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ROBIN GRAY.

A NOVEL.



ROBIN GRAY.

A NOVEL

BY

CHARLES GIBBON

AUTHOR OF "DANGEROUS CONNEXIONS."

"Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met—or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

—Burns.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CONTENTS.

VOLUME II.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
THE WIFE'S TRIAL,	1
CHAPTER II.	
UTTERLY DARK,	16
CHAPTER III.	
THE BROWNIE'S BITE,	32
CHAPTER IV.	
THE SEARCH,	52
CHAPTER V.	
A MESSAGE,	68
CHAPTER VI.	
STRIFE,	80
CHAPTER VII.	
WHICH IS TO BLAME?	97
CHAPTER VIII.	
GIRZIE'S BEQUEST,	111
CHAPTER IX.	
BAD MADE WORSE,	126

	PAGE
CHAPTER X.	
TWO BLACK CROWS,	144
CHAPTER XI.	
SCANDAL,	161
CHAPTER XII.	
WHAT WAS FOUND IN THE BURN,	177
CHAPTER XIII.	
CAIN'S MARK,	193
CHAPTER XIV.	
AN UNPLEASANT DUTY,	208
CHAPTER XV.	
THE WORST OF IT,	223
CHAPTER XVI.	
THE TEST,	237
CHAPTER XVII.	
THE EVIDENCE,	246
CHAPTER XVIII.	
THE FIRST STEP,	270
CHAPTER XIX.	
ON THE SHORE,	287

ROBIN GRAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE WIFE'S TRIAL.

“The night came on with heavy rain,
Loud, fierce, and wild the tempest blew;
In mountains roll'd the awful main—
Ah, hapless maid! my fears how true!”—*Tannahill.*

By the time Brown Jock reached the main-road, Robin had seated himself firmly, and with one vigorous tug at the right rein he turned the horse's head toward the hills. Then he let him have his way. He could not go too furiously for his rider.

It had often been Robin's boast that if a horse would keep his feet, he would keep his back. That it had been no vain boast was proved now; for Brown Jock tried all his tricks to unseat his rider; but in the main

he held straight onward up the hill at a furious gallop, and that was all Robin cared for.

Wind and rain beat upon him, and the torrent rushed thundering down the glen.

But neither wind nor rain could cool the fever of his brain; and not all the thunder of the torrent could deaden the sound of the demon voices that were ringing and shrieking in his ear—"Askaig, James Falcon."

The legend of the kelpie was verified to him this night, and the eerie voice rose above the fury of the spate, wailing the words—"Askaig, James Falcon."

Brown Jock stretched to the road with glaring eyes that seemed to pierce the deepening darkness. Down from the hills rushed countless streamlets, into which the snow had thawed, and down poured the rain steadily,—all swelling the torrent in the glen. The hills rose like broad towers of gloom, and the black clouds hung heavily overhead, as if ready to fall and crush horse and rider to the earth.

He was insensible to everything save that eerie voice always shrieking in his ears and goading him to desperation; and the horse sped recklessly up steep and down slope as if inspired with something of its rider's frenzy.

As they attained the highest point of the road where it suddenly dipped down to the ford, the rider glanced across the black chasm and on the opposite height observed a feeble light in the window of Askaig. At the same moment a vivid flash of lightning pierced the black clouds and illumed the hill tops, followed instantly by a deafening peal of thunder that shook the earth and echoed again along the hills.

The horse came to a dead stand, sinking back on its haunches and quivering with fright. Robin struck it with his heels, and the animal suddenly dashed down the steep with new fury and into the torrent.

The impetus received in descending the hill carried the horse half way through the water; but there the current was strongest

and fiercest. The water reached the saddle, and coming with full force against the horse's side, whirled it round and swept it down the stream. But Brown Jock was a powerful horse, and obtained additional strength from terror. It regained footing with its head to the current, and then with a huge effort of all its strength cleared the water and ascended the road at a gallop, never slackening pace until the rider drew rein at the door of the house.

The din of the storm had prevented his approach being heard by the inmates. He flung himself from the saddle, slipped the rein through the iron ring beside the door, and entered without knocking. The passage was dark, but a gleam of light shone from beneath the door of Falcon's room. It was no time for ceremony of any kind, even if his passion had permitted him to think of it. He flung open the door and made two paces into the apartment.

Then he halted, for there was an exclamation of amaze and alarm at his appearance.

He stood still, the water dripping from his soaked garments and forming a pool around him.

He glowered darkly upon his wife, too full of passion, too much overwhelmed by the conviction of the truth of his worst suspicions, to be capable of speech at first.

The room was lit by the red glow of the peat fire by which Wattie Todd was crouching, dividing his attention equally between gazing in puzzled wonder at the other occupants of the room and feeding the fire with peat.

On a chair nearly opposite the door Jeanie was sitting, her eyes red and swollen with weeping. When her husband entered she had started with a sharp cry and moved forward as if about to rush to him; but when she saw the black fury of his face she had paused, frightened.

James Falcon was standing by the table, on which lay the bundle Jeanie had brought. He was flushed with excitement, apparently having been pacing the floor when he had

halted abruptly with an exclamation of astonishment at the entrance of Robin Gray.

The latter for several minutes paid no heed to any one except his wife, and upon her he glowered dumbly, whilst his giant form shook with passion. Then his eyes slowly turned from her to Falcon, and his hands closed spasmodically as if he were about to strike him.

A spell seemed to have fallen on them all, whilst the storm raged without, and the wind rushed angrily in at the open doors, shaking them till the hinges creaked again.

It was Jeanie who broke the spell of that grim silence. Starting up she rushed to her husband with extended arms.

“Robin, Robin, I’m glad ye hae come,” she cried, attempting to seize his hands.

But he stepped back, snatching his hands from her wrathfully.

“Awa’, woman, awa’,” he said hoarsely; “dinna come near me lest I fail to keep my hands still and do ye some hurt.”

“What would ye seek to hurt me for? Hae ye no come to take me hame?”

“Hame! What hame?” he exclaimed furiously; “I hae nae hame noo, and Lord kens where ye will find one. The hame that I made for ye, and that ye made bright wi’ your hypocritical smiles and leeing tongue, ye hae torn it doon and trampled it aneath your feet. Hoo can there be a hame where there is nae truth? Hoo can there be a hame where there is a fause wife? Every stick and stane o’ Cairnieford would rise to scorn ye if ye dare gang back there. Oh, woman, the house is black wi’ your shame; and I’m a broken auld man that can never lift my head again.”

The latter words were uttered in a tone choking and quavering with agony, that seemed to be bursting his heart.

“My shame?” she echoed, her bosom heaving, her colour coming and going rapidly, whilst her clear eyes rested on him with unspeakable pity and love.

“Aye, your shame. What, would ye brazen it out in spite o’ the evidence o’ my ain e’en? My God! can ane sae guilty be

sae bauld? Turn awa' your face frae mine. Gae, hide your head for shame, and never look on me again lest I strike ye dead at my feet."

"Dae it noo if ye think I deserve it," she answered with steady voice, and never flinching before his angry gaze, although the hot blood tingled on cheeks and brow. "But I hae nae cause for shame, and I winna hide my head though a' the world was looking on me."

There was brave truth in her simple indignation; but to him in his blind passion it was only brazen falsehood. He stared at her as if appalled by the boldness of her guilt.

"Ye hae nae cause for shame? (gripping her arm violently, and bending over her with darkening visage and quivering lips). Was it no you that swore to be a true wife to me?"

"Aye, and so I hae been" (firmly).

"And hae ye no hidden frae me that this man had come hame—that he was wi' ye as

soon as he arrived; and hae ye no told me lees about yoursel', and hae ye no this day travelled through wind and rain that ye nicht run awa' wi' him? Hae ye no dònè a' that, and will ye dare to say there is nae cause for shame?"

"I didna tell ye I had seen him, because I didna want to vex ye; but I meant to tell ye o't. I came here the day seeking you, no him—"

"Hae done, woman, hae done," he interrupted sternly, wrath and agony struggling for mastery; at one instant rage in every look and tone; and the next the torture he was enduring declaring itself in the faltering voice and the spasms of pain which distorted his features. "I came only to satisfy mysel' that ye were here—that ye were the fause thing ye are, but no to bide and add to your sin by wringing new falsehoods frae ye. I hae seen and I am satisfied. I leave ye to take the gate ye hae chosen; and the best that I can do for ye is to try to think o' ye as ane that is dead—for dead ye are to a'

that is guid in life. I'll try to think o' ye as what I thought ye were, no what ye hae proved yersel' to be. The best wish that I can gie ye is that ye mayna be haunted by the memory o' the wreck ye hae made o' me—may ye never ken the misery ye hae gien me. God forgie ye, Jeanie, for it a'."

"And God forgie you, Robin Gray, for the wrang ye do me."

"Peace, woman, and dinna take His name in vain. Frae this minute ye are free to gang where ye will, to do what ye will, for I haud ye worthless o' an honest man's care. The shame, the misery ye hae cast upon me I will try to bear and hide frae the world as best I may; but dinna come near me again; dinna let me hear ye blaspheme."

"In His name I ask ye to listen to me," she began firmly; but as he made a step to the door, as the thought flashed upon her that this separation was to be final as he declared—that she was never to cross his path again save as a stranger—that, worst of all, and

most probable in his present distracted state, he might be driven to do himself some injury—all her indignation, and the strength it gave her, broke down, and she burst into tears, stretching out imploring hands toward him. “Oh, Robin, Robin, I hae been a true wife to ye in thought and deed, though my heart was sairly tried. Day and nicht I hae striven to make ye happy; day and nicht I hae prayed for strength to be a’ that a wife should be to ye, and after a’ that, oh, man, man, will ye cast me aff in your blind fury without hearin’ me? Will ye leave me to gang wi’ a broken heart and a bowed head among folk because ye are wud wi’ jealousy. The Lord help me, I wish that ye had never been guidman to me; I wish that I had never won to this place, for I would rather hae been drooned in the water out by than hae heard the cruel fause words ye hae spoken this night.”

“And I would rather hae found ye cauld and dead in the burn than hae found ye here with him.”

“It was nae faut o’ mine that I was here—will ye no believe a word I say?”

“No, after what I hae seen. I hae done wi’ you for ever.”

He wheeled round to quit the room, but Falcon planted himself between him and the door.

“But ye are no done wi’ me, Cairnieford. I hae listened wi’ puir patience to the mad nonsense ye hae been talking, to the foul shame ye hae been casting on the best and truest wife man ever had—you that should hae been the first to rax out your arms and shield her. Ye would fling her frae ye without gieing her a chance o’ clearing hersel’ because she’s ower muckle broken doon by the disgrace you bring to her to compel ye to hear her. But ye shall not so easily escape from me.”

Robin, during this address, which was delivered in a tone of indignation and resolution, stood like an angry lion at bay. His hands worked violently and his lips trembled, as if it cost him a huge effort to restrain

himself from falling upon the speaker and tearing him piecemeal. The actual physical suffering of the man was terrible.

“Out o’ my gate, Jeames Falcon,” he said huskily; “out o’ my gate, or I canna answer for what may happen.”

“I can, however”—(coolly, almost contemptuously).

“I warn ye, stand awa’ frae the door, or your bluid will be on my hands. I leave the woman to ye—take her; she’s worthy o’ sic an honest gentleman. You and her baith I hae tried to serve, and baith hae turned and stabbed me.”

“You’re a fool, and a mad one, too. By heaven I would give my life if she would let me take her at your word, and prove to her——”

“Daumn ye, if ye will hae’t blame yoursel’.”

Unable to control his passion longer, Robin grasped Falcon by the throat, and, as easily as if he had been a doll, lifted him up and dashed him on the floor. Too frenzied ap-

parently to know what he was doing, he knelt on the prostrate man's breast, still keeping that deadly grasp on his throat.

Jeanie, with a cry of terror, flung her arms round her husband, and with an exertion of desperate strength drew him from his victim. Her very touch seemed to have a magic influence on him, and with a wild dismayed look he regained his feet as soon as Falcon.

Seeing Lang Rob standing in the doorway staring with blank amaze at the extraordinary scene, Robin shouted to him—

“Haud him aff—keep him awa’, or I’ll be the death o’ him.”

He was rushing out when Jeanie griped his arm.

“I will go wi’ ye,” she said; “in storm or calm, I’ll gae wi’ ye.”

“Awa—ye hae saved him”—(confused by his excitement and despair)—“gae to him.”

“And I hae saved you frae the gallows, maybe.”

“Awa’—keep him out o’ my sicht—ye hae

saved him—ye hae ruined me—Heaven keep ye—oh, deevil burn ye for ever!”

And, grating his teeth furiously, he flung her from him with such violence that she fell to the floor stunned, whilst he rushed madly forth to the darkness and the storm. Wind and rain were raging wilder than ever, but he welcomed them as friends; for they were in keeping with the storm in his own breast.

CHAPTER II.

UTTERLY DARK.

“ Oh the warl' to me is a bleak dreary waste,
Without a green spot where a fond hope might rest;
An' I stan' 'mid the gloom like a shelterless tree,
Sair scathed wi' the blast, reft my blossoms frae me.”

—*James Leman.*

Lang Rob, dripping wet, and shivering with cold, had been sufficiently startled by what he had seen to yield prompt obedience to Robin Gray's command. He had jumped aside to let him pass, and had seized Falcon roughly by the arms to prevent him following.

There was a sharp struggle between them, for although he had no intention to fight with Cairnieford, and was determined that nothing should force him to do so, he was at the same time determined that he should listen to a full explanation of the circumstances under which he had found Jeanie at Askaig.

“He’s wud, do ye no see? Let him gang, or there’ll be murder atween ye,” cried Lang Rob.

“Let go, I tell you,” shouted Falcon, and wrested himself from his grip.

But it was just then that Jeanie fell, and Falcon seeing that, instead of following Robin, sprung to her side and lifted her in his arms.

“Oh the daft blind idiot,” he cried bitterly; “let him gang, and may the black heart o’ him that could think the thoughts he has spoken o’ her make a hell to him. He’s nae mair worthy o’ her than the carrion crow is worthy o’ the white-breasted doo for a mate. Let him gang. I for ane will never attempt to gie him peace by showing him how pure she is. Get me some water.”

The moment he had seen Falcon attacked, Wattie had bounded to his feet as if about to spring to his assistance. The rapidity with which the struggle passed, however, had given him no opportunity to display the courage which affection for his friend had inspired. But he now showed

his readiness to serve him, and, with an alacrity for which he would not previously have obtained credit, he snatched up a blazing peat and ran into the kitchen, returning presently with a coggieful of water.

“I told ye hoo it would be as soon’s I saw her here,” said Lang Rob sympathetically, assisting Falcon in his efforts to restore Jeanie, by chafing one of her hands. “I wish to guidness I’d been in when he cam’. I nicht hae kept him frae seeing her. But that confounded stot has kept me dancing after him like a Will-o’-wisp in a’ the storm for the last twa hours, and I haena got him yet—deil’s in the brute, I expect he’s tum’let over the Bite, and been carried awa wi’ the spate. There’ll be a fine ado when the Laird hears o’t, though I hae dune what man could do in sic a storm. She’s coming tae, puir body.”

Falcon, paying no attention to Lang Rob’s lamentation, had been busy sprinkling the water on Jeanie’s face, whilst Wattie stood silently beside him holding the coggie and watching anxiously.

