the tramp. But he was tacking down the street to a song of Robbie Burns.

The verse ended. Taking brisk advantage of the lull, Nuts once more stepped forward.

"Gen'lemen. Just a few words."

Crash came the chord on the harmonium, and the chorus flung themselves with triumphant gusto into the second verse.

With a shrug of the shoulder, and a flick of shells, in profound contempt, Nuts walked off. But Figg was a raging devil. Rab had said something in his ear, and he forced himself through the circle, and stood shouting and gesticulating in the face of the singers. Even the cloak flung round his tall gaunt figure seemed draped in epileptic folds. The white, tense face surmounting it vibrated with a hysterical fury. "Free Speech! Free Speech!" he foamed. There was something so demoniacal about him that I felt creepy. The man at the harmonium pounded bravely on; but the chorus, the women in it, and some of the men, gasped when they looked at him, and the sounds dried up in their mouths.

Rab took me by the arm. "Come!" he said.

"He'll get himself into mischief. Cannot you quieten him?"

Rab shook his head with a laugh. "He's owre far gone," he answered.

The evangelist stewards came running up with a policeman. They broke the circle where we stood. "Oh! it's 'im, is it?" the officer said, as he pushed his way through with a fine consequence. "I've missed 'im for a while."

"Come," said Rab to me again. "You don't want to appear in a London police-court case before you win back to St. Brise."

The thought put me in a fright, and I walked off with him. "Free Speech! Free Speech! I represent the Press. The Free Press and Free Speech," Figg's voice followed us.

"I never saw anything like that," I said, hurrying down the street.

Rab laughed to himself. "Nor did I," he said; "but I imagined what it would be like."

At the street corner we looked back. Two policemen now were marching a rocking figure in a black cloak through the crowd.

"You egged him on," I said a moment later, as we stood by the railings in one of the squares. I had a sudden inspiration that he had egged him on.

"Huts!" Rab said. "He's better out of the way of mischief for a day or two."

His callousness recalled my own score against him. It did more than that. His callousness to Figg, to Figg of all persons in the world, carried me a step nearer an understanding of him and of myself. For I had a quick vision of Rab's happiness. The man was happy, or enjoyed life, at any rate, with a happiness I could never attain to. What a

free, uplifted life was his! What was the life of duty compared to his! I was thinking, of course, of my own life. His was like the flash of understanding that was lighting my mind for a second; and mine was the gulf of blackness where the flash was dead. It was not that he was happy and I was not: everywhere the world shows the wicked man flourishing. It was more than that. I was filled with doubt of myself. When he and I came to close quarters, first principles clashed. I was getting down to the bed rock of character and conduct; and as I dug, some of my own assurance crumbled away. I felt—and the feeling carried me back twenty years to the school-room of St. Brise—I felt as I did when Mr. Foster toppled me over from my stand upon Conscience. Rab's saying applied itself to me: "I'm true to myself," he was for ever telling me. Was I true to myself? Was I? In the matter of Charlotte, for example? For a second I was lit by the search-light of that question. Then I was plunged again into the blackness.

"See, Rab Cuick!" I cried. "There is something in all this I cannot fathom. What is it? You know. You can tell me, and must this night. In some incomprehensible way this Figg touches our lives. What is your knowledge of him? What is your understanding with him?—O! it is not he alone. So it has been ever since I can remember. . . . My grandfather, my father—scores, scores more. . . . O! it's not them, and it's not Figg," I cried desperately, "it is you that are in it! It is you I cannot fathom!"

"Walk round the square. There's a bobby keep-

ing an eye on us," he said; and then, when he had drawn me off into another street and we fell into a slow walk again: "To grips, is it?" he went on, mockingly. "Well, I'll not beat about the bush with you. That burgundy and champagne—I'm not accustomed to them. They seem to have sapped your customary discretion. They've seduced my tongue, and you maun charge them with its frality. . . . You are in a maze, and you think I can get you out of it. Before I answer you, say, in what capacity do you ask? Is it as the lawyer for Clephane, the factor, with duties to your clients and it? Or is it—how shall I say it with sufficient delicacy, save as I've said it before?—is it not as a lawyer, but as a man?"

"The two do not clash," I answered, fencing.

"No? At least it needs a clever whip to drive them in double harness. But we'll take it as you say. Now, this auld story o' Mrs. Righton's that's worriting you . . ."

"Auld?"

"Auld to me, in the main."

"But, man!" I cried in excitement, "do not you see what it means! With Hector MacNab's death the Den property—and Nochty is the pick of Clephane—went to Mirrin MacNab, and with Mirrin MacNab to the Clephanes when she married the old laird. But it wasn't hers to take with her, if this story is true and Christian Tullis and the young MacNab were wed."

"If they were wed," says Rab, quietly.

"If they were—of course. But that's the point. In that case their child, your wife, . . ."

"In fact, Mr. Shirra, you would have me, willy-nilly, laird o' Nochty."

"Not you!"

"In a kind of liferent, of course. An ex-laird! But among your 'If's' you forget one. What if Christian Tullis be living still?"

"Christian Tullis! Oh, she must be dead—long ago. Let me see . . . thirty and ten and ten—it's over sixty years since the Sabbath night o' the legend."

"Sixty-two years come the twenty-first of November," said Rab. "My age to a day, you forget."

"Of course. Well, say Christian Tullis was twenty then."

"She was barely nineteen."

"Then sixty-two and nineteen. Over eighty . . . She might be living, of course."

"Of course. Awkward folk live as long as annuitants; and you remember what Michael Trail advised about one of them in the Strath—'Tak' him up the hill: he's been forgot!' But," he added, "maybe there are no hills whaur Christian Tullis bides."

"I've heard something of her history later," I said, falling into a train of recollection. "She married a foreigner,—a Dutchman it was. . . . Ha! No hills. . . ."

My own words flashed the truth upon myself. The woodyard scraps of story leapt to my mind. It was as if in groping along a wall for an exit I had touched a spring that flung open a door.

"Ha! You know all about Christian Tullis!" I

cried. "A voyage of adventure and discovery, you said. You promised to tell me of it."

"So I did—in my good time."

"Oh, I know more than you think," I cried recklessly. "Perhaps I know something about a family of Dunlop across the sea as well as yourself."

"You have your ain strange ways of gathering informations," he sneered angrily. "And all in Clephane interest, I daursay."

"I have, I tell you, an interest in this. There's Dave's rights to think of. Dave . . . and there's his sister's."

"True, there's his sister's. . . . And maybe," said Rab, looking me through and through, "maybe their poor father's price might be enhaunced a bit in some folk's eyes, were things to turn out right."

This man, this rascal, had it in his power to shame me. He was my stumbling-block to Charlotte, and he knew it. In his hands lay the truth about this story by which I trusted,—I no longer denied to myself my trust in it,—to evade the obstacle; and he knew that also. Oh! it was this story, the escape I hoped for from it, that lost me Charlotte in the avenue this morning. Imperfectly I saw that, and could not bear to think of it. Yet I still clung to the story fatuously.

"Tell me," I said; "is it possible you have known this all along, yet said nothing and done nothing to get at the truth? . . . Why, why? . . . It's monstrous."

"I can well believe it is—in your eyes. But, as you say, it's me you cannot fathom," he continued, halting me long enough to look in my face and laugh

at the discomfiture he saw there. "Hey! You tak' the wrang plumb-line when you sound me wi' yoursel'. . . . Assuming there's a favourable truth to be got at—for"—he laughed again—"an unfavourable I don't desire, and no more, I take it, do you. Consider! I am a poor man, and a man with a repute that's—well, you've all whistled me down the wind considerably. The Clephanes and the MacNabs, again, are auld, well-stated folk. There you are! What though we could mak' out some legal claims on Nochty, whaur is the white tincture can convert a Cuick into a Clephane? . . . O, mind you, I don't deny that there's a pleasure in guid birth. When all's said and done, it's not a pleasant thing to have an uncle called 'Schlatcher-feet.' "

"What!" I cried. I remembered the dirty wastrel whom we called by that by-name, and my thoughts flew to Charlotte. This was worse than ever. "What! was Schlatcher-feet your uncle?"