With a big sigh Jeanie's eyes opened slowly. At first she did not understand the position, and she looked with pitiable vacancy at the men who were bending over her, seeing Falcon last.

"Are ye better now, Jeanie?" he asked tenderly.

His voice seemed to touch some chord of memory, and instantly she was sensible of all that had occurred to the minutest detail. With a low moan, and shuddering, she covered her face with her hands as if she could not bear to meet the gaze even of Daft Wattie Todd and Lang Rob.

"Dinna distress yoursel', Jeanie, dinna heed for a man that could cast ye aff as lightly as an old coat. Ye were ower guid for him, and a' body whose respect ye need care for will say that."

As he spoke she became sensible that she was lying in his arms, and the knowledge quickened her strength. She started up, shrinking away from him as if there had been something evil in his touch.

“Where is he?” she asked bewilderedly, addressing Lang Rob.

“Cairnieford?” he answered, understanding at once to whom her question applied. “He gaed awa twa or three minutes syne, when ye fell.”

She moved to the door, but she was so weak that she tottered unsteadily.

“Mercy on us, mistress, whar are ye gaun?” cried Lang Rob, stepping between her and the door.

“After my guidman”—(the voice was husky and broken by suppressed sobs).

“In this storm, wi’ the nicht dark as pitch, and the rain pouring sae that ye canna see twa staps afore your nose? My certes, ye’s no gang out o’ this house the nicht wi’ my will. When ane o’ our stots that ought to ken the place has been lost, and mair nor likely killed, I would like to ken how ye would find your road? It’s clean impossible, and I’m no gaun to hae your death on my shouthers as weel’s the stot’s—there’ll be steer enuch about that.”

“I maun gae, or ye maun bring him back to me,” she answered feebly. “I’ll no bide here without him.”

“Bring him back—could ye bring a drap o’ rain back out o’ the spate? It’s impossible, I tell ye; sae just content yoursel’ till the morning. Ye can lie doon in my guidwife’s bed——”

“Let me gae awa,” she cried piteously, disturbed by a new source of terror; “he was angry and mad, and maybe he’ll be drooned.”

“Deed, I wouldna say, though I hope no; and if ye’ll be quiet, I’ll gang out and look round for him; but there’s nae use losing mair lives nor we can help—and there’s the stot gane already for certain, the stupid brute. Will ye bide here till I come back?”

Falcon, when she had started from his arms, regarded her sadly: sorrow for her misery subdued his own pain, and rendered him generous even when she hurt him most. He had not interfered when she made known her intention to follow her husband, although he was perfectly aware of the utter futility

and danger of such an attempt, especially to one so weakened as she was by the agitation through which she had passed. He feared that if he endeavoured to stay her, it might only strengthen her resolution to go.

Now, however, he advanced to her, and taking her hand respectfully, but firmly, and in spite of her shrinking effort to release herself, he drew her toward a chair.

“You shall not quit the house until morning,” he said quietly, “if I have strength to keep you here. You shall not risk your life to follow a mad fool like him.”

“Ye are speaking o’ my guidman,” she said, wiping her eyes, and looking at him angrily, “and gin ye hae half the respect for me ye pretend to hae, ye will no speak ill o’ him behind his back in my hearing.”

“I’ll no speak o’ him ava, if you will try to calm yoursel’ and remain here. I’ll show ye that the respect I bear ye is nae pretence, for, hate him and scorn him as I do, I’ll go mysel’ and seek him.”

“Hoots na, ye maunna do that,” broke in

Lang Rob, "I am acquaint wi' the bearings o' the place as weel as ye can be, and if he'll come ava, he'll come for me. He'd be mair like to gang the farer awa' if he was to hear ye. Sae I'll jist rin out and gie a halloo, though I dinna see that it'll do muckle guid."

"No, no, dinna ye gang, or let me gang wi' ye," cried Jeanie, excitedly, and apparently afraid to be left with Falcon.

But Lang Rob, muttering to himself that "women folk were as thrawn as stots ony day," went out, closing the door after him with a vigorous slam, as if he did not altogether relish the task he had undertaken, and presently his voice was faintly heard above the din of the elements as he hallooed with all his might.

Jeanie would have followed him, but Falcon held her firmly, and she turned upon him with bitter rage. She was frantic and miserable—utterly incapable of coolly reasoning out the folly of her desire. She was sensible only that her husband had quitted her in wrath, had roughly shaken her from him as

false and worthless; that he might be even at the moment in peril of his life; and that the man on whose account all his foul accusations had been raised would not let her go to help him. In that state she became herself unjust.

“What are ye haudin me here for?” she cried passionately, “when my man’s life maybe hings in the balance. Hae ye no wrought me ill enuch in bringing me here to make a guid kind man scorn me? Would ye force me to bide in the same house a’ nicht wi’ ye that there micht be nae chance left me o’ ever clearin’ mysel’ o’ the shame ye hae brought on me?”

He winced under the cruel words, and his brow flushed.

“I had nae hand in bringing ye here, Jeanie, I swear it afore Heaven. Whoever has perpetrated the cursed trick by which this has been brought about, I had no share in it. Hae your senses quite forsaken ye? Hae ye forgotten who ye are speaking to?—me who would hae gi'en life itself gladly if

it could hae spared ye this nicht's suffering. What gain would it be to me to shame ye?"

"Oh I ken it a' weel enuch noo, I see it plain. Ye thought ye would shame me sae that I would be glad to gang awa wi' ye to hide mysel' frae the 'scorn o' the folk. But ye're mista'en; for though a' the toon and a' the countryside turned the finger o' scorn against me, I wouldna gang wi' ye."

"For the Lord's sake dinna speak ony mair," he exclaimed horror-stricken. "I am as blameless o' the wicked thought as the wean unborn. O Jeanie, Jeanie, I believed that when ye were married there was no second misfortune that could give me so sharp a wound; but these words ye hae spoken hae struck far deeper and far mair cruelly than even the knowledge that ye were lost to me for ever."

She burst into tears, wringing her hands piteously.

"Oh why, why did ye bide here a single day after ye promised me that ye would gang awa'—that we should never meet again—

when ye ken'd that every hour ye staid was only adding to your sorrow and mine? Why, why did ye no gang awa' before this happened?"

"I staid because I had an act o' justice to you, to mysel', and to others, to perform. But I came up here to bide, that no chance might bring me across your path. I hae never been near your dwelling since that day we parted; I hae avoided every road that I thought there was the least chance o' your travelling on."

"But why did ye no gang awa' at ance?"

"Because I have been daily expecting Ivan Carrach to arrive. I blame him for a' the misfortune that has befallen us, and I was determined that he should never wrong another. It seemed to me in my anger and misery that it would be some consolation for the ruin he had wrought to see him swing on the gallows."

"Ye were wrang, ye were wrang to bide a minute for onything."

"I ken that noo"—(bitterly)—"and I will prove to you that the evil spirit that prompted

your tongue to speak that black suspicion of me lied, for I will resign all hope of justice, all chance of vengeance, and go away. You were just now afraid to remain here because I would be with you, but that fear need not trouble you any longer. You blamed me for lingering here, and I ken that I was mad to do it, for whilst I was fancying that I was learning to forget ye, I was taking bitter pleasure in breathing the same air that ye breathed, in looking doon the glen where ye dwelt, and in hearing about ye frae the only true friend I hae had, puir Wattie there."

He paused an instant, his voice failing him, and he shaded his eyes with his arm to hide the tears which were in them.

Wattie, who had been all this time moving restlessly about, uncertain what to do with himself and sorely puzzled by the evident distress of the two persons who, after his mother and Dawnie, he cared most about—hearing his name mentioned, crept noiselessly to his friend's side. He took one of his hands stealthily, and looked at him with queer

wistful expression, as if he would offer comfort and sympathy if he had only known how.

Falcon impatiently drew his sleeve across his eyes.

“Pshaw—I’m like a bairn. Enough, ye shall never hae another chance to blame me for lingering. I leave ye now, and so help me Heaven you shall never look on me in life again unless ye beg me yoursel’ to come to ye.”

He snatched up a bonnet from the table—it was Wattie’s, but he did not observe the mistake; and Wattie himself was too much bewildered by all that he had seen and heard to observe the danger of his losing that treasure which he had hitherto guarded so carefully.

Jeanie had listened with confusedly mingled feelings of anguish, satisfaction, and fear—anguish at the miserable events of the night, satisfaction that he had proved himself the honest faithful man she had loved and believed him to be, and fear lest anything

should happen to him. But she had grown calmer and stronger whilst he spoke, and she felt that she was driving him out to unknown danger in the storm and perilous roads from a mere selfish desire to shield herself.

“I hae tried ye sairly, Jeamie,” she said imploringly; “but I was distracted, and didna ken weel what I was saying—will ye forgie me thae fause words I spoke enoo?”

“Aye, freely, and it will make my heart easier on the road seeing ye hae asked me to forgie them.”

“I think I hae been out o’ my judgment a wee the nicht, but I’m mair mysel’ noo. I ken that I was wrang to blame ye, and wrang to fear anything that fause tongues might say about us. I hae nae fear for them noo. Bide here then till daylight—”

He interrupted her.

“No, Jeanie, I winna bide here another hour. Dinna try to persuade me, for I canna yield. I am going now. Shake hands first; there can be nae harm in that. Ye wouldna refuse to be frien’s wi’ a man

that was dying, and so far as ye are concerned I am a dying man."

He spoke so resolutely, and with such a grim sad smile, that she was convinced she could not move him from his purpose.

"I think it's you wha are unreasonable noo," she exclaimed distressfully. "Lord, Lord, pity me and help me. Oh why is a' this put on me? Dinna make me answerable for twa lives."

"The Lord will pity you, Jeanie, and help you; and when I gang awa' that will be the best proof to Robin Gray of how much he has wranged you and me baith."

"Dinna gang till morning—it'll be safe then. Do ye no hear how the storm is raging? The very sound o't chills my heart and makes my blood cauld."

"And yet ye would hae gane out in't a' two or three minutes ago."

"Aye, aye, but that was mysel' that would hae been in danger, no you."

"The greater the danger the stronger is the proof that I love you, Jeanie, more than

myself—that I love you too much to gie the tongue o' scandal the chance o' stinging ye wi' its venom. Goodbye, goodbye, my poor lass, and take courage, for the truth will come uppermost in spite o' everything. Before morning I'll be miles awa' frae ye if I'm living."

And without giving her time to say more he wrung her hands quickly and strode out of the house.

Wattie started at his sudden departure, and ran round the table looking for his bonnet.

"Hey, Jeamie, Jeamie Falcon," he called excitedly, "bide a minute till I get my bonnet and I'll gae wi' ye."

He found Falcon's cap lying on the floor, and, placing it on his head, he ran out calling with all his might.

Jeanie was left alone, dazed and helpless in her anguish.

CHAPTER III.

THE BROWNIE'S BITE.

“ ‘O dismal night!’ she said and wept,
‘O night presaging sorrow,
O dismal night!’ she said and wept,
‘But more I dread to-morrow.’”—*Sir G. Elliot.*

She had no strength to stay him, but when the door closed she crouched on a chair, shivering and moaning, too weak to stand, too much stunned by the tortures of the last hour to be able to realize the import of the circumstances at once.

In that hour the agony of a long life seemed to have been concentrated, and her gentle nature had been distracted by the most afflicting of human passions—terror at the wild wrath of her husband, shame and indignation under his unjust reproaches; terror again at the danger to which he was exposing himself; anger with Falcon as the cause

of all; and then remorse for the injustice she had done him.

She was overwhelmed and borne down to the earth, so that, for the first few minutes after she had been left alone, she was incapable of connected thought or action of any kind.

But presently she was quickened by a species of frenzy or desperation, and she started to her feet, drawing her plaid tightly around her. She felt as if she were going mad, and that action of some sort was necessary to save her.

“He was richt—Jeamie was richt for his ain sake and mine to gang awa at ance in spite o’ tempest and darkness. And what am I biding here for? There’s naebody to hinder me noo, and its richt that I should gang awa’ to my hame in spite o’ tempest and darkness though I should dee on the way. Lord forgie me the thought, but I feel as though it would be a guid thing to dee the noo and get awa frae a’ this weary sorrow. Oh it’s hard, hard to thole.”

She crept to the door and opened it. A fierce gust of wind swept in upon her, the rain dashed in her face, and at the same time a vivid fork of lightning darted athwart the black sky, flashing in her eyes and blinding her so that she shrunk back as the thunder pealed along the hills.

But she was no stranger to the spectacle of the fury of the elements; so she drew her plaid the more tightly over her head and under her chin, and stepped carefully out from the house. Another flash of lightning dazzled her eyes again, and although it rendered everything around her for a second as clearly visible as in broad daylight, the darkness which ensued was more impenetrable than before, and she turned to the left instead of to the right in quitting the doorway.

She soon, however, discovered that she was walking on grass, and knew by that she had missed the road. Cautiously she endeavoured to find it again; but this was no easy task, for she had passed round the corner of the

house, and having got to the back of it, there was no gleam of light to guide her.

She was regaining confidence as her eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness, when suddenly she stood quite still, with quickening pulse.

Above the roar of the spate, as it rushed furiously down the glen, tearing trees and boulders of rock with it in its impetuous course—above the eerie wailing of the wind and the splashing of rain, she fancied she heard men's voices in angry discussion near her. Then rapid trampling of feet, as it might have been in a scuffle, and another swift glare of lightning revealed it all to her. She uttered a piercing scream.

She had discovered that she had wandered so far from the right course that she was within a few yards of the brink of the Brownie's Bite. That was not the cause of her scream. She had seen, as one might see figures in a mist, two men on the very lip of the black abyss struggling madly.

Immediately, like the echo of her own cry,

but wilder, shriller, and more terrible to hear, there rose a shriek of mortal agony, and she knew that one of the men had been hurled over the precipice into the foaming spate.

She stood transfixed; and there seemed to her to follow a moment of deathly silence. It was the feeling of one who has been standing beside a cannon when it explodes, and the ears are deafened to all other sounds.

Who were the men she had seen?

A vague sickening dread oppressed her as the question involuntarily flashed through her mind. But she could not, dared not, think of the answer which suggested itself. She was abruptly roused from the species of stupor into which she had fallen by a man stumbling against her.

“Wha’s that? What was ado here?” he said, griping her, and then suddenly releasing her with the exclamation—“You!”

She recognized the voice. The horrible answer to that question thrust itself upon her; she clasped her head with her hands,

and then, utterly worn out and exhausted by the storm of emotion she had undergone, she sunk to the ground insensible.

It was a happy unconsciousness to all suffering, to all the misery which encompassed her. When she recovered she would have been glad indeed to have sank back into that blissful oblivion.

It was morning; the rain had ceased, but the wind was still high, and the fury of the spate was almost unabated. A pale watery mist hung over the hills; the grass lay heavy and glistening wet; trees torn up by the roots, huge stones lying on the fields, and the barn beaten down to the earth, indicated the devastation of the previous night.

She was lying on the bed in the kitchen of Askaig house when sense returned. She was alone; and as soon as she recognized the place she closed her eyes again with a weary sob, praying with bitter fervency for the great physician Death to come and relieve her of her pain.

There was a singing in her ears as if her

head had been under water. She felt sick and giddy, and so feeble that she did not seem to have strength enough to rise from the bed. Yet everything of the sad night's work was cruelly distinct in her memory.

One faint gleam of hope momentarily illumined the darkness of her mind: was it possible that the terrible vision the lightning had revealed to her had been only a vision? Had she sank under the agitation of Robin's accusations and the parting with him and Falcon, and had that most horrible episode of the past night been nothing more than the wild dream of a tortured and fevered imagination? It had been all so brief, so slight, that it was like a dream.

But his voice?—that could not have been heard in a dream so clearly: the sound was ringing in her ears now, and her pulse stood still with the terror it inspired—not on her own, but his account.

A heavy footstep on the earthen floor caused her to look round. Lang Rob Keith was approaching the bed, gazing at her. His

dress was untidy, his short shaggy hair was shaggier than usual, and particles of straw were sticking on the woollen breast of his jacket and in his hair. He had in brief the drowsy appearance of one who has had no sleep during the night, and who had been resting on a heap of straw. More remarkable than this, however, was the expression of fright on his unwashed face.

The instant he observed that her eyes were open he halted.

“Hoo do ye find yoursel’ noo, mistress?” he queried in a subdued tone as if he were afraid of his own voice.

“Better, thank ye” (faintly).

“Troth and I’m richt glad to hear ’t. Just ye lie still and I’ll kendle a fire in a minute, and get ye some het brose. I’m no guid at making porridge, but I’m a prime hand at brose, and there’s some fine new milk ye’ll get to them, for I hae just been awa’ milking the cow.”

“Dinna heed for me—I couldna take ony-thing.”

“Deed but ye’ll hae to take something,” ejaculated Rob, seizing an axe and proceeding to chop wood, “or ye’ll just be fa’in’ back as bad’s ever again, and no a living soul here to dae ought for ye but mysel’, and nae way either o’ getting word sent doon that ye’re no weel.”

“Hae they a’ gane awa’ then?” (hesitatingly, and after a pause).

“Every ane o’ them; even Wattie Todd’s gane, and whar the dementit cratur’s daunert tae, Guid kens. He couldna cross the burn onyway, sae he maun hae gane ower the hills, if he’s no lyin’ drooned somewhar.”

“Surely no that; he gaed awa’ after—after Jeames Falcon, and he’s weel acquaint wi’ the road, so that the poor laddie would be safe wi’ him.”

Rob made no reply; but he glanced uneasily over his shoulder, as if half expecting to see something at the door. He continued his exertions to kindle the fire with renewed zeal.

“I dinna mind lying doon here,” Jeanie

said again after another pause; "did I faint, and was 't you brought me here?"

Lang Rob was apparently disturbed by the question, and responded in a low voice—

"Aye, ye was in a faint."

"Where?" (eagerly and yet tremulously, for she dreaded the confirmation of her own knowledge).

"Weel, gin ye maun ken, ye was outby ahint the house, and I found ye lying on the ground as though ye'd been dead. I carried ye in and put ye on the bed, and syne I learnt that there was naebody left but oursel's."

"Were ye looking for me when ye found me?"

"Na, for I hadna come in frae the time I gaed oot to look for—your guidman, till I carried ye in."

"Did ye see him?"

She put the question with a degree of nervous excitement which threatened a relapse. But Rob was silent.

“How did ye happen to be round at that side o’ the house?” she went on.

Rob’s uneasiness increased, and his expression of fright became more marked.

“Hoo did ye happen to be there?” he queried instead of satisfying her.

“I missed the road.”

“Weel, I was just looking in a’ airts for your guidman when I maist tum’let ower ye.”

Her weakness was overcome by her agitation, and she raised herself on her elbow.

“But ye never expected to find him there at the edge o’ the Brownie’s Bite,” she said piteously. “For the Lord’s sake answer me, Rob Keith, if ye dinna want me to gang wud—did ye see my man there?”

Rob turned his frightened face to her, and seeing how deeply she was moved rejoined in a whisper—

“I didna mean to tell ye or to say ought o’t tae onybody; but I’ll tell ye the truth since ye winna let me haud my tongue.”

“Tell me”—(closing her lips and trying to muster strength to listen calmly).

“Dinna blame me syne, for ye force me to speak. I had been doon the road a gey bit hallooing after Cairnieford till I was hearse. I was coming back, and was just by the house when I thocht a man passed me. I shouted, but got nae answer. I followed and missed him. I suspectit that I was on the top of the Brownie. A flash of lightning showed me that I was richt in my guess.”

“Did it show ye naething forbye?”

A long pause, and then with slow unwillingness—

“Aye, it showed me twa men, and the minute after I heard a maist awfu’ skirl that gar’d my flesh creep and my teeth chatter. I think I’ll never get the better o’ the fricht.”

“What was it?”

“Ane o’ the twa men tum’let ower the Bite as sure as I’m a livin’ sinner.”

“What did ye do?”

“Do?—troth I was ower muckle dumb-foonert to dae onything, or I’d hae run into the house and steekit the door. But I couldna steer a peg till I heard a man near me saying

Wha's that? I made a loup for the place and grippit him."

"Who?"

"Cairnieford."

"Are ye sure o' that—will ye swear that before Heaven?"—(distractedly).

"Aye"—(in a steady whisper)—"if I was ca'ed tae judgment this minute I would swear it was Cairnieford spoke to me."

"He spoke—what did he say?"

"It was me spoke first. I speired at him what he had dune, and he just dragged me twa'r three steps forrit to the place whar ye was lying, and syne he said, 'Take her into the house.' Wi' that he gied himsel' a twist out o' my grip, and was awa' in a minute. I brought ye in and barred the door; but I haena gotten a wink o' sleep a' nicht. That awfu' skirl has been dingin' in my lugs and coming doon the lum wi' ilka blast o' wind, frichtening me clean out o' my five senses. Lord kens what's been dune, but I'm wae to think o' what I fear."

"What is it ye fear?"—(gaspingly).

The man trembled from head to foot, again glancing uneasily toward the door.

“Dinna speir that, for mercy’s sake. I daurna gie’t words. . . . There noo, ye’re awa wi’t again.”

He strode to the bed. She had sank back, uttering no sound, but shuddering and with a face so ghastly that he had every reason to fear that she was about to relapse into insensibility.

“Gie me a drink,” she said in a feeble tone. “I’ll be better in a minute.”

He filled a bowl with the warm milk he had just brought in, and held it to her lips. The draught refreshed and soothed her; and Rob, seeing that, hastened to boil the water and make the brose, under the impression that she would be thoroughly revived by a dishful of that mixture of oatmeal and hot water, which, to render the more toothsome for his patient, he improved by the addition of a lump of butter. All his persuasions, however, could not make her partake, whereat he was grievously disappointed.

“Aweel, we’s no waste guid meat, sae if ye winna I will,” he said philosophically, sitting down and proceeding to sup, pausing, however, with his horn spoon in the dish, to give her one more chance: “are ye sure ye’ll no hae them? they’d dae ye a hantle mair guid nor onything I ken o’.”

But as she still resisted, he began at once and supped with relish, looking much more himself by the time he had satisfied his hunger than he had done since the previous day.

Smacking his lips he looked round to the bed, and saw that the haggard face of the woman was turned toward him, watching him strangely. There was something so queer in the look that he rose uneasily from his chair.

“She’s gaun clean crack,” he muttered to himself; “mercy on us, what am I to dae here a’ my lane wi’ a dementit woman to look after? A score mair beasts would be naething tae’t.”

“I was gaun to ask ye a favour, Rob,” she said in her faint tremulous voice.

“Ask onything ye like, mistress, and I’ll dae’t, gin it can be dune.”

“It was . . . just no to mention what ye hae told me, unless ye canna help it.”

“Hae nae fear o’ that; I can keep my thumb on a thing as weel as onybody when I mak’ up my mind till’t; and it’s no likely that I would be the ane to bring Cairnieford into a scrape if onything I could dae would keep him oot o’t, for he was ay a guid frien’ tae me.”

“Ye promise that?”

“Aye, willingly. I’ll no speak o’t to a living creatur’ . . . hooly, hooly, mistress, ye’ll fa’.”

She had risen from the bed, and on trying to stand had staggered dizzily. Rob ran to her assistance, and steadied her with his hand.

“Heaven bless you and yours, Rob Keith,” she murmured; “and may ye never ken what sorrow is.”

“Ye’d better lie doon again, ye’re no able to stand.”

“I was just a wee thing dizzy; but it’s awa noo. I canna bide here langer; I maun get hame someway, for I canna, daurna, rest until I ken what has come o’ him.”

Rob, however willing he might have been to get rid of her if she had been crazy, as he had for a moment suspected, was too good-natured and too sincerely sorry for her plight to be ready to let her go so long as there was any danger. He therefore urged her to remain until the afternoon, when she would be stronger and abler for the journey, and when the burn would possibly have subsided to something of its ordinary dimensions, so as to be more easily fordable.

But she would not delay, and finding his arguments as ineffective on this subject as they had been regarding the brose, he said he would “yoke the cart,” that she might drive across the burn if it were practicable.

“Syne ye can drive yoursel’ hame, and send ane o’ the lads back wi’ the cart; an’ ye nicht let him gang as far’s the toon, and bring my guidwife wi’ him. She was to hae

come hame the-day onyway. But first I'll gae see what like the water is."

As soon as he had quitted the house, Jeanie proved that once on her feet she could use them. She went out, passed round the house and made straight for the brink of the Brownie's Bite, scanning the ground anxiously as she proceeded. She only halted within two yards of the edge.

The evidence she sought was there, plain—terribly plain, and readable. The earth, softened by the heavy rain, bore the deep imprints of men's feet, crossing and recrossing each other, and making long ruts where a foot had slipped—all giving mute but clear testimony of a struggle.

Evidence of the fatal result of that struggle was afforded by the paling which guarded the edge of the precipice against the cattle. It had not been renewed for some time, was rotten, and beside the footprints a portion of it was broken away, as if some weight had fallen against it and carried it down the abyss.

She would have given the whole world to have been able to obliterate these fatal signs. She tried it, and she trampled on them; but her feeble efforts seemed only to mark the hateful spot the more distinctly. Besides, there was the paling; she could not mend that.

“O Lord of heaven, pity him,” she cried with clasped hands, “and direct me; it canna—canna be that he would hae done this awfu’ thing if he had been himsel’; him that was ay sae kind and gentle wi’ the dumb brutes couldna—couldna raise his hand against the life o’ a fellow-creature. There’s been some mischance atween them—they maun hae come across ane anither by accident, and Jeamie would be trying to explain, and Robin would want to get awa’ frae him, and Jeamie, trying to haud him—maun hae missed his foot and——”

She looked at that open space in the paling and turned from it with a sickly shudder.

“I’ll no believe that it could hae been ony other way—I’ll no believe it till he tells me

wi' his ain lips that he did it wilfully. Lord help and pity him, for he needs baith mair nor me, noo. Oh, he may scorn and hate me a' the mair that this has happened; but I winna forsake him. I'll cleave to him and be a true wife in spite o' scorn and hate and wrang; and surely Heaven will help me to do what's richt."

The resolution, which grew out of her despair, imbued her with a calmness and strength that rendered her step firm as she returned to the house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEARCH.

“Ye dark rolling clouds round the brow of Ben Borrow,
O weep your dark tears to the green vales below;
Ye winds of the hill, wake your wailings of sorrow,
No beams of the morning can gladness bestow.”—*P. M. Arthur.*

Lang Rob was waiting for her in some surprise at her absence. As soon as he saw her he suspected where she had been; but he made no reference to the matter. He had gone out himself in the morning to look at the place, and had seen the proofs of the night's tragedy.

He informed her that the water had considerably subsided, and that he believed it would be fordable in a couple of hours. She would fain have persuaded him to let her attempt it at once; but he was stubborn on that score. He dared not risk the loss of cart and horse, especially when one of the best stots had gone already.

“A stot gane?” she cried with sudden eagerness—“When?”

“Last nicht, some time; ye mind hoo lang I was out looking for the stupid brute.”

“Aye, aye, I mind ye speaking o’t,” and her eyes brightened with hope; “and nae doubt it was the stot that tumbled——”

She checked herself: she did not wish him to surmise what she had been doing, or what had been the result of her observations. He understood her, however, and under the plea of having to give the horse a feed and a “rub doon” preparatory to the journey, he hurried away to the stable in order that he might not by any slip of the tongue, or unconscious expression, betray his knowledge of the futility of her hope. Long after he had missed the stot, and had searched in every direction for it, he had examined the paling and had found it whole.

Controlling as best she might her impatience to reach home and learn whether or not her husband had arrived there, she waited the expiry of the two hours. The horse was

harnessed and yoked to a heavy cart, and Rob drove slowly down the road to the ford. The water was rushing in a long steady black line through the glen; but it was not deep enough to present any formidable obstacle to a strong horse. Rob resigned the reins to Jeanie, and she drove across safely.

“That’s a’ richt,” he cried, as the cart rose dripping out of the water on the other side; “ye’ll win hame easy noo; just haud him ticht by the head as ye gang ower the brae. Ye’ll mind to send for my guidwife—only ye needna fash gin the rain comes on again. I dinna think it will, but if it should, ye’d better keep the horse a’ nicht, and she can come up wi’t the morn.”

Jeanie promised to attend to his instructions, gave him earnest thanks for his kindly services, and drove away. He watched her till she had crossed the hill and disappeared on the descent.

Although the distance was only about four miles to Cairnieford, the slow progress of the cart afforded her ample time to review the

events which seemed to have placed as many years as there were actually hours between her and yesterday.

With the avidity with which one starving clutches at a bit of bread, she had clutched at the hope suggested by Rob Keith's reference to the lost stot. And now, in spite of all she had seen, in spite of the confirmation of her vision by the fact that Keith had witnessed the same, she argued on all the probabilities of their being mistaken, and on all the impossibilities of Robin Gray being guilty of a crime so dire as that she had imputed to him, until the slender hope blossomed into a kind of conviction. There was a lingering doubt, a lingering sense that she was forcing herself to believe against reason, but it only wavered over the bright moon of her hope like a thin cloud.

When one's whole mind is bent on proving certain foregone conclusions, the most palpable sophistries are accepted for sound argument, particularly when the person to be satisfied is one's self. So with Jeanie; she

was glad of anything that hope might build upon and paint into a resemblance to reason. Whether this faculty of guiling one's self be a blessing or not, it comforted her now, and enabled her to think more calmly of what was before her.

She had known from various petty incidents that Robin was a man of strong passions, and capable of as fierce antipathies as likings, although she had never fancied him capable of such unreasoning frenzy as he had displayed at Askaig. She knew, too, that once he had resolved upon anything, it would have been almost as easy to move Ailsa Craig as him. Consequently she anticipated much difficulty in obtaining his credence for her explanation of how he had come to find her with Falcon at Askaig.

But that he should know, aye, and be compelled to feel, how innocent she had been of any unworthy thought, she was determined. Whether he might admit the error into which rage and jealousy had betrayed him, and become reconciled, or persist in his

decision to separate, he should acknowledge that she was blameless.

That purpose was firmly fixed in her mind when she caught the first glimpse of Cairnieford through the bare trees. The sight of the home in which there had been so much content and happiness previous to that morning when Falcon had risen like a ghost before her, let loose a tide of memories of Robin's love that swelled her heart, and filled her throat with choking sobs.