"Stap me! You can be a literal devil, Dauvid," answered he. "No, he hadn't that honour. Yet—affairs fall out queerly. He might have been more inconveniently related. He had a dochter. He might have shamed me as a father-in-law. Demned awkward thing an ill-reputed father-in-law, Dauvid!"

I kept my hands tight behind my back, and said nothing.

"It comes to this, Mr. Shirra," he said, dropping into a note of more relentless insolence: "I'll not move a finger to unearth this affair that you have miraculously got scent of. You can do what you like about it: let it lie or howk for it—if there's any-

thing to leave or to bring up. You ken best what's compliant with your duty to Mr. Richard Clephane. That's for your conscience. Now for your interest, Mr. Shirra. Pardon me if I daur not be more outright but maun talk in a parable."

He drew himself up, with a squaring of the shoulders, like a man to a task that gives him enjoyment. His look, his gesture, the tone of his voice, betokened his enjoyment.

"A certain great nobleman was beloved by a beautiful and profuse maid of lowly estate. This nobleman was enaumoured of the maid; but because of his place and accomplishments he could not marry her; nor yet could he bear to break with her. And so, when the time cam' for him to go into a distant country, he bade her, not 'fareweel', but only *au revoir,* as it were, and embraced her, and took his departure. Now this maid's father was a ba-ad man!—much feared and disliked in his countryside,—to that degree that for all her beauty she found herself treated with disdain. Therefore, gathering together her belongings—her ain at least—she left her home and went into that distant country whaur her lover was residing. And when she cam' to him, he received her joyfully—but wi' discretion; and in time she fand him grow cold, and sometimes he seemed to avoid her; and then she heard, on the tongues of the gossips of that country, stories of the nobleman her lover and a certain fascinating leddy of the Court. And once more she fled, and hid herself among strangers. Now it happened that about this time a certain wise gentleman of her country, a man of a very tender and disinterested heart, made

a discovery. And when he proclaimed it, behold! the nobleman was deposed of all his wealth and rank, and the maid was found to be the rightful possessor of them; and all in this country and amang her ain people who had despised her afore were ready to fall down and worship her. Then the maid sought out her lover, who was now cast out of the Court, and treated with coldness and contempt, even by the beautiful women in it; and all the wise men among them wondered and tried to dissuade her, but she condescended upon the outcast, and offered to share with him all she possessed, and—and, in a word, Mr. Dauvid, he jumped at it like a cock at a grossit. . . . There's a nut for you to crack."

The insolent audacity of the man left me in speechless bewilderment. I was in a whirl between two contending blasts; one of anger with Rab, one of chagrin at the truth in his speech. For was it not true that my miserable probing of the story to the bottom was only to throw Charlotte into Richard's arms? I could not doubt it, knowing her heart,—if she loved him. That was the question I kept beating out in my mind: If she loved him. . . . If so . . .

And all the time Rab was answering it in his talk by my side. "Ah! Mr. Dauvid," he was saying, "there's no limit for a woman when she's enaumoured of a man." And then I became half-conscious that he was describing something that was familiar to me: a cottage and a paddock and a few white clothes glimmering on the hedge in the moonlight, and a modest girl's nature overflowing to a lad. . . . Something told me that he was relating an experi-

ence of his own. . . . Something flashed it upon me that it was his own wife he was telling of. . . .

"And so it is with any woman when she's gone on a man. She . . ."

"You blackguard!" I cried, and walked off and left him.

When I reached my hotel I found a telegram from the Town-of-Tarvit office awaiting me. Mr. Trail had had another seizure, and I was to return at once if possible. The next night I was back in Fife.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE NORTH FORELAND.

THE splendid summer of that June set full-blown, and ripened, and fell. The winds of autumn scattered it. Winter, like a mortcloth, lay upon the earth.

All the while I was kept flying like a busy shuttle in my groove in Town-of-Tarvit. Industrious lawyering engrossed my life. No echo of Charlotte reached me. I had not a day to spare for search of her—I had not: besides, of what avail was search in that monstrous hive of London? Charlotte was lost to me; and I was proving for myself now the virtue of work as an opiate for the repining heart. Yet as a man labouring in the open is always conscious of the blue above him—though once or twice only he straighten his back to look up at it,—so I, though I could not live in the thought of Charlotte, never missed the consciousness of her from my mind.

Mr. James Clephane spent the greater part of those months up in London, "keeping an eye on Richard," he said. "Making a virtue of pleasure," said Mr. Trail: the old fellow's wits were brisk enough though his legs had failed him. James Clephane, as his lawyer guessed, was bitten afresh by life in town. He had had his fling of the world

when he was younger and less well off. Now was his St. Martin's summer, and he was basking in it. Little follies like that are not the least of life's virtues; and I am glad that the picture of Nochty I leave with you should show the honest, testy man innocently indulging it.

At such times as he was in Fife, however, I could not help a suspicion that he fought shy of me. The stiffness, or at least reserve, which I had noticed in the last days of my stay in London remained in his manner. He did not once again touch with me on Richard's affairs; though he had deep consultations upon them with Mr. Trail, who, on the plea that they came nicely within the compass of his failing energies, quietly withdrew the Clephane private business into his own hands. This was one worm in the bud of my exultation over the more arduous and complicated responsibilities that now fell upon my shoulders.

In a general way, of course, I knew all that was going on at Clephane, and even with Richard in London. On one matter, indeed, once the danger threatened by it was past, Mr. Trail was anxious to be particular. The Biatrucci scandal had been hushed up: "No thanks to Mr. Shirra" was in Mr. Trail's tones as he spread the ridiculous story before me. He made no allusions to Charlotte by name: but she was understood in his references to the wrong scent on which, he would have it, I had laid James Clephane. I knew better, and it was difficult to suffer his raillery in silence. It hurt my professional pride; the more so that I could not get out of him how the affair had been settled. "Was Figg in

it?" I rashly demanded. "Figg! Who's Figg?" he asked. The question challenged me to make a clean breast of Charlotte's story, and that was impossible. I stumbled over a lame explanation of my acquaintance with the man. "A fig for your Figg!" Mr. Trail cried when I was finished, and chuckled in his armchair. That became a standing joke with him—"A fig for your Figg." From his merry way of dealing with the subject I concluded that Richard Clephane was causing him no fresh anxiety. Indeed, he told me that the young laird had come into calm weather, and that all was plain sailing. That was good hearing, inasmuch as it pointed to no further complications with Charlotte. But I had a feeling that I was being shut out from the heart of Richard Clephane's doings.

For this hurt sense of exclusion from Clephane counsels I found consolation of a kind in my knowledge of Mrs. Righton's story. I suffered no vulgar temptation now to use it against my clients. In truth, I had no longer a wish to probe it to the bottom. Charlotte was lost to me assuredly if I became the instrument of Richard's dispossession. Rab's insolence had lit up all the corners of that truth. And although she was lost to me in any case, it seemed, yet I referred all my actions to her wishes. She was my Mistress still. Perhaps I had a secret hope of winning her one day after all. I know I had. Yet I think there was some more subtle reason than all these. I think there was: oneself is to oneself an unfathomable morass. As things cleared themselves of their complications in these months, as things do clear in the mind if left to themselves, I became far

from certain that the story, when it was probed, would yield more than a common liaison, or at most some presumption of a marriage that could never be proved. And, what was in my mind was, "Better Charlotte, with an unsounded birthright, than put it to the test, and fail, and leave her nakedly Rab's daughter." I was still dragging on the stake to which Aunt Sarah had moored me long ago. So does our troubled selfishness shrink from the sacrifice that would lift us to the serene conquests of the higher self. Even as a consolation for Clephane slights, it was the unsounded story only that I could depend on. I declare, in this, I had come marvellously near Rab Cuick.

At the same time, feeling about for the reason of these slights, I was foolish enough to be fretted with a suspicion that Mrs. Righton's story might be the cause of them. I began to wonder if Mr. Trail had an inkling of it: he was a deep and sagacious man. I sometimes wondered if Rab had discovered it to him, for he spoke very complacently of Rab. Or how, if the Rascal, in a flame of insolence, had discovered it to James Clephane himself? This was foolishness, of course. I ought to have remembered that that was not Rab Cuick's way. As Aunt Janet had said of him as a lad,—and he had matured his way since then,—"It was enough for him to get a hint, and having a hint to weave a story, and to weave it so fine and gossamer that, when you catch it, it breaks and vanishes in your hand." Perhaps—that was the belief forced on myself—there was nothing more in the story than a hint. In any case, what was his interest in divulging it now? Oh,

it was impossible to reason on any matter in which he was concerned. It was impossible for me, at any rate. For me he was a moral and mental thwart. He affected me like an adverse circumstance; like bad luck—like a run of bad luck, I sometimes thought. Material interests were no gauge of his actions: his conduct did not seem to be circumscribed by material conditions. But in his spiritual way, he was on the side of the devils.

Rab had remained in London some days after I left it, and since his return I had not spoken to him, though I had seen him more than once on Town-of-Tarvit streets. The Bowes cottage, I knew, had been sold to pay his debts, and that autumn and winter he had led a gipsy life in the county, of which only the flying rumour reached me.

But I encountered him on the day when my feet were taken out of the path of uncertainties and set in the sure road to Charlotte.

There was premonition, in the morning, of the spring of my love fortune. The Winter-child stirred in its sleep with the flush and smiling murmur before awakening; and the tides of my own spirit moved.

It was market-day in Town-of-Tarvit, and in the pend of the Salutation I ran against the Rascal. Steeped in the moving mood of April, I was taken at surprise by the encounter; so that I forgot my plan of reserve with him, and the customary greeting of the market-place slipped out of mouth before I could check it—

"Well, Rab! what's your news?"

"News, Mr. Shirra? I'm fair lippen wi' news.

But I would not spill it on the public caus'ay," he added. "You still have a room in by?"

I kept a little room in the hotel on market-days for farmer clients; and into it, after a moment's hesitation, I led him now.

"Well?" I asked of him, when I had motioned the waiter to bring in whiskies.

He was standing up to a print above the fireplace —an old print of Frederick the Great.

"Great man the Hero!" says he, tapping the glass over the picture with his finger-tips. . . . "To think o' that atheistical auld rascal's phizog adorning the walls o' Christian Scotland!"—and he fell into a discourse on the popularity of kings.

"Here is your whisky," I interrupted him—"for I haven't much time. It's a busy day with me."

"You are not so complisant as Mr. Trail," said he, dropping into a chair. "Hey! Even at Nochty, I think, I'm a bit of a *persona grata*. . . . You ken why, of coorse?"

"Well, well," I answered evasively; but the curiosity I felt must have appeared in my voice.

"Ha!" he cried. He was as sharp as a weasel. I could feel his teeth on my ignorance already. "You haven't forgotten a little discovery we surprised together at that fishing-place?"

"Would you tell me you have spoken to Nochty of the MacNab story!"

"Ha!" he snapped again. "I see you are in the dark about some Clephane doings. Evidently James doesn't think highly of the man and the lawyer in a pair. . . . What could mak' you think, Mr. Shirra, that I would start a Wull-o'-the-wisp like yon?"

Before I could answer: "By your leave I'll order another whisky," he continued, pulling the bell-rope and drinking his glass dry. That was not like him. He noticed that I looked at him curiously.

"A body needs it when he's getting auld: I'm getting auld," he said.

He crossed to the window and stood up in it, looking out upon the street. The windows of the Trafalgar opposite were filled with farming folk; the porch below was thronged with them like the step of a beehive. A soft wind and sunshine caressed the town. He spread a hand towards it, as much as to say: "Look at it, look at it!" I was looking, in a sudden gloom of discontent. There must have been something in the day or the season—there are such days and seasons!—making me specially susceptible to the ebb and flow of feeling. What did they amount to, after all,—this big business, this increasing well-doing? The taste of my successes had suddenly become like ashes in my mouth.

"I'll tell you a bonny thing," he was saying, still looking out upon the street. "You remember, last hairst, the farmers Blebo way had to get the Irish across to cut for them. All the storms and rain-plouts that visited Fife seemed to land there, and the corn was that beaten down and matted that the reaping machines couldn't tak' it. And—d'ye ken? —the auld hands for miles around that could win,—just ordinary folk like them down there,—went east to refresh dry hearts and een wi' a sight o' the huick in use again as it was in their young day. . . . Stood lining the field-sides and remarked on the pretty wark the Irishry were making o't. Now,

isn't that bonny?—as bonny and natural as a wild-rose, and scenting a whole country-side. . . ."

"Ah, Dauvid!" he said, when I answered nothing; "folk are perplexing—folk." He laughed. "You remember Tam—my laddie in Australia? Like me, he has a bit gift o' music,—fiddle and sang, and a fine crack—and was entertaining a company with them in a public, up country—Ballarat or somewhere—Scots sang . . . And 'mid the applause and standing o' drinks, up comes a fellow and shakes the hand off him nearly. A man in a fair way o' doing—a son, it turned out, of auld Peter Swab i' the Fish Wynd in St. Brise. You'll not remember him. 'They tell me you are newly from St. Brise,' said he.—'Ay,' Tam answered, 'three months syne.'—'Man! you're a braw singer, lad!' cried the other . . . 'but . . . gie's your hand . . . Are the Bucket Pats still standing?' There! Yet, would that man come back to the Fish Wynd?"

"Sentiment in drink," I answered.

"There's much in that, I admit. But not everything."

"And pleasures of memory," I tossed off.

"Certainly! But what about the pains of experiences remembered? . . . My God! We've got to toil hard for the pleasures of memory!"

He spoke with an astonishing feeling. I suppose he was sincere; though so rotten was he that even in his sincerity he was insincere. "You have toiled . . ." I began. I would have added "for nothing for worse than nothing," but what was the use? Besides, would it be true? The man enjoyed life—enjoyed every moment of it in the play of his wits

against other men's wits. He followed my thoughts now. "You only perceive," he said, "the rim o' the mune o' my misery."

He spoke with an infinite lament. If it was acting only, it was marvellous; undoubtedly it was only acting. He had come to this, that he played a character, and that the character he played was himself.

Some perception of this kept me silent, and drove back my mind upon myself.

"It's a vain world, this, Dauvid!"

Was he so cunning as to understand me? Deliberately or not, he had led my mood to feel for a note, and now he had struck it.

"It is!" I cried, with earnestness.

He turned from the window in a laugh, and faced me with his news. "So Clephane is to have a young mistress at last," he said. My face betrayed the alarm he had surprised me into. "Somebody you ken well . . . well!" he went on, laughing at me. "Fie! You let all the young lads beat you!"

"You are the man for news," I said, trying to carry it off. "And who, say you, is the lady?"

"Do you think I ought to tell you?" He hummed and hawed at insolent length before he did tell me. . . . "Brother Alick's daughter, Darling Downs, you know. Just like that!"

"Edith Duncan!" I breathed relief that it was not Charlotte; yet, at the same moment, a jealousy for Edith stabbed me. "Nonsense!" I cried.

"Did you expect some other body? . . . But a man can only marry one lass, more's the pity," said he, with a grin. And he added—"A merry lass,

from what I could see of her. . . . A touch o' the sun, a ripple o' laughter, a daughter of the South . . . A find for Fife, as well as for the lucky man."

"That is it," I said. That *was* it. I was thinking of the rareness of the prize and the unworthiness of the winner,—and of myself without Charlotte. That was where the news galled me.

"Why!" I cried,—I spoke as if it were impossible that anyone should countenance so unfair a dispensation of Fortune,—"why . . . her uncle . . . will he permit it? He knows about this Biatrucci affair!"

"Ho! ho!" cries Rab. "'Twas that that did it!" And then, as I looked at him incredulously, "You know it's settled? . . . But you don't know how it was settled? I see you don't . . . I'll tell you. I settled it!"

He chirruped a story of how he had insinuated himself into an acquaintance with the man Biatrucci, acquiring thereby a knowledge of him which he turned against him later. He had played Figg to that end. A light broke for me on his manœuvres with Figg. It spread its illumination over the withdrawal of Clephane confidences that had been irking me in these last months. "So now you understand how I'm so wonderfully in some folks' good books," he said, clinching my own thoughts.