Somewhat oddly these memories were presently tinged with a degree of bitterness against the man with whom they were associated; for as the fear of physical danger to him subsided, she began to feel that he had been cruel and unjust to her, and that he more than Falcon had destroyed the happiness of their home.

On reaching the house she found everybody in a state of excitement; first, on account of the absence of the master and mistress during the whole night; next, and most important—for numerous surmises had been made to

account for the first occurrence—by the discovery of the carcass of the horse, Brown Jock, in the burn, stuck fast against a huge stone that had served as a sort of breakwater to a little wooden foot-bridge, which had been swept away by the spate.

The horse was quite dead, and its hide, lacerated in a hideous manner, indicated that it had been carried some distance by the rushing torrent, and dashed against numerous projecting boulders of rock on its course. The regret of the farm folk for the loss of such a fine animal was mingled with the dread of a still greater calamity which the discovery suggested, for they had unanimously come to the conclusion that the master, who had ridden away in such a furious fashion, could not have escaped a similar fate.

The horse had only been found about an hour previous to the arrival of the mistress; and the men were just proposing to proceed down the burn in search of the body of their master when they observed her approaching.

They received her with gloomy countenances, yet not without expectation that she would be able to assure them of the guidman's safety. The intelligence that Robin had not been home since he had gone off with Brown Jock startled her, and the spectacle presented by the mutilated carcass of the horse gave her a new shock of horror. It seemed as if the wretched events springing out of Falcon's return were to have no end.

As she was unable to give any account of the whereabouts of her husband, there was nothing to be done but start on the expedition already proposed. First, however, Jeanie despatched one of the men to the neighbouring farm of Boghaugh to inquire if Cairnieford had called there.

In less than an hour the man came back accompanied by the old farmer Dunbar, his son Jock, and a couple of ploughmen. None of the Boghaugh folk had seen Robin since Monday last, and, alarmed by the news of his absence and the finding of the horse which the Cairnieford messenger had brought,

they had come over to render what assistance they could in the search.

Three of the men immediately started to follow the course of the burn down to the shore; whilst young Dunbar, Mackie the Cairnieford grieve, and two others, proceeded up the glen, keeping close to the bed of the stream, and as that was a difficult matter owing to the many narrow passes, with high, steep, and sometimes perpendicular sides, through which the current flowed, their progress was necessarily slow. It was therefore agreed that the first party, failing to discover anything on their way to the shore, should hasten after the second, to assist in the more arduous part of the undertaking.

Each party carried ropes and long pitchforks, the latter to probe pools, deep gullies, and fissures in the rocks. It was nearly an hour past noon when they started, and they had to make the most of their time, as they would only have about three hours of daylight for the work. Although any of them could have walked to Askaig and back in a

couple of hours by the ordinary road, that which they were to follow would occupy double the time, even if they had not had the drawback of having to search the stream.

Dunbar and Mackie were in advance of their companions, and before they had proceeded many paces the latter said with a sagacious shake of the head—

“I doubt there’s been a gey habble atween them.”

“Atween wha?” queried Jock Dunbar, a stalwart young fellow, whose whole thoughts were bent on the melancholy task in hand, and his eyes searching the stream closely, whilst at almost every step his long fork was dipped in the black current.

“Atween the mistress and her guidman,” rejoined the grieve, who was diligent enough in the work, although less active than his comrade. “Cairnieford gaed off yestreen after her in siccan a fury as I never saw him in afore; and did ye no notice the face o’ the mistress?”

“Aye, she looked skeart like.”

“Skeart—doonricht miserable, say I. Tak’ my word for’t there’s been a braw habble, an’ I’m misdoubtin’ we’ll find the end o’t yonder” (pointing to the water).

“I hope no, though I can jalouse what they would quarrel about. Can ye?”

“Surely; the speak’s been out for a week past that Jeamie Falcon had come hame, and that he was bidin’ up at Askaig clean crazy at finding that his dawtie was married to Cairnieford. A’body’s talking o’t, and won’erin’ what will be the upshot.”

“It’s true eneuch that Jeamie cam’ hame. I saw him mysel’ on Saturday and spoke to him. But he was sae dour that I didna fash to seek him again.”

Certain stages of the way were easily traversed, and the task of sounding the stream was accomplished by simply reaching out the long forks they carried. But gradually as they penetrated the heart of the hills their passage was intercepted by jagged rocks and steep acclivities, at the top of which the forks were useless for sounding purposes.

This difficulty, however, was overcome by Dunbar, who fastened a lump of stone about the size of a bull's head to the end of a rope, and cast it down into the water. By means of this simple drag they were enabled to assure themselves that they did not miss the object of their search. Still it was slow work, and they had made little more than half the distance to Askaig when the deepening shadows of the hills around them intimated that they would not have daylight to complete their task.

The hills rose in solemn gloom above them, and every object at only a few yards' distance was fading into shadow, while dark clouds seemed suddenly to have dipped down touching the earth.

They had now attained a point where they would have been compelled to make a long pause, even had the sun been high above them instead of being low behind the hills. A rock seemed to have been cleft in twain, making a channel for the burn. At the top the ridges leaned towards each other, leaving

only a space of about six feet in width. But at the base the water had hollowed out the rock on either side, forming two cavities of several feet in depth, dry when the burn was low.

The searchers were in a strait to find means of examining this place with sufficient care. Mackie proposed that they should cease operations until next day, when they would have light enough to see to the bottom of the chasm, which at present appeared to them only as a black hollow.

Dunbar was indecisively dragging the heavy stone across the current at the bottom, lifting it above the water and swinging it as far under the projecting rock as he could manage. The stone encountered some obstacle. He tugged gently; the obstacle seemed to yield, not like stone.

“There’s something yonder,” he said in an awe-stricken whisper, and his companions held their breath.

“Better no shift it then till the morn,” said Mackie after a pause, also in a whisper.

“Halloo, halloo!”

The men started at the shout which reached their ears, as if they had fancied for a moment that the sound had come up from the depth of the chasm where that “something” was lying.

The halloo was repeated, nearer and more distinct. They answered the signal, peering in the direction whence the sound proceeded. At length they descried two figures approaching, and in a little while they were beside them.

They were two of the men who had been on the search down the burn to the shore.

“Hae ye found onything?” queried Mackie.

“No, we hae nae foun’ ought; but whan we got back to the house they tauld us that word had cam’ the maister was in the toon safe enuch.”

“Hooray!” shouted the listeners heartily—all except Dunbar.

He regarded the speaker doubtingly.

“Are ye sure o’ that?”

“Weel, I’m sure enuch gin they haena

tauld me a lee about it, an' I ettle they wouldna do that."

"No, they wouldna do that," echoed Dunbar, looking perplexedly down the chasm; "but there's something yonder."

"Fient a hair need we care noo what's there, since naeboddy's drooned. Come awa, lad, it'll be dark enuch afore we win hame," argued Mackie.

"I'd like to ken what it is, though."

"What would it be?"

"A body."

"Hoots, what would a body dae there—onyway leave it till the morn, when we'll be able to see what we're doing; it'll no be a hae't the waur. Ye can let the rape hing there a' nicht, and we'll row this stane on tae the end o't to keep it siccar, though I'll warrant ye, we's get naething for our pains, but aiblins a clod o' peat, or an auld ewe that tint hersel'."

There was a slight laugh at Dunbar's expense, and he turned away with the rest after the rope had been made secure as arranged.

The laugh had not been very loud, for there was a certain eerie aspect on the place, with the broad shadows of the hills and the night deepening over it, and the melancholy swish of the stream through the chasm, which restrained mirth. But it was enough to make the young fellow wince and yield his point, for like most folk he was more sensitive to ridicule than reason.

A body was lying down there under the rock, although not that of Robin Gray.

CHAPTER V.

A MESSAGE.

“And are ye sure the news is true,
And are ye sure he’s weel?”—*Jean Adams.*

Jeanie had seen the men start on the search with a kind of trepidation, which she could not clearly define to herself. It was not fear that they would find her husband—for, recollecting that when he had encountered her on the top of the Brownie’s Bite he had been without the horse, she calculated that the animal must have been lost before he had arrived at Askaig. It was a fear lest they should find somebody else—whom, she dared not whisper to herself.

She had detained her father from accompanying the searchers, as he had intended, by telling him that she had need of his help for another mission. She purposed sending him

to Clashgirn to make inquiries about Falcon, as she thought it probable that, before quitting the country finally, he would either visit the Laird or send him some message. She was anxious to be assured in some way, that the fine hypothesis she had erected to account for the broken paling might be established beyond the faintest doubt.

As soon as Adam had seen the men fairly off he returned to his daughter, and interrupted the kindly condolence which old Boghaugh was offering her with the question he had already asked several times.

“In the name o’ Heaven, Jeanie, what does it a’ mean?—what’s gaen wrang atween ye and Robin?”

“We hae had a quarrel, faither, that’s what’s wrang.”

“A quarrel—what about?”—(frowning as if, being a woman, she must be to blame).

“If ye’ll let me see my mother for a minute, I’ll tell ye a’;—ye’ll bide, Boghaugh, and hear’t, for ye’re a friend baith to me and Robin, and ye’ll judge atween us.”

“I never like to meddle atween man and wife,” said Boghaugh, shaking his gray head cautiously; “but I winna refuse to help ye if I see ony houp o’ a word o’ mine doing ony guid, though I hae ay found that man and wife settle their ain bickerings best when left to themsel’s. Heaven send that Robin may hae the chance o’ doing’t.”

“I dinna ask ye to interfere atween him and me, Boghaugh; but other folk will be talking, I misdoubt, and I want ye to ken the richts o’ the matter.”

“Weel, let’s hear,” broke in Adam authoritatively.

“Afore I say a word, I want ye to take the powny and ride ower to Clashgirn, and speir gin the folk there hae seen or heard frae Jeames Falcon.”

“Falcon? Is’t true then what the folk are saying that he’s came hame?”

“Ower true; but haste ye awa’; it’ll no take ye mair nor half an hour, and by that time I’ll be ready to explain everything.”

The calmness with which she was speaking

amazed herself. In spite of the dull aching at her heart she was outwardly the most self-possessed of any of those around her. With an unusual clearness she recollected the most trivial circumstances; and, amongst other things, she remembered that she had not yet fulfilled her promise to Rob Keith to send the cart for his wife.

She hastened to repair the oversight, and as the men were all away, and the herd-boy had taken advantage of the confusion paramount to escape on some private frolic, she despatched one of the lassies to the Port.

Then she went up to her mother—still in a dreamy way marvelling at her own calmness—and, as she expected, the bedridden woman had received distorted and disconnected rumours from some of the girls of the passing events, and was in a high fever of alarm, rendered all the more acute by her helplessness to satisfy herself as to what was really going forward.

She was still occupied in the difficult task of trying to soothe her mother when she

heard the sharp voice of Girzie Todd in the kitchen below inquiring for her. Girzie was the very person who would be most likely to help her in discovering what had become of Falcon. So she went down immediately.

“Ye’re there,” was Girzie’s abrupt salutation. “I met the lass gaun into the toon for Rob Keith’s wife, and she tauld me ye had come hame. Did ye no bring my Wattie wi’ ye?”

Jeanie had forgotten all about Wattie; but she remembered now.

“I haena seen him since last night, when he gaed out after Jeames Falcon.”

“And where’s he gaen till?”

Jeanie beckoned her to follow to the door, and there she rapidly recounted what had occurred. Girzie was apparently already aware of a portion of it—how, was explained by her comment.

“Ye needna fash yoursel’ to try the burn seeking your guidman. I cam’ here on an errand frae him.”

“Frae him—then he’s safe and weel?”

“He’s safe, sae far as that he’s no drooned, but he’s a lang road frae being weel. He looks mair like the ghaist o’ himsel’ nor onything else, and he’s as weak as an auld wife coming out o’ the jaundice, and as ill-looking.”

“Whar is he, Girzie, tell me quick?”

“He’s just at my bigging, nae mair nor less; he said he couldna gang to the inn for the shame o’ folk glowerin’ at him and speaking o’ him; and he couldna thole to come near the house here yet for the thochts it would gie him — thinking about ye nae doubt.”

“I’ll gang to him this minute.”

“Na, ye’d better no do that; it’s no ye he wants but your faither. He doesna ken ye’re hame, and frae the way he was speaking o’ ye, I think it wouldna do him guid to see ye till he’s a wee thing quieter. Save’s a’, it made my heart sair to see him and hear him; for ae minute he’s clean broken doon, sabbin’ and greetin’ like a wean ower a bad apple, and the neist he’s rampaugin’ about, roarin’

and swearin' as though a' the deils that drooned the swine had got haud o' him."

"That makes me a' the mair anxious to win till him. O Girzie, woman, how could I bide here and thole the thoughts o' a' this sufferin' for nae cause, when maybe a word frae me would make a' plain?"

"Whiles the truest words look like the biggest lees, and he's just in the dementit state to think them sae."

"It sha'na be my fault then if he doesna ken the truth. When did he come to your house?"

"No aboon three hours syne. He's been walking about a' nicht, and he cam' round by the laigh road and sae got across the brig doon by at the shore. He's sair dune out, but he wouldna hear o' lying doon to rest."

"There's my father comin'; we'll gang awa to him this minute."

"Ye'll do as ye like, and I haena time to argue wi' ye. I want to ken about Wattie."

"I can tell ye naething mair about him than what I hae done."

“Lord hae mercy on us,” cried Girzie, and her hard features became wrinkled with a spasm of pain; “surely Jeamie Falcon wouldna be sae daft as tak’ the puir creature awa’ frae his hame and me.”

“Maybe Jeamie hasna gane awa’ yet; my father was ower at Clashgirn speirin’ for him.”

But Adam came up and told them that nothing whatever was known at Clashgirn regarding Falcon’s movements.

Girzie’s face was troubled.

“Ye’ll hae to find Jeamie. He’s the only ane that can tell ye whar Wattie is, and nae doubt they’re thegither,” said Jeanie.

“Find him—aye, though I should travel frae land’s end to land’s end, I maun find him. But no, he wouldna, he couldna be sic a thochtless gowk as let him gae wi’ him; he’s maybe sent him hame or noo. My puir bairn couldna dae onything for himsel’, and wha is there would dae wi’ him as I hae dune? But I maun haste awa’ after him wharever he’s gane till—the gomeril.”

Girzie departed with more anxiety con-

cerning her son than she had chosen to display. She knew how strong had been the affection with which he had come to regard Falcon, and that with all the simple thoughtlessness of a child, and the fidelity of a dog, he would be ready to follow him anywhere. She believed, however, that Falcon would send him home, provided Wattie did not fall into one of his "thrawn" humours. He was capable at such times of pursuing his own desire in spite of anything that might be said or done to him.

"But what'll the dozent cratur' dae to find his way hame?" she muttered striding along with clenched teeth; "he'll no ken the road, and there's nae saying what may come ower him. Syne gin he's thrawn and winna leave Jeemie, what'll be dune? I'll hae to gang after him onyway or he'll lose himsel' a'the-githir. Neighbor Tait 'll see to Dawnie till we get back. Oh the stupid thochtless fallow, to gang fleeing awa' frae his mither that gate. I'll warm his chafts for him when I get haud o' him—my puir bairn."