"As for that Righton story," he went on,—and, indeed, that story was in my head again; a suspicion flashed on me whether he had reserved Richard from that other danger for a deadlier blow of his own. . . . "Bah! I'll show you my hand. If there is

anything in that story we shall never grip it. Rest assured of that . . . O! I might bring it out as a last card, should I even be so far gaen as to be tempted to play it. One never knows. But"—he spoke eagerly,—"I'm only auld in body, mind you! Not in the wits. Have you seen any slackening of the wits? No . . . and so long as I'm myself—a man, cannot you understand?—I'm nearer Clephane, or Nochty rather, when I have my hand on that story than if I were to redd it up!"

The whisky he had drunk must have gone to his head; else I should say now that he showed the first signs of slackened wits when he discovered himself so nakedly to me.

"I understand . . . the idea," I said; less to him than to myself, in an attempt to understand the extraordinary nature thus revealed to me.

"The idea . . . a trifle," he took me up. "And to be sure, you cannot put it down on parchment and sign and seal and witness and docket, and run up a bill of costs against it in your ledger . . . Yet it governs. Just a ladybird on a drab suit . . . yet it governs. . . . It governs the man Swab, though it may not bring him back to the Fish Wynd. . . . It governs you, Dauvid,"—he looked at me with a searching laugh—"though it's in the balance yet whether it will drive you awa' from *your* Fish Wynd. . . . We'll see, we'll see . . . Though you are not exactly Rab Cuick, you have a bit leaven of the by-ordinary in you. Ho! ho! We'll see. For among the multiplicity o' ruling passions i' this world, the least flee-awa' o' them are apt to be the powerfullest in the long run . . . . Look! You are

surprised at my news. But Edith Duncan is only one of Brother Alick's many offspring, and the years pass fast wi' a woman, and Clephane's a desirable place, and it's time a certain person settled down in it, and so on and so on. In all of which there's a plain, understandable, respectable idea, against which, even wi' Brother Gerald, the godly view of the young man's *faux pas* maun stand a puir chance."

"And so now," he said, making to go, "you've got my news. Fallowfield will be spreading it in the market to-day,—they kept him i' the dark about it till it was owre late for him to wreck the project by his gabble; but they've told him now. . . . And," he grinned—"I've told you. . . . For six months Uncle Gerald and Uncle James have been labouring for this salvation of the musical genius, and now, like the angels in Heaven, they're rejoicing. He's to be married immediately to the Darling Downs lass, and awa' to the Antipodes to visit his new relations afore he comes home for a fresh start." He turned on the stair to say again, "A fresh start!" And then, as he left me, "A selfish common-sense seems to be the prevailing wind, Mr. Dauvid! . . . And, sirce, it seems to be the groweing wind as well."

The feel of that prevailing wind was in my bones as I left him and walked to my office; but "a fresh start!" was echoing in my ears. And there, like an answer to it, among my mid-day mail, lay a letter from Figg.

The thing seemed to breathe the man: truculent, depraved, exculpatory, inefficient above all. A long

trail of torn up scraps of paper, one felt sure, lay behind the ambiguous rigmarole. Reading it was like picking in a dust heap. But it held a find for me which I scraped forth. Figg knew where Charlotte was. He was going to put a price on the knowledge, of course; but I was ready to pay his price, whatever it was. I had found Charlotte!

"A fresh start!" trumpeted irresistible now. All the afternoon I worked in my office, clearing off urgent business. I had the most deliberate understanding of the step I was going to take, and of the consequences it involved.

Charlotte should be mine, and together she and I were to seek life in a new world across the sea. That was my plan—call it my phantom. The business, Roselea, all the associations of the past, all the possibilities of the future, here,—all were to go. All were to be sacrificed: that was how it phrased itself in my mind, by-and-bye. I did not see the selfishness of the path I was choosing—that it was the last turn of selfishness; as I looked down it, it began to appear sublime. Actually, it began to look sublime. Nevertheless, I had a conscious instinct against burning my boats before I had proved Figg's news. So I did not call on Mr. Trail and discover my purpose to him, but only left a note informing him that urgent personal business called me to London.

I travelled South overnight, and next forenoon sought out the Blackfriars lodging-house from which the letter was addressed. The building emitted an effluvia of cabbage and pease, which became sickeningly stifling as I mounted the stairs to Figg. I found him in a cubicle on the top floor, half

dressed, sitting up in bed among soiled blankets, reading, with a cigarette between his lean, yellow-stained fingers. My arrival took him by surprise. He showed it by the wagging of his head and the whining insolence of his manner as he set up apologies for his conduct. My eyes followed the lean, indecent, tobacco-stained fingers, restlessly playing with the cigarette. Somehow, they seemed typical of the man. In sudden, angry loathing I broke through his defence, relentlessly pressing for his news and his price. He affected to find a grievance in that. I had to threaten him with some of Rab's revelations of the Biatrucci story before I could drag them out. After all, it was only a "fiver" he asked for. I drew a note from my pocket and held it up. "Now!" I demanded; and he told me Charlotte was back with the O'Sullivans. The O'Sullivans, he explained, had come a cropper—"all U.P. —up a spout." They were living in Margate, and Charlotte was with them. He gave me the address. I flung the note upon the bed, and left him.

It was late afternoon when I knocked at the door of the Margate house. A freckled, watery-eyed "slavey" opened it to me. She smirked over my inquiry. Miss Cook, she said, was out shopping, but would be back . . . half an hour, perhaps, perhaps less. I turned away without leaving my name. I would call again, I said; and going into the gardens off the Front, took a seat that commanded the street, and watched for Charlotte's return. It was another wonderful day of spring—warm and balmy. The sun was sinking splendidly in the west. The long shadows had crept past me on the grass when she ap-

peared in the street. She had entered the house before I could intercept her; but the door was unclosed and I pushed it open.

She was standing in the lobby, still in hat and gloves. The "slavey" had taken the parcels from her hand, and was delivering my message. I observed, again, annoyed, the eager archness of her look. I pushed farther in beside them.

"I knew it was you," Charlotte said, levelly, silencing the girl's smirks, and bracing my fluttering eyes and tongue. She reflected a moment; then, "Shall we go out?" she said. I nodded assent, looking at her admiringly. She turned to leave a message with the maid about her return,—most matter of fact.

A thin cry of "Charlott-ee! Charlott-ee!" came from above. "Miss Moira calling you," the girl said. Charlotte ran upstairs, beckoning me to wait. I heard a childish cry of pleasure; then Charlotte's voice in persuasive explanation. Presently some one joined them. "What ho—o!" came Mrs. O'Sullivan's voice, followed by a long-drawn whistle. I was swept by annoyance again. Instinctively I knew that Mrs. O'Sullivan was peeping down at me; and looking up the well of the staircase, I saw a ball of yellow hair drawn back from over the baluster. The brilliance of the yellow was dead.

Charlotte's voice reached me again; protestingly, now, half in annoyance, half in laughter. "Go 'long!" cried Mrs. O'Sullivan. Then a loud kiss resounded through the lobby. I resented the kiss. "Kiss her for luck, Moira!"

Charlotte joined me presently, with hot, averted face. "I am ready," she said, leading the way. We walked out of the unromantic house into the unromantic street. "Along the cliffs," she said, and turned into a road that led to them by the back of the town. And then, after a minute's silence, "I knew it was you."

"You expected me?"

She hung on the answer reluctantly. "No."

"Honestly?"

"I am trying to be honest," she answered, with the ghost of scorn in her smile.

"Well, I am here," I acknowledged her meaning.

She asked me hastily, "How did you know?" I thought she asked how I knew her meaning. "Oh, I have learned," I began. But she corrected me, "How did you know I was here?"

"A little bird," I cried evasively. I dared not mention Figg. "Are you sorry?" She ignored the question, and told me of herself.

She told me so much only of her life in these ten months as explained her being with the O'Sullivans. But Mrs. O'Sullivan filled in her outline for me with ardent colours next day.—

The O'Sullivan had somersaulted back out of the ring of luck into the depression beyond. The tumble was a day's talk on 'Change. The house in Leinster Gardens had been broken up; and in the seclusion of Camberwell again they drew breath for a fresh upward flight. "As 'appy, as 'appy," Mrs. O'Sullivan said; "the Boss would come out on top, never fear!" Mrs. O'Sullivan's philosophy was rooted in courage. But Moira pined and wasted.

With the curious one-idea'd insistence of a sick child, she fretted for Charlotte. "Find this Charlotte, and there was a chance of recovery," the doctor said. The O'Sullivan had already turned his back on Mabie's, and lunched his big person on a cup of cocoa at a cheap cook shop in order to take home jellies and grapes for Moira. To pay the doctor's bills, Mrs. O'Sullivan sent away her "slavey" and took in a boarder. Now, to compass advertisements in the agony columns of newspapers, which never caught Charlotte's eyes, they practised small economies on themselves and the unfortunate lodger,—dripping in place of butter, and like makeshifts. On all but the very dirtiest of days, the O'Sullivan saved 'bus fares by taking Shanks' nag out to exercise. He had his reward. It was on one of his tramps homeward across the water he ran against Charlotte. The good creature spoke of that as his reward. Mrs. O'Sullivan gave me no hint of the haven their household was to Charlotte at the lowest of her fortunes. As little did she seem to think of a Deity, or even of a vaguer Providence, to be thanked because their own fortunes lifted from the day Charlotte joined them. Her pagan eye was all for the wonder of things as they fell out. Strength was creeping back into Moira's delicate frame; flesh on her arms, even colour to her cheeks, since they came down to Margate here. And Charlotte, the dear good girl, was the talisman. All this, and the sisterly affection between the two women in consequence, was in that kiss of Mrs. O'Sullivan's—the kiss that grated on me still, by the vulgarity of it. I said

something to Charlotte now that glanced at the vulgarity.

"A brave, affectionate woman," she challenged hotly.

Abashed, I blurted, "You have learnt much in these months."

"A world," she answered.

I looked at her in sudden wonder,—in sudden wonder and relief: I, too, might be embraced in this enlargement of her nature. The moment I had met her in the lobby I had been conscious of some change in her. Now I had some dim perception of the roots of it; and I stood humbled in the thought that my feeling for her had been one of pity partly. She was so mellow, so certain. It was not in the material battle of life in these months in London that the roots of the change in her were struck, but in the fight of her nature to recovery from her disillusionment. Chief element in that disillusionment, I know now, was her momentary adhesion to the significance of Richard Clephane's whispered words. Therein herself had wounded her pride,—an unforgetable wound. Oneself is the last person we forgive, though the first to whom we remit punishment. Charlotte had no thought of self-punishment. She only strove to be honest. She was not conscious of an endeavour to be honest, but the salt of sincerity was in her nature, and in these months it was healing the wound, transmuting its poison to virtue, as is possible only to the nobly sincere. Yet in that experience she had not exchanged all the daft virtue in her blood for that of its wisdom. The old natural

spring of life leapt in her. Romance was the star of her nature, and it shone bright in her still.

We had left the street now, and crossing some waste ground, came out upon the cliffs. The sun was on the horizon behind us. In front, the headlands rose out of the sea, massive butts of white ivory tipped with gold. I gave an exclamation of pleasure at the sight. It awoke her. She talked of that coast. The purpose I was there with was raging, inexpressible, in my blood; but she assuaged it for the moment by her talk. On such a night, twenty years before, we had walked together by the sea at St. Brise. The sense of all that had happened in these twenty years was like an atmosphere enveloping that recollection. There was satisfaction, restfulness, a momentary repletion, in this parallelism of experience—that wonderful decorative principle of life. . . . She knew all the landmarks on the shore here, and told me what I might expect if I were to continue walking round it: the Goodwins and Beachy Head. Beachy Head! She had stories of sea-fights in the Channel. She spoke of the lights of France flashing across it on black nights. Beyond the point we were rounding was the North Foreland: when darkness fell, on the way home inland, we should see its light. "You know it all well," I said.

"My favourite walk," she told me. "Round here, and back by the land road. . . . You will laugh when I tell you . . . just a child . . . I like to watch for the first flash from the lighthouse . . . to go round here at sunset, and on the road back, watching for it, feel the surprise of the first flash.

. . . You'll laugh! I might be Moira!" She was right. There was a child seated at the heart of her nature.

I had stopped in my walk to look about me. As we fell into step again, "This is all new to me," I remarked.

"So it was to me in a way," she said, after a little, —"in a way. Yet do you know"—her mind was running loose and frank with me, reminding me more than ever of that night in St. Brise. "Do you know, I used to dream of this . . . I think. Not exactly this . . . when we were little, and heard tell of things"—I could imagine Aunt Charlotte telling them, and Rab—"and read of them—of sailors and far-away lands and the fighting days: not of any one in particular, but altogether, you know—just the greatness of our country, you know: just the vague, sweet figure of our country—this was the shape it took . . . something like this . . . the leafy fields of England . . . leafy lanes and fields, somewhere in the West . . . and this South coast here, and the Channel . . ."

This was a new Charlotte to me—as new as this coast. And because she seemed of a sudden far removed from me again, the thought of another coast assailed me with a fierce pain.

"You haven't forgotten St. Brise, Charlotte?"

"Forgotten!"

"Oh, I know you have not. Is it likely you would forget, when I never cease to remember?"

She looked at me—I thought, doubtfully.

"Why am I here if I forget?" I demanded of her.

"Why should I wish to be there, seeing I remember?" she answered my reproach.

The selfish purpose in me leapt to the opening she gave me here. I caught her arm and stopped her. "Do you think I wish you there?" I cried. "Do you think I wish to go back myself? . . . Oh! it's good enough for a memory," I said, echoing Rab's conversation.

"Come away with me—let us get away, across the sea. . . . Think of it? You and I, clear of it all—away from it, from them, all—in a new country where . . . where . . ." I hulled about in my speech, seeking some harbourage which a new country might hold for us, to point it out to Charlotte; but always I was thrown back into the rough waters of my own present,—"where we can be away from them all. Why should we yoke ourselves to other folk's stories?—dead and gone folk, dead and gone stories." I seemed to see, suddenly revealed in my words, the years we had lost. "Come away with me now—now!"

She answered my vehemence, her lip trembling in a laugh. "Now? . . . Could we take wings and fly . . ." she spread a comical hand towards the dying splendours of the day, ". . . to the West. Aye, to the West."

"You laugh at me."

"I do not." She repeated earnestly, "No; I do not." And then, "Would you leave it all—all?"

"With you."

"For me?"

It was an appeal; a daring appeal of her love for the removal of that doubt which had always been

the barrier against it. It flashed me a glimpse of the barrier, and struck me silent for a second; and in that second I knew she was falling away from me again. "Can you not believe that I love you?" I cried, as if to keep her.

But she did not answer. "It would only be running away—running farther away," she said, instead. "What has any one ever made by running away——?"

I interrupted her. "Others had found happiness," I said. I mentioned her brother Dave.

She hesitated a moment before she answered me, —"I wrote to Dave—a daft letter. Oh!" she laughed—a wistful laugh. "I've had my time, too, when the West called me. . . . He asked me to come out to them. He wanted to send the passage-money to take me out. But I could read between the lines.—Mind you," she interrupted herself, "Dave's the finest man that ever stepped. He would understand that letter,—he would understand it.—But I didn't go to him. . . . There and here. In the young country and in the old. . . . Haven't I tried it? Haven't I seen below the surface here? Is it different from below the surface in Fife? . . . How's my father?" she asked suddenly.

"I saw him yesterday."

"Was he . . . how was he?"

"He was full of news," I answered, and told her his news. She said nothing. There was no change in her face, or I could not see it in the deepening twilight; only her step beat quicker on the road. "You do not think . . ." I began, with a kind of laugh. The consciousness of that jealous pang when I heard

Rab's news made me uneasy, and it was with a defensive instinct that I anticipated a suspicion that might lurk in her mind. "You do not think I am jealous of Richard?" I said therefore.

And in a rush of recollection and feeling I added, "I *was* jealous of him, but not now, for this. Oh, Charlotte! I have loved you always."

The sincerity of passion in my cry surprised her. It seemed to find an answering note in her own sincerity. She stopped in her walk and faced me. I saw only the pain in her face. "I did not mean to hurt you," I besought. She answered, "No, no," impatiently. "But *you* know why I ran away from Fife—*you* know?" she cried.