And the woman was as much inclined to cry as to be angry. There was the resolution of a strong nature expressed on her embrowned visage, across which the shadows of anxiety flitted now and again as she fancied the occurrence of some accident to her son. She certainly would not halt until she had discovered him, no matter how far she might have to travel.

She, however, expected that the farthest she would have to travel would be to Ayr, although she was prepared to go on to Southampton to seek Falcon on board the *Victory*, whither, she had no doubt, he would proceed. She remembered the name of the frigate and the port easily, for they had been repeated often enough by Wattie.

Jeanie gave her father Girzie's message, which had the effect of puzzling and delighting the old man.

“What I was gaun to tell ye, father and Boghaugh, I'll tell ye noo in Robin's presence, and I look tae ye to gar him hear me as well.”

“Nae fear o’ that, he’ll hear ye. He’s no an unreasonable man, though it does look unco queer that he winna come to his ain house to say whatever he wants.”

“Ye dinna ken the state he’s in, father, or what he’s thinking.”

“No, I canna make out what the habble is about ava, and that clean bamboozles me.”

“He thinks, father” (her voice shaking), “he thinks that I was gaun to rin awa’ wi’ Jeanie Falcon.”

“What would ye dae that for!” queried Adam, looking for a minute more puzzled than ever, and then with a stern frown, as the probabilities of the case and the consequent shame flashed upon him, he griped her by the arm. “Ye never thocht o’ daeing that,” he said harshly; “ye wouldna disgrace them wha hae been true and kind to ye, even in your thocht?”

“Never, father, never.”

Adam raised his head stiff, proud, and calm.

“I couldna think ye would, Jeanie, wi’ the

upbringing ye hae had, and I wonner at your guidman that he could hae sae far forgot himsel' as to doubt ye. But what was the cause o't?"

"Ye shall hear a' in his presence."

"I can bide till then. I'm no feared but ye'll come through't a' an honest woman."

Always hard and dry, the shock he had sustained by the hint as to the cause of quarrel between her and Robin seemed to have softened him. She could not recall any occasion on which he had spoken to her so kindly as now, and his trust comforted her.

CHAPTER VI.

STRIFE.

“But to think I was betrayed,
That falsehood e'er our loves should sunder;
To take the flow'ret to my breast,
And find the guilefu' serpent under.”

Mrs. Riddel of Woodleigh.

Robin Gray was sitting on one of the cutty stools in Girzie Todd's cot. He was bent almost double, his hands covering his face, his elbows resting on his knees. He had paced the narrow limits of the floor for half an hour after Girzie had departed with his message to Adam Lindsay. At every turn he had cast an agitated glance through the little window at the narrow lane, as if impatiently watching for her return before she had time to reach Cairnieford. It was a dull miserable afternoon, everything wearing the bleak drenched aspect which a storm leaves behind it. The wind was stirring the

thatches of the houses, shaking out the rain in heavy drops, which formed into dirty pools on the ground.

Even had his mind been undisturbed, the man would have been affected by this dismal weather, and in his present humour it oppressed him tenfold: it was so suggestive of the dreary hopeless future that lay before him.

Then he had seated himself on the stool. His eyes were sunken and bloodshot, his hair tossed and matted, and deep blue lines under the eyes added twenty years to his apparent age. His broad shoulders were bent as if under the burden of his sorrow, and altogether his stalwart form had the appearance of being utterly broken down by the storm of passion which had burst upon him.

As if he would shut out the spectacle of his own misery, he had bowed his head on his hands with an agony too deep for any utterance to relieve it.

In that position Adam and old Mr. Dunbar found him when they arrived—Jeanie was

waiting outside till they should prepare him to see her.

He looked up quickly on their entrance, expecting Girzie, and both of the comers were surprised by the marked change in his appearance, from that of a hale sturdy man of middle age to the wreck now before them.

“I didna expect to see you here, Boghaugh,” he said wearily, and rising slowly; “but maybe it’s as weel ye hae come.”

“Certes, man, I scarcely expeckit to see you here or onywhar else an hour syne,” rejoined Dunbar; “and I would be mair sorry to see ye lookin’ sae badly if it wasna that I’m weel pleased to see ye ava. Man, ye gied us a’ a skear.”

“How was that?”—(indifferently).

“Your horse was found dead in the burn, and we thocht ye would be found in the same condition. The folk are awa’ raking the water for ye enoo.”

“Puir brute, I micht hae been wi’ him”—(abstractedly, and as if he were barely thankful for his escape)—but when I got to Askaig

I didna tether him fast enuch. So he broke loose, and, I suppose, frichted, and trying to cross the burn to win hame, was carried awa' wi' the spate. I jaloused as muckle, though I spent about three hours seeking for him."

"Aye, weel, it was lucky for ye that ye wasna on his back, for he's an awfu' sicht."

"Lucky?"

"Aye, do ye no think sae?"

"I couldna say; but sit doon, baith o' ye. I hae to speak o' a matter that'll keep us some time, and my head's sae dazed that I canna get at the marrow o't sae quick as I would like. Sit doon."

Boghaugh was a cautious man, who, as he had declared, objected to meddle with his neighbours' affairs, and he felt a little awkward at present under the consciousness that, with Jeanie lurking outside, he was engaged in something like a conspiracy against the man to whom he was speaking. He sat down. Adam, who had not yet opened his lips, remained standing, stiff and stern.

"Ye wanted to speak wi' me," he said now

in an abrupt manner. "What for would ye no come to your ain house to say't? Ye hae had a quarrel wi' your guidwife, I ken; but I thocht ye was a man o' ower muckle common sense to mak' an ado like this."

Instead of feeling the least dissatisfaction with this rebuke, Robin advanced to him and laid his hand on the old man's shoulder, looking in his weather-beaten face sadly.

"I'm glad ye ay thocht that, Adam," he said with unsteady voice, "because ye'll be the readier to believe that I'm no like to make sic a steer without guid reason for't."

"When I ken your reason for't, I'll be better able to gie ye my opinion."

Robin regarded him in silence for a minute, and then, with a deep-drawn breath—

"Aye, weel, I see that ye think me in the wrang— Oh, Heaven, that I had been sae!"

It was a passionate outcry, checked instantly by the hopeless calm with which he had just addressed them. He was desirous of maintaining that appearance of calmness,

but in spite of himself, in spite of his despair, his emotion at times would rise uppermost.

“But there’s nae use wishing for hairst in December,” he resumed. “I sent for ye to come to me here, because I couldna thole to look on the house where we hae been sae happy thegither, kenning that it was a’ by, that the sun will never make the place bricht ony mair for me. It’s a bitter eneuch thocht in itsel’, without carrying it amongst the things that are livin’ wi’ her memory. Every buss that grows about the place would mind me o’ her and the joy I hae lost, and the shame I maun bear; the stane at the door she used to stand on to welcome me hame, wi’ her bonnie blythsome face, would bring back every look that was to me like licht frae aboon, and that noo makes my loss the mair; the chair she used to sit in by the ingle neuk, the books she used to read—a’ thing, a’ thing is haunted by her presence, and I daurna look on them.”

To this piteous wail neither of the listeners

made any reply, although they could not help being touched by the man's distress. They would have offered consolation if they had only known how; but seeing that the wife for whom he was mourning as lost was just outside the door, they were naturally puzzled to know what to say or do under the circumstances.

Robin presently recovered his composure, and relieved them of the difficulty by proceeding quietly—

“What I wanted ye for, Adam, was to tell ye that I'm gaun awa' the morn—I dinna ken where to, but somewhere a long way beyond sicht and sound o' Portlappoch and Cairnieford. I dinna ken when I'll be back—maybe never. While I'm awa' I want you to take care o' the farm, and keep a' thing in order, sae that if she should ever come hame again she may find a house and friends ready to receive her.”

“Wha is't ye're talking about?” interrupted Adam, gruffly.

“My wi——your dochter.”

“And what about her coming hame?—she’s come hame.”

“Come hame?—when?”

“As soon’s ever she could win across the burn. What else would she do, and whar else would she gang?”

Robin was at first like one thunderstricken; and then a bitter smile slowly dawned on his countenance.

“Oh aye, I understand,” he muttered in a hard sneering tone; “I understand: she’s been frichted by what I said yestreen—maybe he’s been frichted too, and so she’s come hame instead o’ gaeing wi’ him as she meant to do. But that winna alter me, for she is as guilty in my e’en as though she had gane.”

“Guilty o’ what I would like to ken?” said Adam stiffly.

“Guilty o’ deceivin’ me—guilty o’ deceivin’ the man she had sworn to abide by till death—to gang awa’ wi’ Jeames Falcon.”

“Ye’re speaking o’ my dochter, sir, and ye’re speaking lees. Jeanie Lindsay was

never guilty o' the shame ye charge her wi', even in her thocht."

"Aye, are ye sure o' that?" (sharp and angry)—"then will ye tell me what for she hid frae me that Falcon had been at my house to see her? she hid it frae you tae, or ye're mair a hypocrite than I could hae believed possible. Will ye tell me what for she told me a lee about it, for I mind weel that nicht speirin' if there had been anybody ca'ing? Will ye tell me what for Falcon, that I hae ay been a frien' to, and wanted to serve, should lurk about Askaig for a week, and never send me sae muckle as word that he was living? Will ye tell me what for she gaed to Askaig when I was awa' at the market, and bided there wi' him? I was there. I saw them wi' my ain e'en."

Adam was overwhelmed by this torrent of questions, in the enunciation of which the blood crimsoned Robin Gray's face, and his eyes brightened with ire. Adam was all the more overwhelmed because he was unable to give any satisfactory response.

He was unexpectedly relieved of his difficulty by the opening of the door and the entrance of Jeanie, with a quiet steady regard fixed on her husband.

“Here is my dochter,” said the old fisherman excitedly, “and she’ll answer ye hersel’.”

Robin uttered a cry of surprise and rage combined, and started as if he would rush from the place to avoid her; but Boghaugh rising seized him with both hands, restraining him—more by his words, however, than by his strength.

“Hoots, man, dinna mak’ a fule o’ yoursel’. Be sensible and hear what she has to say. Od, man, the blackest loon that ever stood fornenst a bailie has a chance o’ explainin’ his faut.”

“I told her never to come near me again,” he said with glaring eyes, but controlling his passion; “but that there may be nae blame on me, I’ll listen to what she has to say.”

“It’ll no take me lang to tell or you to hear,” she said firmly, although her bosom was swelling with emotion. “Ye blame me

that I didna tell ye Jeamie had come to see me. I didna do't because I wished to wait till I could speak o' him without gieing you the pain o' thinking that I cared mair for him nor a wife should dae."

"Ye hear her," he interrupted wildly. "She owns hersel' that she couldna speak o' him as the wife o' another man should."

Her cheeks burned, and her lips trembled, but her voice was steady.

"Ye ken'd whan I married ye that I lo'ed him, and that I never would hae been your wife if I hadna believed him dead—I didna mean to mind ye o' that," she added hastily as she saw him writhe, repenting the cruelty of the words, "but ye hae forced it frae me."

"Say what ye like, I can bear't," he answered, attempting to sneer in order to cloak the violence of his agitation.

"If ye had said a word to me about him I would hae told ye everything, but ye never said that word, although ye had heard that he was hame. I didna speak; for that day when he cam' in by to Cairnieford, him and

me parted never to meet in this world again, as we thought."

"And nae doubt ye had nae expectations o' seeing him at Askaig when ye gaed there yesterday, taking your claes wi' ye and everything ready as though ye didna mean to come hame again?"

"I didna think o' him ava when I was gaun to Askaig. A man cam' to the house wi' a message frae you, as he said. He told me that you had been up at Askaig, that ye'd had a quarrel wi' Jeamie Falcon, and that ye'd got yoursel' sair hurt, and maybe wouldna be able to come hame. Sae I was to gang to ye at ance, and bring things wi' me for you and for mysel', lest we shouldna be able to leave the place. He had the gig waiting at the foot o' the loaning, and I gaed wi' him, no doubtin' his word."

"Wha was the man?"

"I dinna ken him."

"Had ye ever seen him afore?"

"No, that I mind, although his face and voice didna seem strange to me. I wasna

suspecting a lee, and I was ower muckle ta'en up wi' what he said about you to think anything about him."

"Sae ye couldna tell us wha the man was?"

"No."

Robin gave vent to a harsh mocking laugh that grated on the ears of the others, and seemed less like the kindly-hearted man he had always hitherto shown himself than almost anything he had yet said or done.

"And do ye think a man in his senses is to believe that story?" he cried contemptuously.

"Aye, you would believe me if ye were in your senses, Robin Gray," she said, flushing under the smart of his scorn, and her temper getting the better of her sorrow; "but ye're possessed o' some evil spirit that makes everything ye hear sound false as your ain suspicions are. Lord help ye, man, I maist forget my ain pain in pity o' ye."

"Thank ye. Was that a' ye had to tell us?"

"No yet. I gaed wi' the man to Askaig.

When we got there, naebody was in the house. I was surprised at that, and he said he couldna understand it. But he tauld me to sit doon in the room and no to steer, and he would find out where ye was. He gaed awa' and he didna come back again. But I noticed this—that the gig was Clashgirn's, and nae doubt the Laird 'll be able to tell ye wha the man was that had his gig."

"Oh, I can tell that without his help. It was just a man sent by Jeamie Falcon."

"I'll no believe that; he wouldna be guilty o' sae base a trick on me. I blamed him for't when I was driven wud wi' your abuse, but I'm sorry for't noo."

"Nae doubt it was a' the doing o' the man ye didna ken."

Without heeding the cruel jibe she went on.

"I waited about twa hours, as near as I could guess, when Jeamie Falcon cam' in wi' Wattie Todd. He was as muckle put out at sicht o' me as I was at sight o' him. He told me that ye had been there the day afore speirin' for him, but no that day; and he

jaloused that Clashgirn had something ado wi' the gowk's errand I had been brocht on. I wanted to get hame at once, and we gaed doon to the water. But, a' the while I had been waiting the rain had been fa'ing, and the spate rising sae that it was impossible to win across the burn."

"Yet I got across an hour after that."

"And the crossing has cost the horse his life. Oh, man, if I had ken'd that it would hae satisfied ye I would hae louped into the water and been carried hame as Brown Jock was."

She paused, hastily wiping away the tears which had forced themselves to her eyes, and repressing the sobs that were choking her.

"Gae on, Jeanie," said Adam stiffly, but taking her hand with the simple confidence of a child.

Again his trust touched her and strengthened her.

"We gaed back to the house to wait for Rob Keith, who was awa' seeking ane o' the beasts that had been lost. We thocht that

he nicht be able to find some way o' getting me across, although it was quite dark then. I was greeting wi' the fear o' no being able to win hame that nicht, but I never thocht that even if that had happened ye would hae shamed me and belied me as ye hae done. Ye cam', and ye ken what happened syne, except that Jeamiegaed awa'jist after yoursel', saying that we would never see him again. I went out to see if there was nae way o' getting hame in spite o' a' the storm. I tint the road, and got on to the Brownie's Bite."

She paused: then looking steadily at him she added, very slowly—

"I saw something there—" (Aye! he started) —"that frichted me. You cam' across me, and I fainted. I didna come to mysel' till this mornin', and as soon as Rob Keith could get a horse and cart through the water I came hame. That's a' I hae to tell."