The appeal of pride was in her words now. She wished to say to me, "It was on my father's account I ran away. He is your stumbling-block, too—ought not I to understand? I do understand. Only for my pride's sake say it." That was all in her words. But I was thinking fiercely of the reason country-side scandal gave for her going; and "From your father," I answered, defiantly eager for my own pride's sake to repudiate the scandal.

She guessed what was behind my answer: she remembered Figg's hints. Her face went white. She put a hand upon me.

"Do they believe that at home?" she said in a whisper almost.

It was a revelation.

"Oh!" I cried, in a gasp of wonder and triumph at the revelation; "then you mind what they think at home."

I saw her face shrink from me. I saw her shrink

against the wall. I heard her sobs. I put my arms about her. I had not meant to be cruel. I was not thinking of the cruelty of my words now. They and the moment of their utterance melted into events and years of a past suddenly revealed to me. Her tears and pain mattered nothing; what they told me was the only thing that mattered.

"You love me, Charlotte."

She protested, "I did not say so," in her tears.

"But my love hears your love calling."

I held her in my arms in the darkness. The night was stone dead; its only sound was the thick breathing of cattle in a field near by. I held her close. I would not be denied. I was myself. I saw myself; and in that revelation was myself. At last I had reached the heights of a higher self, and from them could look down on the valleys of selfishness where I had lingered so long. Aunt Sarah, the family of Trail, this fat business in Fife; Rab Cuick, and the finger of country-side laughter pointed at me. I saw them all now, and how they had bound me all the while that my heart was turned to Charlotte. I have told you, that is my story. I saw how I had yielded to the temptation which the Righton story held. I saw the pitiful last subterfuge of self in this plan for carrying Charlotte across the seas. And seeing all this, I knew she was mine. She was mine. In finding myself, I had found that which alone could win her. With the revelation of my unmanliness came an indisputable assurance. I held her close. "Charlotte, we will not run away. You will come home with me," I told her. I felt the answering leap of her heart.

Suddenly we were enveloped in a great light. The light-house flash, swinging round through a break in the wood between, fell full on us. It flooded the road and the trees above, and through the ghastly glimmer of the wall picked out the thick ivy stems dusted with grey chalk. It enveloped us —like a physical accompaniment of the light that had broken within ourselves. We fell a little apart in it. In that half-minute our eyes spoke.

"I have been selfish."

"I have asked too much."

"Can you understand—how selfish?"

"I know—how much too much."

"I have been long of understanding."

"You will never understand a woman's pride." (This with a smile.) "Or her need to be loved."

"I love you."

"And to be sure of it?"

"You will come home."

As suddenly as it had fallen, the light was blotted out. I held out my arms in the dark. She came to them. She was mine.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST.

My story—our story—ended that night at the North Foreland when Charlotte and I found each other and the greatest thing in the world. But sometimes Life ministers to the curious sense in us by rounding off its stories; and it rounded ours off wonderfully.

I have told of days immediately after our marriage which we spent in London, like happy London lovers, revisiting the scenes of Charlotte's adventures. It was from the O'Sullivan household that we had a send-off. Moira had played bridesmaid all the previous day, while her mother ran about between laughing and crying; and when we drove away on our wedding morning we left the yellow ball of hair shaking tears and laughter on the O'Sullivan's exuberant waistcoat. And, of course, in these days in London, we went over our whole story; beginning with Hector MacNab and Christian Tullis, and the Legend of the Sabbath Night, and Mirrin MacNab's sinister figure; piecing bit by bit our several gleaming contributions to it. The result was no more complete than I have given it in these foregoing pages; some obscure passages in it were not restored till later, there are some which never can be restored; but in that happy time its pattern grew

under our eyes with a wonderful clearness. Perhaps Love's eyes were the best for its understanding.

Charlotte spoke much of her mother, tenderly, but without reserve. She went over the events of that night when Aunt Charlotte sailed for the Happy Islands. It was then I learned how Dave's masculine sense had lifted her out of the mists of small moralities to an understanding of the dignity of her mother's love for Rab. From that moment, I could see, a respect that was enormous enveloped her affection for Dave. To Rab, save in connection with her mother, she scarce referred; but I knew how she still fought her abhorrence of a man who, nevertheless, was sanctified to her by her mother's love. And I came to know also that the roots of Charlotte's love for myself stretched away to the day when I first showed my affection for Aunt Charlotte.

But it was of her grandmother, Christian Tullis, that we talked most. She touched Charlotte's imagination. Charlotte did not speak of her with any sentimental regard: these last months in London must have sifted out of her nature any dregs of illusory sentiment that were in it. Yet it was more than an imaginative interest she felt. All through these months Christian Tullis's story, so much as she knew of it, had run in her thoughts. It did much to preserve in her a mind erect among all her disillusionments. And now when, filling out that story from my completer knowledge, I told her of Rab's hint that the Widow Dunlop might be living still, with a bright impulse she declared we must go to Holland. I acquiesced. The curious and literal instinct was not dead in me. "That," I cried, "will

probe the story to the bottom—if you discover yourself to her."—"No, no," she said. "We must respect her wishes. Besides, she would deny me," she added, showing how deep she had penetrated to her grandmother's heart. . . . It was an imaginative impulse: that was all; just a wish to know if she lived, and if so to catch one glimpse of her perhaps. —We were only to be in time to see Christian Tullis put into her grave.

In Amsterdam, with our scraps of knowledge to guide us, we discovered the house in the Heerengracht. We found that it was a home for orphaned children, for orphaned girls, established by the Widow Dunlop; and that she lived all the year round now at Berkhoorn, her country seat in Gelderland. Early the next afternoon we alighted from a steam-tram at Berkhoorn pump. We lunched at an inn beside it, in a cool verandah, shaded by the vivid greenery of the spring elms. The hostess, a grave woman, knew enough of English to interpret our wants; and afterwards she called down her son to converse with us. Koos was a lad with a bright frank face, blue-eyed, round-nostrilled, of a figure of unusual height and slimness, clad all in black. He spoke English well—with evident pride in speaking it. Here was a spring, I thought to myself, that might be tapped for the information we wished; but it bubbled up of its own accord. . . . A pupil-teacher, taking up languages, he explained. He told us he had improved his English by reading aloud to the lady of Berkhoorn. She that was dead. A compatriot?—for we were English surely?—so was she, but you wouldn't have known it. Her Hol-

lands was a native's. A wonderful woman! He repeated "A wonderful woman." And now she was dead—four days ago. This was her funeral day. The hearse—all the way from Arnhem—had gone on to 't Huis Berkhoorn. The Burgomaster and the Notary had walked out earlier. It would be here any minute now. He was waiting to follow it. The villagers in groups there—they would all follow to the graveyard. . . . Oh, yes, the women and children as well as the men, in workaday clothes, just as they were. They would miss the Weduwe Dunlop, he said: we had not required him to mention the name to tell us who was the lady of Berkhoorn. Already we had fixed the picture of her he drew in his boyish, enthusiastic talk. "Blind, stone-blind . . . for years. But brave! Hey, brave! What a spirit for a woman over eighty! Each morning to the last she was carried down to the *voorkamer*. She knew all that was going on round her. Better than those with all their eyesight. She knew about everything —everything that was going on in the world she was interested in. He went up to the house and read to her—the newspapers, Dutch, English, French, too. A wonderful woman. . . ."

So he was still running on, when the *cortége* entered the village. We stood up under the elms as it passed—Koos like a high pole beside us. Then he left to follow it. We waited a minute before we went also. "She cannot object to this," Charlotte said. And so, at a distance, as strangers, we followed Christian Tullis to her grave.

Beyond the village were firwoods; and beyond them moorland, where we spent the afternoon. We

felt we wanted to be in the open. It had all flashed upon us so wonderfully! Later, we returned to the village, coming round by 't Huis Berkhoorn. With its spread jalousies it looked cool and debonair at the end of the larch avenue; with formal beds of tulip and lily, and a fountain splashing in a round pond in the sunlight. Afterwards we walked out to the graveyard. Adjoining it was the *Pastorie,* and beside it the *Pastorie* garden. We saw the Dominee out in it among his flowers. The new grave lay near a clump of weeping birches. Here—was our unspoken thought beside it—here was the end of a story stretching back to the night of the Legend. The beginning and the end of a story. We seemed to know her better, standing here,—this woman who had influenced so many lives we were acquainted with, not least of all our own. A woman—so we pieced her history from the broken fragments in our possession—a woman who, having consented to run away from her past, resolutely never looked back. From her bosom Charlotte pulled a paper, one of those she had found in her mother's patch-box, the letter written long ago to Janet Seton. "God will blot out the past and open a future to broken hearts," it ran. Had the future God opened out held all that broken heart had hoped for? "A wonderful, brave woman," Koos had said.

As we turned away the Dominee was on the path. He was an old man, garrulous; like the philosopher's, his interest lay in his garden; and he was something of a philosopher also. So he discovered himself. He had seen us in the village earlier, he said: his pastoral courtesy required no excuse. He seemed

a little excited; or eager.—"An Englishwoman, did we know?" he asked, pointing to the grave.—We said we knew: a lad at the inn had told us about her. —"Ah! Koos Flink?"—"Tall, very tall."—"Yes, yes, Long Koos they called him. Also, sometimes they called him the Walking-Stick of our Lord." He smiled apologetically. I turned to the grave again to tell him how Koos had said "A wonderful woman."—"Surely, and proud—but . . ." He left his sentence incomplete to invite us to his house—to see his flowers. We went with him and saw them, and he offered us refreshment. He and I would have Hollands. "For Mevrouw,"—he said "Mevrouw" questioningly, "my wife?"—and smiled benignly when I answered Yes. "For Mevrouw he recommended an *advokaat.*" He called his old housekeeper, Doortje; and Doortje, with the rosy cracked face framed by the gopher of her *kornet,* brought her a glass of sweetened egg and brandy. "You wouldn't be offered an *advokaat* in every Dominee's house in Holland," he told us. I gathered that perhaps he had some troublesome temperance censors in his parish. But he said next that he was glad he lived in a village where people were earnest, not critical. . . .

So he talked on, revealing himself; and he discovered a portrait of the Widow Dunlop also. He spoke of her charity and her wealth. "Wealth—oh!" He raised his eyebrows, and sifted imaginary pieces between finger and thumb. The will would have been read by this time. He thought the Notary would have been back by this time on his way home

from the reading. He spoke irritably. He couldn't understand why the Notary wasn't back,—unless it was that the Burgomaster was with him. Set *him* down to his glass and he wouldn't rise. . . . But he will hear the will in good time, he said, . . . in good time . . . when the Notary returned. Though the widow's fortune couldn't be anything to what her husband left . . . seven *ton* if it was a stuiver, *he* must have left. The son lost a lot of it—lifting a ship off a sandbank, at Tessel. The son was drowned—no, not at the ship-lifting, but somewhere, away sailing. . . . A wild lad. Yes, it was a terrible blow to his mother: she was devoted to him. But the widow never showed much. "A brave, proud woman—but. . . ." Again he stopped short. Dirk Dunlop, her husband, adored her. That, the Dominee said, was as it should be; and he looked to Charlotte. The Dominee was a delightful, courteous gentleman. "Still," he continued, "I always thought there was a tragedy somewhere. . . . Something behind—something behind! . . . I always say a wife will tell her husband everything in her life, sooner or later. . . . Always tell your husband everything, madam,"—he made a polite laughing little bow to Charlotte. . . . "But I'm not sure of the widow," he added, as if to himself.

He talked us to his gate, and sped us into the road to the village. Almost his last words were, "She must have left a good deal of money." We bade him farewell then. We saw him again for a moment from the steam-tram, as it carried us away

from Berkhoorn. He was still in his garden, looking down the road. He was waiting for the Notary with his news.

Three nights later we arrived in Town-of-Tarvit. My first duty was to call on Mr. Trail, and I set out to do it with a heart resolutely braced for the encounter. His greeting was, "Why do you come alone? Where's your wife? Bring her and present me to her, if she will come to see me." Michael Trail was a sagacious man. His talking thus, as if there were nothing remarkable in my bringing home Charlotte as my wife, or even in the manner of my doing it, threatened my heroic temper with collapse; but he soon restored it by a vision of my ordeal. "By the way, Rab's about the town," he said. A twist of his lip, as he carried the snuff to his nose, was the only sign he permitted himself of recognising a situation at once humourous and full of possible chagrin. Rab's own saying, "Demned awkward thing an ill-reputed father-in-law!" stabbed me afresh.—Well, Rab was still the ordeal.

I took Charlotte to call upon Michael the next night, after early dinner. He still dined early. He was marvellously agreeable and polite to her; and she liked him from that night, though he never encouraged intimacy between the households. The talk was all commonplaces; to all appearance the visit was the most level in the world. I knew he was ill at ease and wished it over; but he did not show it, save in one little thing. He had coffee for us; he himself did not drink coffee. And when he asked her if she would have sugar with her coffee,

with a comical effort to offer her the choicest of his possessions, even in his speech, he pronounced it "shuggar." I knew from that that he was not himself.

The interview was a strain upon Charlotte and myself as well; and when we left, the lown young-summer night tempted us to a walk. We turned into the road to Nochty. A mile or more out a wide wood skirts it, through which a path runs back to Town-of-Tarvit. In its solemn depths she took my hand. A field or two away was a pithead, the farthest west of the new workings started on Clephane. Between the labouring breaths of its pump through the still night came a clear melody: some tuneful ploughman, I thought, whistling, as his ancestors whistled, to keep off evil spirits in the dark. And, by-and-bye, when the path turned eastwards, we saw Town-of-Tarvit lights. It was a moving night. "Do you know," Charlotte said suddenly, "what I once saw on a gravestone in Kensington—an epitaph on a woman? This, 'A beauty and a virtue'!" I took her in my arms and kissed her.

And then, at the very next bend, we encountered Rab. He was standing under some trees on a bank by the path-side, and we were upon him before we observed. Charlotte gripped my hand. The contest of feeling in her shook her. I was shaken myself, though I answered her clasp with some assurance. I had determined how I should treat him when we met: firmly but persuasively. I had some projects in my head for his social reinstatement,—a cottage, a bit of garden. The feeling in both of us, I think, was that we must be kind to him, poor man,—poor

misguided man! I suppose he detected, or at least guessed, the patronage of our intention; and resented it. At any rate, he took the wind out of our sails laughably.

He held out his hand to us, but allowed us to approach him to shake it; and so keeping his place on the bank, he had the advantage of position. He looked old and rather done; but there was nothing in his appearance that seemed to call for the material help we planned for him. He never did need material help; and we had no other to offer him. In his left hand was a short wand of hazel—a whistle of his own making. He was the tuneful player. For a second or two he looked down on us with a grave paternal look.

"So you're home," he said, "—at last." And then, at once, "You are not grateful. I exist in your minds," he explained—"I exist in your minds as the obstacle. You do not understand that it was I who brought you together." With a word he flashed us back to that night at the back of St. Brise pier. "I promised your Aunt Sarah then," he said, "to extract some high latent qualities from your nature. Here this night is my reward!"