The simple earnestness of her manner was the best witness of her truth. But the man was blind still. The conviction of his jealousy was too strongly impressed upon his mind to

be removed by the mere assertion of her honesty. No, he was not blind—he was worse than blind, for everything that came within his vision was distorted into the vilest falsehood. And yet he loved her madly; his heart was aching and warming to clasp her to it!

“And every word ye hae spoken I believe to be true in sicht o’ Heaven,” said Adam.

“And I believe it to be false,” said Robin fiercely—all the more fiercely because it pained him so.

CHAPTER VII.

WHICH IS TO BLAME?

“Cauld is the blast upon my pale cheek,
But caulder thy love for me O,
The frost that freezes the life at my heart
Is nought to my pains frae thee O!”—*Burns.*

“Father, father!” was all that Jeanie could exclaim when her husband made that cruel declaration of his disbelief.

She flung her arms round Adam’s neck, and laying her head on his breast gave vent to the sobs and tears she had with so much difficulty repressed whilst she had been explaining her conduct.

Boghaugh had been scarcely less impressed with the truth of Jeanie’s statement than her father had been; although, all the circumstances considered, it did seem strange that she should have gone to Askaig, where she knew Falcon was living, on the mere asser-

tion of a man of whom she knew nothing, that her husband was lying there injured when she had seen him start as usual for the market. He did not, and indeed could not, make sufficient allowance for the silent suspense the wife had been enduring for a week previous, and which, to her mind, rendered an angry encounter between her husband and Falcon only too probable.

He was, however, as mentioned, impressed by the statement, and was considerably taken aback by the rudeness with which Robin asserted its falsehood. The quarrel looked so serious that he felt he ought to say something, although he did not know exactly what, and his usual caution could not be immediately overcome. He began to wipe his bald head with his large red handkerchief, as if, in spite of the weather, he were perspiring violently.

Adam, with one arm protectingly round his daughter, and lowering brows, stood glowering at the furious face of his son-in-law.

Matters had reached a climax at which nobody seemed to know what to say or do next, and for several minutes there was a pause, during which the sound of the woman's sobs mingled with the sough of the wind in the chimney, and the slow pat-pat of the heavy rain-drops falling from the thatch and blown against the window.

This pause was of advantage to Robin Gray so far that it permitted the spectacle of her grief to affect him. Every sob cut him to the heart like a sharp knife; every tear that glistened on her cheek seemed to declare her innocence and to reproach him for the affliction she was suffering. He would have done anything, given anything, if at that moment he could have taken her in his arms and bade her forget all as if it had been no more than a horrible dream.

But he could not do that. Loving her as he did, devoted to her as he had been, and jealous of her as a miser of his gold—jealous of every word and look and smile; knowing how she had loved Falcon, and bitterly con-

scious always of the disparity between his own age and hers, whilst lightly valuing all the amends for that disparity his love and goodness had been able to make—with all these combined to disturb him, doubt once raised could not have been easily allayed, even had the grounds for doubt been much slighter than they appeared to be.

He was swayed alternately by the great love he bore her, which was urging him to cast all doubt away, and fold her to his breast, and again by the demon of jealousy which possessed him, and maddened him into spurning her from him as false and unworthy of that affection he had lavished on her, and which rendered her falsehood all the more culpable.

Again there was a medium condition of his frenzy during which he was apparently calmer. He contracted his brows and pressed his head with his hands, trying to compel his thoughts to move in steady sequence—trying, as he had done on that night when the Laird had warned him of Falcon's return, to look

the matter fairly in the face, and see what course common sense and kindness indicated to him. In that humour he had decided upon leaving Cairnieford in charge of Adam for her benefit and for her sake, and to go away somewhere that he might be amongst people who knew nothing of the disgrace he imagined he had sustained, and amidst scenes which would not add to his misery by constantly reminding him of her.

Decision in the worst extremity affords a certain degree of composure; an exhausted body and a mind without hope produce a languor which is akin to quietude.

He had reached this state when first Adam's contradiction and then Jeanie's appearance had stirred the winds of his passion into all their former fury, rendering him deaf alike to the promptings of his better self and all that she had said. The idea of her falsehood had become so firmly fixed in his mind by the tortures of the preceding night that it could only be uprooted by proofs much stronger than any he had yet received—

proofs that should strike like pickaxe and spade.

Still during the pause which ensued, writhing at sight of her distress, he pressed his head between his hands trying to view the matter dispassionately.

“Ye’re no the man I took ye to be,” at length said Adam, harshly; “an’ it’s a doom’s black day for me that I maun feel mysel’ behauden as I am to the man wha could speak as ye hae dune o’ my dochter. By the Lord, if I had the use o’ my arms as ance I had, I would hae broke every bane in your body for half as muckle.”

“Whisht, father, whisht,” interrupted Jeanie, drying her eyes; “there’s nae use speaking that way; it can do nae guid, and ye hae mair need to pity him nor to be angry wi’ him, for he’ll rue a’ that he’s said and dune sairly afore many dâys are by. God help him.”

Her sobs were stilled now and her eyes were dry as she cast a look of sad compassion on the man.

“I maun say, Cairnieford,” broke in Boghaugh gravely, “that ye seem unreasonable. I never like to meddle atween man and wife, but I maun say that I think you’re wrang.”

“Aye, God help me,” he said bitterly, “since ye are a’ against me, and Guid forgie me, woman, if I hae wranged ye. O, Jeanie, I would be proud to hae the tongue that has spoken your shame brunt out o’ my mouth if I could only feel that ye hae told the truth.”

She had been touched by the anguish of his tone as he had begun to speak, but the finishing words stung her.

“What hae I ever done,” she exclaimed indignantly, “that ye canna believe but I’m telling lees?”

“Ye hae hidden frae me that he had come back, and ye hae told me—though no sae many days syne ye said ye never would—that ye wished ye had never been my wife.”

“And ye drove me to’t wi’ your cruel words. Aye, and ye mak’ me feel noo that

I am still sorry, for it would hae been happier for us baith if I had held to what I felt to be richt and never joined my hand wi' yours. Heaven forgie you for makin' me feel't, and Heaven forgie me for doing sae, but ye hae said enuch this day to mak' me wish amaist I had gane awa' wi' Jeamie Falcon last nicht."

A violent spasm distorted his features for a moment, and then he cried hoarsely—

"Ye hear her, Boghaugh—ye hear her, Adam?—(to her)—That will do, ye needna say ony mair."

"I didna mean to say ony mair (firmly and with flashing eyes)—at least I mean to say nae mair to you. A man that is sae ready to snap at ony word that could cast shame on his ain wife is no the man to do her justice, though an angel was to come doon to him and gie him assurance o' her honesty."

"I hae tried to do my duty by ye—"

"And I hae never failed in mine. But it ends a' here, and even to the end I hae done

my duty in trying to satisfy ye that I am an honest woman, sair to thole though it has been to think that I could hae been doubted. But the last word that I will ever speak to defend mysel' frae the charge o' a sin I never was guilty o' in thocht or deed has been spoken noo. Though I leave your house this day, I can haud my head up proud amongst a' folk, for it is by nae fault o' mine that ye gang forth a shamed man. They wha ken me will haud me blameless, and for others I need care naething."

There was a simple dignity in her manner that brought him more to his proper senses than anything she had yet said.

"Only speak ae word," he exclaimed; "tell me where I may find the man that came for ye wi' the gig, and I will believe that I am wrang."

"I hae told ye a' that I can tell ye, and it has been the whole truth, as Him wha sees and hears a' things kens. Ony mair ye want to learn ye maun get frae others, I hae naething mair to say. But for the many kindly

things ye hae done for me and mine, I gie ye thanks, in spite o' a' that's passed, and I will ay think tenderly o' ye as what ye were afore this cam' aboot, for I hae a reason stronger even than my gratitude to wish ye had ay been what you were then."

"Ye will gie me nae proof?"

"I hae nane to gie but what I hae gien already."

"And ye shouldna hae needed mair," said Adam in his stiff dry way; "but there's nae use trying to gar the blind see. We'll leave your house this day, and while we have hands we winna be behauden to ye for onything."

"Ye'll do as ye think best," retorted Robin, angry with Jeanie, with her father, and most of all with himself, whilst doggedly holding to his belief that he had been wronged in purpose, if not in fact, and miserable in the thought that the whole world was against him. "I'll arrange wi' Carnegie, the writer, so that the woman that bears my name shall never need to want."

"I will hae naething frae ye sae lang as I

can work for mysel'. We needna bide here ony langer, faither; a' that need be said is said."

"There's just ae word, and that is to tell ye, Cairnieford, that my arm is nearly richt again, and wi' Heaven's will I'll work day and nicht to pay ye back every bawbee that we owe ye."

"Hoot, toot," ejaculated Boghaugh; "auld folk and young folk are a' gane wud, I think. This is no the way to part. Come, come, Cairnieford, just say ye hae been wrang, and that ye'll think nae mair about this daft habble; and ye, guidwife, just help him ower the slap and gie him your hand."

It is possible that Robin would have yielded to the reconciliation at that moment, for the resolution which Jeanie's bearing expressed had fallen like a cold shower on his distracted thoughts, and enabled him to realize the idea that the treasure he had valued so—and still valued—was slipping from his grasp for ever, when one word from him might save it. But Jeanie herself interposed.

“Na, Boghaugh, wise and kind though your counsel be, I can never gie him my hand again till I hae proof that his mind is as free frae a’ doubt o’ me as it was on the day we were married. I would wrang him and mysel’ baith to do’t; and I winna hae a patch where there has been nae rent.”

“She shall never gie him her hand again wi’ my will, though he should gang doon on his knees till her, and beg her to forgie him,” said Adam stoutly, and drawing her toward the door.

Robin’s head was bowed, and his hands hung listlessly by his sides.

On the threshold she looked back, and then, releasing herself from her father, she returned quickly to her husband.

“I canna gang awa,” she said in a tremulous whisper, “without telling ye that I never ken’d how muckle I cared for ye till the noo when we are parting, maybe never to see ane another or speak a kind word again. But it maun be; for your sake and mine, we’ll be better apart.”

He made no reply; indeed he could not, for his voice failed him.

She quickly touched his check with her lips and then ran out of the house stifling an hysterical sob.

Robin leaned his shoulder against the wall, groaning.

“Deevil tak’ it,” muttered Boghaugh, apparently exasperated beyond measure, “it clean dings a’ I hae ever seen that twa folk as fond o’ ilk other as can be will make their lives miserable just because ane o’ them hasna courage to say forgie and forget.”

The old man shook his gray hairs and struck the ground impatiently with his staff, forgetful of all his caution. Then, as if struck by a new idea—

“I’ll cry her back.”

Robin raised his hand to stay him.

“No,” he said huskily, “it’ll dae nae guid; better let her gang.”

“But this’ll never dae—ye maun come to a richt understanding.”

“I see nae way o’ bringing it about.”

“Weel, ye’ll come hame wi’ me the nicht, and after ye hae had a guid sleep your head will be clearer and maybe ye’ll be able to see then.”

“Very weel, I’ll follow ye; but I’m gaun owerby to Clashgirn first.”

CHAPTER VIII.

GIRZIE'S BEQUEST.

“ He strays among the woods and briers,
Or in the glens and rocky caves,
His sad complaining dowie raves.”—*Burns.*

For two hours after Boghaugh had departed Robin remained in the house alone. What melancholy musings were his during that space; what spasms of pain; how many resolves hastily adopted and as hastily rejected!

All these resolves, however, were directed toward one object; to clear up what appeared to be so inexplicable in Jeanie's statement, namely, who had been the man who had brought the false message from Askaig, and what had been his motive in doing so; or rather, who had been his employer, for without doubt the man had acted merely as a servant.

There was a distinct clue to start with in the fact that the gig had been that of Clashgirn.

“If this be ane o’ Nicol McWhapple’s tricks to fule me, by the Lord aboon it’ll be the dearest bit o’ knavery he has ever played,” he muttered moodily with clenched teeth.

Somehow the bitterness of his wrath seemed to have turned from Jeanie on finding another object upon which to vent itself. He thought of her tenderly, and that kiss upon his cheek had been more potent to soothe him than all the drowsy syrup of the East could have been. Those last words of hers were more precious to him in his sorrow than all the dearest memories of his life.

And yet he winced whenever he thought of Falcon, became bitter and jealously angry: unreasonable, he admitted it was, seeing that when he had married her, he had done so with her confession fresh before him that her heart was Falcon’s. But then he had not speculated on the possibility of his return; and he had speculated largely on winning

her from his memory all to himself. He had devoted his whole energies to the task, and had fancied that he was succeeding—nay, knew that he was succeeding, when the old love rose from the dead and everything went wrong.

When his irritation was rapidly rising to a new frenzy a voice at his elbow whispered—“I never ken'd how muckle I cared for ye till noo,” and the words acted as a charm, frightening away his evil thoughts as the crucifix was said to scare away the foul fiend himself.

Girzie returned. She was dourly silent, and moved about the house in a quick nervous way. She had been up to Askaig and obtained confirmation of Jeanie's intelligence concerning Wattie, so far as Rob Keith was able to confirm it, for he had been out when Falcon and Wattie had quitted the house. She had gone to several places where she had thought it possible Wattie might have staid during the night; but she could obtain no information concerning him anywhere, and now she was preparing to start in pursuit.

Robin had waited for her in the expectation of learning from her something relative to the man of the gig.

“Hae they fee’d ony new men at Clashgirn?”

“No that I ken o’ or hae heard o’; they hae just the same loons they had at hairst.”

Her answers to all his queries were short, sharp, and chiefly consisted of “I dinna ken.” She was preoccupied and even surly, far too busy with her preparations, and too anxious about her son, even to ask one question as to the result of Jeanie’s interview, much as she had been interested in the matter previously.

He was moving to the door before he observed the peculiarity of her manner. His attention was attracted by the sight of an old-fashioned bonnet which she had produced from some receptacle under the bed, and which she hastily donned, tying the faded ribbons under her chin with nervous fingers. He could not help being struck by her appearance in this huge headgear, in

which he had never seen her before, so far as he could remember.

Then he noticed how the thin lips were compressed, and the sharp features were drawn together as if with pain. His hand had always been ready to help the sorrowing, and at present his own misfortune made him keenly sympathize with that of others.

"Is there onything wrang, Girzie?" he said, regarding her through the mist of his own troubled thoughts.

"A hantle ower muckle wrang, my certie," she said sharply, and with a toss of her head as she gave the bow she had tied a finishing jerk. She felt somehow as if he were in a measure to blame for Wattie's escapade; "ye needna think, Cairnieford, ye hae gotten a' the sorrow o' the world to yoursel', for there's a when o't cam' my gate."

"But what is't?"

"Wattie, the gomeril, has gane awa' wi' Jeamie Falcon, and Guid kens what'll befa' my puir bairn—the deil's in him, wha would ever hae thocht o' him playing sic a cantrip?"

And, alternately ready to give vent to wild lamentations and angry outbursts, with the acute grief she was really suffering hidden by her exclamations of vexation, she continued her preparations.

“And what are ye gaun to dae?”