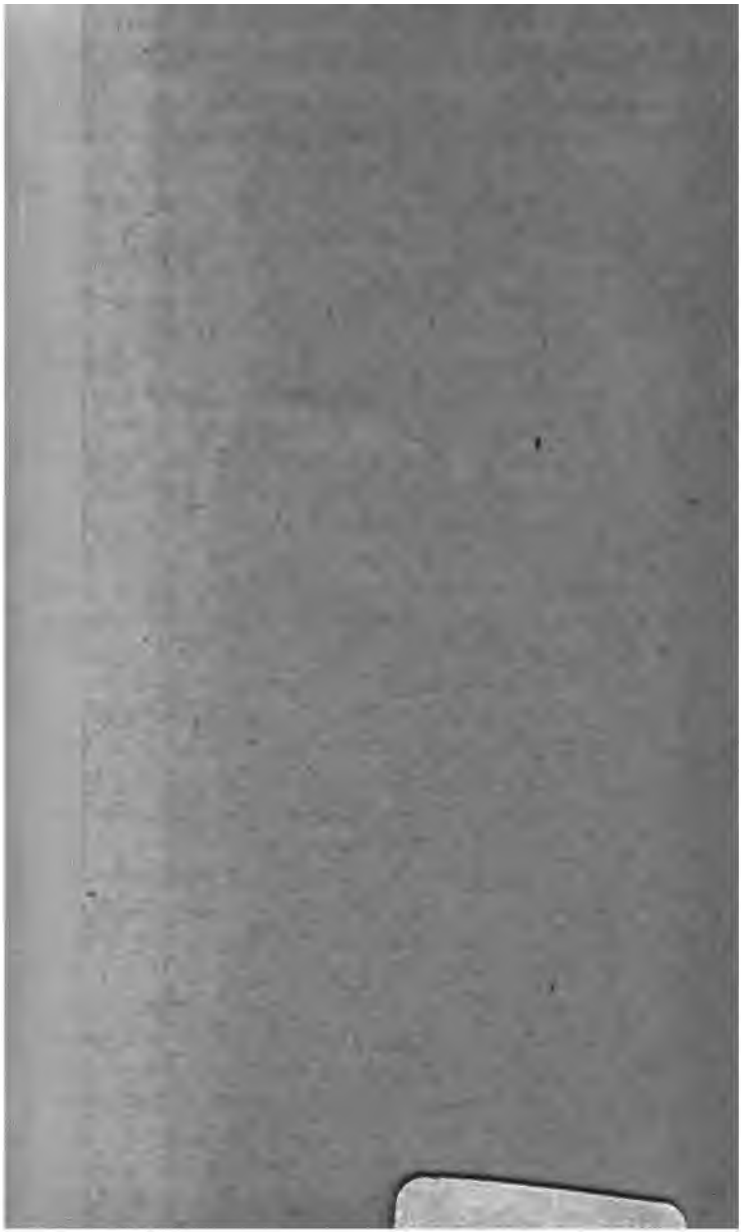
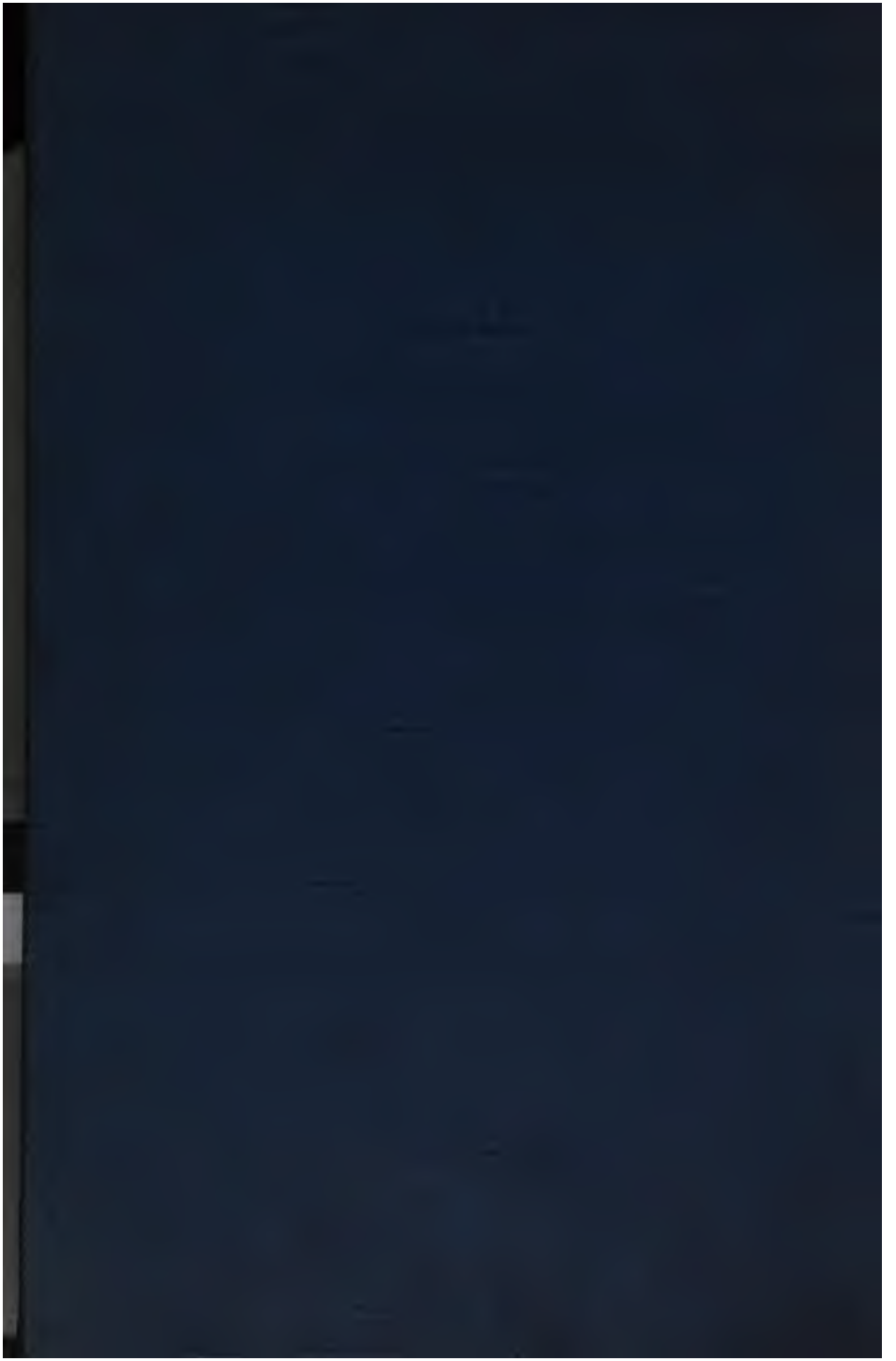
He went on. "You've been honeymooning in Holland, I hear;" and then, with a sudden turn, "About Nochty?" he said. He jerked a hand towards the den. "David will have told you, Charlotte," he began; and in his crooked, illusive way he lighted up the story of Christian Tullis. Charlotte put out a protesting hand. "True," he said eagerly; "'Dead men don't bite,' as conspirator lads used to say." His teeth clicked as Charlotte gave a

startled look to me. "Nor dead women," he added, as if closing a book. Whether it was only a guess, confirmed by Charlotte's gesture, or whether he had some surer knowledge, I do not know. It may be said for him that he never made public use of Christian Tullis's story. It may be said against him that she suffered half a lifetime of silent terror from the threat his knowledge held over her. I am certain a vital part of life slipped from him when he learned that she was dead.

And then he commenced a kind of exordium,—insolent beyond belief. I do not know why we suffered it. It was not only our resolution to endure him that kept us standing there, and silent. Something—and not wholly evil—in the man fascinated us. "Ho! ho! To think of all the young blades ranging the world for the woman. And when they have wooed and married and a'——! At any rate, you've made a braw if belated start. But don't," he said, "don't, Dauvid, be overly uplifted in the story of your love-making." Another thing he said to me I remember was, "Keep bright and polished the harness of your mind. Scour it—wi' elbow-grease. So, lad—that's to live!" And then he turned to Charlotte. "Above all, feed him, Charlotte, feed him!" he said. . . . "I'll tell you a story. When Dick Turbayne married Agg Hutch'on, they took up house on the same landing wi' me at the East Port. And the first morning, when he cam' home at the breakfast-hour, she had pease-brose for him, and she ga'e him pease-brose for his dinner, and the same again when he loused at night. And when he found pease-brose on the table for him again the

next morning, 'Help me! Agg!' says he, 'd'ye think I'm a mavis?' . . . So, see you feed him well." He laughed. I was laughing in shamed anger myself. I felt Charlotte on my arm laugh on the brink of crying. "Take me away," she whispered; and I took her away: and farther down the path she had her cry out. Then, all composed, like the fair day-break after a night of rain, "Home," she said; and looked with a new look of love into my eyes. "Home!" I was filled with the wonder of my good fortune. "What have I done—to deserve it?" my heart said; and her look said, "You loved me."

Sounding fainter and fainter down the woodside as we walked home to Tarvit came a wedding-march played on Rab's ironic pipe.

[THE END.]

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