“Gaun to seek him wharever he is—wha kens but the puir daft creatur’ may hae got among strangers wha’ll just torture the sowl out o’ him wi’ making a fule o’ him—or wha kens but he’s maybe deeing at some dyke-side, starved and cauld and friendless, for Jeamie would be sure to send him hame, and that’s what I dread maist. Lord guide him—but wait till I get a haud o’ him. I’ll learn him to gae dancing after folk that dinna want him, and hae nae way o’ daeing wi’ him though they did. I’ll gar him dance till anither tune, leaving me in sic a state about him—my puir bairn, my puir witless, helpless bairn, God guide ye wharever ye be.”

Her voice was husky and broken, and there were tears in her eyes, across which she im-

mediately drew the back of her hand with an angry "hoots."

"I wish I could help ye, Girzie; is there naething I can do for ye?"

"Na, thank ye, Cairnieford, there's nought ye could dae except help me to seek him, and that ye canna; but there's nae need; I ken weel eneuch the road they hae ta'en, and I'll find him."

"Do ye no want ony siller? Ye dinna ken what ye may hae to spend."

"Na, I dinna want that either. I hae a pickle o' my ain that I hae been gathering for ten years past, sae that whan I'm ta'en to my lang hame Wattie nichtna be just a'thegither unprovided for. It's no muckle, but I hae scrimped mysel' sair mony a time no to break on't because it was for him, and because I ken that wi' a' the loon will hae a hungry wame mony a day. I maun break on't noo; but it's on his account, ye see, and that's different."

"Dinna break on't yet, Girzie; keep it for him, and I'll gie ye five notes——"

“I’ll no hae a penny o’t. Gie it to him when I’m awa’ gin ye like, or gie me an extra penny for the fish when I ca’ on ye; but I’ll hae nane o’t enoo. Eh, man, I’ll be proud and willing to work to make up the store again, if I only had him safe here; but I dinna ken what for, or what way, my mind misgies me that I’ll never see my Wattie hame ony mair, and that’s the reason I’m sae ready to break on his siller.”

“There’s nae fear but ye’ll find him. Dinna let that thought get the better o’ ye.”

“Hoot, aye, it’s just an auld wife’s clavers, I ken; yet afore ye gang, Cairnieford, and since ye want to help me, will ye promise that, gin onything should gae wrang wi’ me, and he come hame, will ye promise that ye’ll be a friend to him?”

“There’s my hand on’t, he shall not want a friend while I’m to the fore.”

“That’s gien me mair heart nor your five notes would hae dune. Do ye see this stane?”
—(laying her hand on one at the back of the chimney, black with soot).

"Aye, what's there?"

"That's my bank; howk oot the stane when the time comes, and ye'll find a' that I hae to help Wattie when I can help him nae mair."

"I'll mind, Girzie; but I'll no need to do your bidding for mony a lang year yet."

"I houp no, but onyway I'm easier in mysel' noo that I hae settled a' thing."

Having in this simple fashion made her will, and placed her affairs decently and in order, as became a person about to venture forth on a journey the end of which she could not foresee, Girzie was ready to start.

Robin left her arranging with her neighbour about the care of Dawnie the cuddy, and set out on his own journey to Clashgirn. The evening was dark and windy, with heavy clouds sweeping rapidly across the sky; occasionally in their kaleidoscope changes permitting a few pale stars to glimmer on the earth.

He proceeded at a rapid pace, notwithstanding the stiffness of his joints, and the

unusual heaviness of his limbs, resulting from the fatigues he had undergone since the last night, and from having permitted his wet clothes to dry on him. But by the time he reached Clashgirn the joints had become supple again, and he felt little of the fatigue he had been unpleasantly sensible of in starting.

This relief freshened his mind as well, and prepared him for what he anticipated would be a hot encounter with the Laird.

“If he wasna a cripple toad, there would be some satisfaction in shaking the worthless life out o’ him,” he muttered with clenched teeth as he advanced to the door.

There was a light in the Laird’s room, as a chink in the shutter revealed. So he knocked loudly, knowing that his man was at home.

An unnecessary length of time seemed to elapse before any one answered the summons, and he was on the point of knocking again, and more imperiously, when the door was opened by Mrs. Begg. The goodwoman

looked flustered, and was evidently in a temper about something.

After briefly saluting her, he asked for McWhapple.

“Deed an’ I dinna ken whether ye’ll get to see him the nicht or no,” she answered with a toss of her head and a short laugh, both of which were intended for signs of contempt for her master; “he’s been in ane o’ his tantrums since morning, when we had twa or three words, and whatever he’s been doing, whether he’s been countin’ his ill-got gowd or what, I canna say, but he hasna let onyane in this house see the inside o’ his room the whole day.”

“He’ll hae to let me see the inside o’t though, or come out to me,” said Robin decisively.

“Weel, it’s mair nor he would let me or onyane else,” continued Mrs. Begg, her voice rising as the recollection of the indignity she had suffered was warmed by the narration of it; “he’s keepit the door locked a’ day, and just ta’en his meat frae the lass at the lintel

—no to say that his appetite's ony the waur for want o' exercise. My certie, no, for he's eaten mair nor enuch to dae three men wi' ord'nar' stamachs."

"Tell him I'm here."

"I'll dae that for ye, Cairnieford, though he tell't Leezie that if onyane ca'd he couldna see them the day—as if I wasna the proper person to receive sic instructions, and be tauld the why o't tae. But I's no bide muckle langer in this house to be lightlied by sic a creatur' as him, and maybe when I gang he'll learn that I ken mair o' his goings-on nor he would care for the minister, or his brither elders, or the folk he's been haudin' his heepocritical head up among, to hear o'—my certie!"

She had continued to speak in a high key as she passed down the lobby to the door of the Laird's room, as if desiring him to hear her. Although Mrs. Begg had a temper, she was, as has been already stated, a kindly body, and the prime cause of her quarrel with Clashgirn, was her anxiety about Falcon,

in consequence of rumours she had heard from Cairnieford.

She knocked sharply at the door, and shrilly announced the visitor.

There was none of the usual unction in the Laird's tone as he replied, not even a note of the martyr-like whine.

"I canna see him or onybody the nicht. I'm busy. I'm no weel. I hae got a bad cauld——"

"Hech, an' ye're hoastin' sair," interrupted Mrs. Begg, satirically.

"Gae 'wa, woman, and do as I bid ye. Ask him to ca' the -morn, and I'll see him."

"Ye hear?" said Mrs. Begg, turning to Robin, who had followed her and heard part of the Laird's answer.

He now knocked himself.

"Open, McWhapple," he said loudly and authoritatively, "and let me in, or come ye out, for I maun see ye, and that the-noo, though I should hae to birze open the door to win at ye."

“Od, it’s extraordinar’! that a man’s to be commanded that gate in his ain house,” exclaimed the Laird; and there was a shuffling of stealthy feet on the floor, whilst he spoke—not his feet—as if some one were getting out of the way. “I hae tell’t ye that I canna see ye the noo. Come the-morn.”

Robin placed his shoulder against the door.

“If ye dinna open by the time I count five, I’ll ding doon the door.”

And he gave it a rough shake to show that he had the strength to carry out his threat as he begun to count slowly, and in a loud voice.

“Od sake, hae ye come to rob an’ murder me that ye threaten to bring my ain house about my lugs? This is a fine way to treat a gentleman, and your Laird—(this in an injured tone)—ye dinna think I’ll let this forcible entry, which is naething short o’ hamesucken, pass without notice——”

“Four,” shouted Robin, “are ye ready?”

“Od’s my life, bide a minute till I can get across the floor.”

“Five!”

And he gathered his strength to fulfil his threat when the door was flung open, and the Laird stood before him with a candle in his hand, the humble surprise of a sweet-tempered and much-wronged man expressed on his countenance.

CHAPTER IX.

BAD MADE WORSE.

“ My doubts are torments waur to thole
Than knowledge o’ the warst could be ;
Oh, faith ance lost, clouds wrap the soul
And mar the truth it fain wad see.”—*Anon.*

“ Anither minute and there would hae been a job for smith and carpenter, and aiblins the doctor tae, if ye’d been ower near,” said Robin, as coolly as if this had been quite an ordinary method of soliciting an interview.

“ Weel, Cairnieford, I must say that though, as a rule, I’m ay glad to see ye, and pleased to bid ye welcome to my house, your conduct on the present occasion is o’ that nature that would gar me think ye had been taking mair drink nor was guid for ye, if I didna know ye better, and certainly it becomes you so much the less to behave in this manner, seeing that you are quite sober.”

The Laird spoke in his best English, as was his custom on all occasions when his dignity was concerned; but it was the tone of a man who, whilst feeling himself aggrieved, is yet sorry to say so, and is open to be convinced that he has made a mistake. But his eyes blinked inquisitively and watchfully behind the candle he held up to examine the visitor, and by that means the back part of the room was thrown into complete shadow.

His appearance was peculiar. Robin had never seen him otherwise than dressed with the sleek precision of a dandy, although always plainly, as became a man of serious thought. At present his clothes were disarranged, his shirt-frill, usually so well starched, and causing Mrs. Begg more anxiety than all the other duties of the house combined, was flabby and snuffy, as if he had been wearing it all night and all day; and his thin hair looked as if it had not been brushed for a couple of days.

His face, always sallow, was sallower than ever now, and his peering eyes seemed to be

smaller and more sunken. They blinked uneasily.

“Am I to come in, or are you to come out, or are we to speak here?” was Robin’s answer to the Laird’s neat address.

“Aweel, since you’re here, and since you will speak wi’ me, you can come in and take a seat. And you can get some hot water, Mistress Begg, and maybe Cairnieford will take a glass o’ toddy.”

At this hint Mrs. Begg tossed her head, and flounced off to the kitchen, whilst Robin entered the chamber, and the Laird closed the door.

The room was in as much disorder as the owner’s dress. The chairs were out of their places, the table was drawn up close to the fire, and was covered with a number of account-books and a variety of documents, except at one corner, which was occupied by a bottle and a glass. On the floor beneath the window had been placed the tray containing the dishes and the remains—a bone picked very bare—of the Laird’s dinner.

“Ye see I hae had a busy day wi’ my accounts,” he explained apologetically, and pointing to a seat; “I hae been letting them get behind-hand, and I was trying to make up for lost time. I’m obliged on these occasions to keep the door fast, or that woman, Mistress Begg, would be for ever upsetting my calculations wi’ her extraordinar’ tongue, which begins ringing at six o’clock in the mornin’ and keeps on ringing till ten or eleven, or maybe twelve o’clock at night. She canna even gie it a rest while she’s taking her meat, but maun keep clatterin’ on as for a wager how muckle she could say in a day.”

He had been regaining his customary composure and meekness whilst giving this information, and a large pinch of snuff completed the restoration. He tendered the box to his visitor in the manner of peace-offering, and to indicate that his martyr-like nature had already forgiven the violence by which the audience had been obtained.

Robin thrust the box from him impatiently.

“I’m sorry to hae interrupted ye in your interesting occupation,” he said drily, “but I had no time to put off, and I ken’d that your kindly heart would excuse me, when ye ken’d that you had it in your power to relieve my mind o’ a weight o’ trouble.”

The Laird gave him a quick glance of suspicion, as if to ascertain whether or not he were mocking him.

“I’m sure I would forgie a heap mair nor you have done, Cairnieford, if I thought I could serve you in onyway,” he answered meekly.

“Then, tell me, when did you last see James Falcon?”

Robin fancied,—but the movement was so slight that he could not be certain that it was anything more than fancy—that McWhapple started and shivered whilst his eyes glanced toward the door of the inner chamber—his bedroom. It was so quickly over, however, and his reply was so much in his usual tone and manner that the matter made no impression on Robin.

“Od, it’s extraordinar’!”—(another pinch of snuff and strong nasal accompaniment)—“I think a’ body’s gane wud about Jeamie Falcon, and a’ body thinks I keep him tied to my coat-tail, for it’s ay here they come speirin’ for him; and if he’d been Lord John o’ the Highlands he couldna hae mair anxious inquiries about him.”

“When did you see him last, I was speirin’?”

“Oom, let me see” — (meditatively)—“hoot, aye, I mind; it was on Monday; he sent ower in the forenoon to ask me to lend him a horse as he was going to Ayr to see when there would be a vessel sailing south, and as I had a bit business in the town concerning the purchase of a new brig, I just took the gig and drove ower wi’ him.”

“Ye haena seen him since?”

“Na”—(shaking his head).

“Then it was you who sent the gig to Cairnieford yesterday?”—(quickly and inclining towards his interlocutor).

“Me? What for?”

“To take my guidwife to Askaig.”

A pause, during which the Laird's eyes blinked with apparent astonishment; then making a dab with his head—

“In the name o' guidness what would I do taking your wife to Askaig, where she would be sure to meet the very man she would maist avoid?”

“Ye needna try to hide it frae me,” said Robin desperately, assuming confidence which he could not altogether feel; “I ken a', and it was you that sent for her, you that sent the leeing message, and a' that ye nicht hae your spite out against me.”

“Whatna message?”

“Ye ken weel; the message that me and Falcon had been quarrellin' and that I'd got mysel' hurt.”

“Who told you that?”

“Hersel', for wi' a' your wiles, and his too maybe, she came hame again.”

“And ye believe it was me that got her carried to Askaig—me that was the first to warn ye that Jeamie had come hame, that

he'd seen your guidwife, and counselled ye to look after her?"

That was a stab sharp and deep.

"Aye, you whase leeing tongue was the first to pooshin' my mind against her, the first to make me doubt her and ready to believe that she was guilty—she wha is as pure as ye are foul. You did it a'—you hae driven me out o' my judgment and caused me to gar her rue the day that we were married. But I swear to ye that if ye dinna confess the whole truth afore I leave this room ye'll sup sorrow wi' a big spoon afore I'm done wi' ye."

His passion had got the better of him again, and instead of meeting cunning with cunning as he had at first attempted, he had unbarred his purpose and his suffering in that outburst.

The Laird folded his hands on his knees with the silver snuff-box under them, sighed and looked the picture of injured friendship.

"I didna mean to say a word on the matter, Cairnieford," he began submissively,

“but since ye put me to it in self-defence it is necessary that I should speak.”

“Out with it, then.”

“I’ll begin by telling ye that I hae had word o’ a’ that happened at Askaig yestreen frae Rab Keith, and my opinion is James Falcon, wha, I’m glad to say is making his way out o’ the country by this time, is a young villain that I would hae basted wi’ my staff had I came across him kenning what I ken noo. As for your guidwife——”

“Weel, what about her?”

“I’ll no say what about her.”

“Say an ill word o’ her and I’ll thrapple ye, by heaven.”

And he sprung up grasping the little man’s throat so tightly that it seemed probable he would choke him whether the words were spoken or not.

“There, man, there,” gasped the Laird, trying to unfasten the giant’s grip; “od, I said I wouldna say onything about her, and ye lay hands on me as though I’d been misca’ing her up hill and down.”

“Gang on,” growled Robin, resuming his seat, and none the better pleased with himself that he had shown such poor control over his temper.

The Laird took a few minutes to recover his breath, and his snuff-box, and to arrange his cravat, which had been displaced. Then—

“I wouldna take this treatment at onybody’s hands, in my ain house especially, if it werena that I ken in what distress o’ mind ye are and pity you.”

Another sting which made the man wince: the sneering pity of this contemptible creature was harder to bear than the scorn of an honest man.

“Gang on, will ye? Curse ye.”

“That’s no civil, to say the least o’t; and onybody but me would just show ye to the door. But I canna feel it in my heart to be stiff wi’ ye in your present state. Weel then, Jeamie Falcon got the loan o’ the gig yesterday, for what purpose I didna ken, or he’d never hae had it. My opinion noo is that

whether your guidwife was a party to the arrangement or no—and I'll no say a word ae way or other on that score—he was meaning to take her awa' wi' him and sail for the south in the vessel that he ken'd was to start the-day. No doubt the storm delayed them at Askaig, and ye came upon them and frightened ane or baith o' them sae that they didna carry it out."

"What man was't that drove the gig?"

"It was my man Morris took the gig up by to Askaig and left it there. I'll send for him, and ye can question himsel'."

He went to the door and called Lizzie several times. The girl at length answered him, and he bade her send Morris to him.

The man entered the room a few minutes afterwards. He was a tall gawky-looking fellow, whom Robin, to his knowledge, had never seen before. He had a dull sleepy face and heavy eyebrows. In answer to Robin's questions, he stated that he had taken the gig as far as the ford at Askaig, and there he had been met by Falcon and

another man whom he did not know. He had relinquished the gig to Falcon and walked home. That was all he knew.

“What was the man like who was with Falcon?” queried the Laird.

“A chiel’ about my ain height, wi’ a jacket that had a blue striped breast.”

“Would ye ken him again?”

“Brawly.”

“That’ll do, Morris; thank ye.”

The man quitted the room with a degree more of alacrity in his gait than he had displayed on entering, as if he were glad to get away.

Robin sat with his face covered, and the Laird took a self-congratulatory pinch. He was the first to speak.

“Now, ye ken a’ that I can tell ye, Cairnieford, and ye’ll do me the justice to own that I hae gien ye a’ the information in my power, and that I gied ye fair warning, on the very day that I first saw Falcon back again, that there would be fashious work afore ye?”

“Aye, ye did that, I own (hoarsely); and

I blamed ye for't. I wish I had heeded mair your warning—though it wouldna hae mattered muckle either; for I wouldna haud her by me if she wanted to leave me. When did the gig come hame?"

"Od, I forgot to ask that, but I rather fancy it hasna come hame yet. Will I cry him back?"

"No, ye needna heed: I ken a' that I want to ken."

"But ye haena heard yet wha was the man brought the gig to Cairnieford."

"I suppose that it maun hae been the chiel' that your man saw wi' him at the ford."

"No doubt; and I think I can help ye wi' a suspicion o' wha that chiel' was."

"Can ye?" (abstractedly, for he was thinking of another matter).

"Aye; I suspect frae mention of the striped breast of his jacket that he was the ostler at the Drybrig Inn on the road to Ayr; for I mind that Falcon was speaking wi' him mair nor a quarter o' an hour on the road home on Monday."

"I'll see him the-morn if he's still at the place. And noo, I hae just ae thing to say: I'll be gaun awa' frae hame the morn, and dinna ken when I may be coming back. Mac'kie will take charge o' Cairnieford for the present; but ye would take ower the lease if I wanted to gie it up a'thegither?"

"I would do anything to oblige ye," answered the Laird, with difficulty concealing a smirk of satisfaction behind a pinch of snuff; "though I would be loath to lose a guid tenant that's ay had the rent ready to a minute on term-day."

"Thank ye. Guid nicht."

"Take a dram before ye gae, ye're needing it—no. Aweel, shake hands onyway, for I hae ay wished to be a friend to ye, Cairnieford."

"There's my hand for ance, Laird, as it's like to be the last time we'll ever meet in this world, and I hope there's little chance o' us meeting in the next."

"Prejudiced to the last against me," sighed the Laird. "Weel, weel, it canna be helped

noo. I wish ye guid fortune wherever ye gang."

"Ye hae a heap o' charity, Laird—on your tongue."

"Kenning my ain faults (humbly), I ay try to be merciful in my judgment o' others."

"That accounts for the quantity o' your mercy."

"Ye're a stubborn body, Cairnieford; there's nae garring ye see straight ance your e'en hae got aglee. But that be as't may, ye'll let me ken if the ostler be the man?"

"Aye, if ye'll let Morris gang as far as the Drybrig wi' me the morn."

"Surely, surely."

"I'll find the man ye may be certain ae time or other; and I hope you may prove as blameless in the matter as ye seem to be enoo."

"Man, what guid would it dae me to breed dispeace atween you and your wife?"

"I canna say."

"Nor naebody else. On my soul, sir, it's

no easy for the humblest creature to thole sae mony hard words as ye hae gien me."

And his virtuous indignation brought his head forward with a reproachful dab, his eyes blinking the while.

"If I hae wranged ye, McWhapple, I'm sorry for't," was Robin's response as he went away.

At a slow pace he proceeded toward Boghaugh. He was in the most painful of mental conditions—uncertain what to do. Much that he had learned seemed to confirm Jeanie's statement, and yet there was no direct proof that she had been deceived by Falcon's messenger. His heart pleaded for her, urged him to hasten to her and implore her to forgive all that he had said and done. And his passion, exhausted by its own violence and his physical fatigue, seemed too weak to contend against the promptings of his love.

But at the moment when he seemed ready to yield, the sharp sting of jealousy quickened him to the remembrance of McWhap-

ple's inuendoes, which he had angrily rebutted at the time, but which rankled in his mind for all that, and restrained him from the course his heart and reason seemed to point out.

He was in the miserable condition of one who does not know his own mind, and is consequently dissatisfied with himself and everything about him. At one minute he heard Jeanie's wild exclamation that she wished she had gone away with Falcon, and he was ready to dance with rage. The next minute her last words were soothing and comforting him, whilst they frightened him with the thought of the terrible wrong he had done her, should it subsequently appear that his frenzy had blinded him to the truth.

It is not easy to realize the torture of his mind, the cause looks so simple. But remember the jealous devotion with which he regarded her, his keen sense of the inequality of their years, his knowledge of her former love for Falcon, and his passionate nature worked upon by a series of unhappy circum-

stances and the wily insinuations of the Laird. Then take into account that through it all an upright conscience was groping helplessly about in a mist of passion, craving for the truth that justice might be done, and some idea of the man's anguish will be obtained, whilst his weakness will be pardoned.

CHAPTER X.

TWO BLACK CROWS.

“There were twa corbies sat upon a tree,
Sing hey, sing ho, and derry;
They had picked a dead man's banes clean on the lea,
And they were as merry as merry could be.
Sing hey, sing ho, and derry.”—*Old Song.*

The Laird stood tapping his snuff-box uneasily, and blinking at the door for some time after it had closed on Robin Gray. His under lip protruded over the upper one, as if he were sucking it, and his eyebrows were contracted so that his visage was covered with wrinkles. He was in a quandary, and one of an excessively unpleasant character, the upshot of which was anything but clear. He took several pinches, but they did not make the matter any clearer or smooth away a single wrinkle.

Abstractedly, whilst the right hand was

arrested half-way to his nose, he rubbed the snuff-box, which was in his left, over his head slowly; but that did not help him either, and whilst losing all patience with the subject of his cogitations, he forgot his grave character as an elder, and uttered impatiently—

“Damn it, and burn it.”

“Oich, no, she would shust as soon trink it—Pe-tam.”

The Laird wheeled about, startled, and beheld Ivan Carrach at the table emptying the glass which had been momentarily arrested by his angry ejaculation, the skipper fancying it applied to the liquor he had been quietly taking.

“At it again—I wish it would burn you; for if it hadna been for your confounded whiskyfied brains, I would never hae been in sic a mess that I’kenna how to get out o’t.”

“Oich, then, where’s the goot o’ pothering? if you’ll no be able to get out, bide in.”

The Laird was in a passion, and his little body quivered with rage. He shook his fist

at the obtuse skipper, whose bovine eyes rolled over him with the utmost placidity.

“I hae mair than half a mind to step out o’t and leave you to bide in’t, ye thick-headed brute.”

Carrach was no more disturbed than if a fly had buzzed against his coat.

“No, you’ll no be doing that. Ochone, she could never do without you, whether it was here shust trinking ta tram, or whether it was in ta jail or on ta gallows. Ochone no, it would never do.”

“Will ye hald your tongue, ye senseless blethering fool? Ye’ll stand in a’ thae places without me if ye dinna heed what I say to ye. What business had ye coming out o’ that room before I called ye?”

“She’ll hear the door was closed, and she’ll look out and see there was nopody here, and she’ll be dry.”

“I might hae guessed that—I believe ye would drink the sea dry, if it had been whisky.”

“Cot, but that would be ta fine drunk!”

And his eyes rolled with ecstasy at the bare notion.

By this time the Laird had hirpled back to his chair, and he sank upon it with the manner of one utterly exhausted, his hands hanging listlessly over the arms of the chair, his body bent, and his eyes fixed blinkingly on the skipper, who, in his stolid way, quite undisturbed by the anger or distress of his master, had already sat down beside the bottle, to which he applied himself at brief intervals.

The Laird's outburst of hysterical rage was over, but it had left much petulance behind, which he was at no pains to disguise. As he regarded the man opposite him, he seemed to be envying his dull stolidity, which rendered him so perfectly callous to everything around him.

"I believe if a bombshell was to drap at your foot, Carrach," he ejaculated, "ye wouldna fash yoursel' to step out o' its road."

"She wouldna say," was the indifferent rejoinder.

“Then do ye ken that a bombshell has lighted at your foot?” exclaimed the Laird petulantly.

Carrach rolled his eyes over the floor, and then over his master.

“She’ll no see her.”

“Maybe ye’ll feel her, as ye call it, before long,—mair likely aye than no. Do ye ken what your infernal blundering has earned for you?”

“No, but I’ll like to hear when I’ll earn onything at all.”

“Then it’s naething less than a hempen cravat, as sure as I’m sitting here this night.”

“I’ll no like her; she’ll fit too tight.”

His stolidity was impenetrable.

A silence fell upon them, during which the Laird reflected, and Carrach continued to drink without the least perceptible effect being produced on him, unless it might be a degree of denser dulness, if that were possible. The bottle being emptied, he shoved it towards his host with a sort of grunt, intended as a hint that he would like it re-

plenished. But McWhapple either did not observe, or affected not to observe, the movement. Another grunt, a little louder and more expressive than the first, and that obtaining no better acknowledgment than the first hint, he declared his wants more plainly.

“Fill her again—she’s run dry, and a dry bottle she’ll make a dry man, and a dry man—oich, she’ll make a sour teil.”

The Laird twisted himself in his chair and cast a quick look at his companion expressive of disgust. He seemed rather disposed to throw the bottle at the skipper’s head than to comply with his request. He overcame that desire, however, if he had entertained it, rose with a sigh, and refilled the bottle from a jar, which he produced from the cupboard at his side of the fireplace.

Laying the bottle on the table, he kept his hand firmly on it until he had told Carrach to see if the keyhole was covered, and the latter had rolled over to the door, found the key so turned that it blocked up the only cranny by which a spy could obtain a glimpse

of the interior of the apartment, and rolled back to his seat and the bottle.

It should be noted, that despite the Laird's rage he had carefully maintained an undertone in his speech, and the effort had added much to the hysterical character of his manner at intervals. The skipper, too, although apparently too dull to display caution of any sort, had mechanically followed the example of his entertainer, and had spoke in a much lower tone than usual.

The Laird's meditation had two results; first, it cooled him, and made him more like his ordinary quiet wily self, although there was an underlying trepidation in all he said and did, suggestive that he was seriously troubled—markedly shown in the nervous awkwardness with which he snuffed the candle, extinguishing it. He uttered an ejaculation of chagrin, but made no attempt to relight it. The fire was burning warmly, and reflected a red light on the two men: enough the Laird thought to serve for the present. Second, his meditation satisfied him

that his wrath rendered it the more difficult to reach the understanding of his companion, and to make him comprehend the dangers which threatened him or them both.

“Now, Carrach,” he said, taking a pinch to settle his nerves, “I’m gaun to be plain with you.”

“Oich, that’ll be a braw sight; she’ll never know you plain before,” interrupted Carrach gutturally.

“Onyway ye’ll find me plainer than pleasant for ance in a way. In the first place, then, let me just mind ye o’ what ye were when I took ye in hand. Ye were a ragged friendless loon, earning bite and sup among the fishers o’ Mull by doing odd jobs, and starving when ye couldna get ony odd jobs to do. I became your friend; I clad you; I gied ye a berth in ane o’ my boats, and I promoted ye according as I thought your ability and gratitude to me merited, until at last ye became my right-hand man, and the skipper o’ my best brig. Was it no sae?

“Oich, aye, it was so. I’ll be your right-

hand man, because there was no one else that would do; and you'll help me because you'll no want me to spoke, and because I'll help you more. You'll begin to help me no because I was poor and needing, but because I'll come to you and sware I will smash your head and tell the bailies that you was a tam rogue and cheat a poor woman. Oich aye, it was so. I'll mind all very coot—Pe-tam."

After this unusually long speech, which was pronounced without the least perturbation, Carrach drained two glasses in rapid succession.

The Laird was decidedly nervous this night, or else his countenance would never have been so contorted as it was whilst he listened. His dismay was not lightened by his surprise that the torpid creature before him should have been able to upbraid him with such disagreeable accuracy. He was, however, quite mild in his response—

"Aweel, the ingratitude o' the human heart is something awfu' to behold!"—(sighing and blinking). "Here is a man that I

hae raised to be the skipper o' my ships frae being a beggar, and he turns on me in my auld age, accusing me o' self-seeking, and helping him for nae other than my ain gain. I thought to imbue ye, sir, wi' a suitable humility by reminding ye o' the past, and I find that ye are mair hardened against a' Christian sentiment nor I ever could hae suspected."

"I'll thocht you'll said you was going to be plain with me?"

"And sae I will; but there's nae use raking up auld scores, for I see they canna affect you in a proper way."

"Aye, but they will affect me—they'll make me wonder what you'll do without me."

"Man, I wish I had never seen ye; I would hae had an easy mind this night."

"That same thocht will come to hersel' some whiles a few. But whan was you to begin to be plain?"

The Laird had another attack of petulance, for he begun to feel that the skipper, with all his stupidity, understood him more clearly

than he could have imagined his muddled head capable of doing.

“I wish to Heaven you were at the bottom of the frith,” he ejaculated sharply.

“I’ll be quite sure o’ that. Coot, it’s beginning to be plain spoke.”

“Just haud your jaw and hear what I hae gotten to say. Ye ken that I’m no a man to take any violent measures that brings ane within the grasp o’ the law, when a’ my experience and practice tells me that there’s nae object in this world ane can wish to reach that canna be reached wi’ a bit simple scheming and fair opportunity, which opportunity can ay be found handy by onybody wi’ his wits about him. It’s wonderful how the bowls row into ane’s hand when it’s open and ready to catch them. Sooner or later the right bowl comes to the hand that’s ready for’t, whether it be to help a friend or knock down a foe; and ye hae only to play skilfully to make your ain mark without the possibility o’ ony unpleasant rebut, let the aim be discovered or no. That’s been my experience,

and ye ken that I hae walked accordingly, except on the rare occasions when I hae been fule enuch to let you hae a word in my plans.”

“Aye, you’ll make a braw scheme, but when you’ll leave me to carry her out, I shust hae to do as things will do wi’ me.”

“And a fine ado ye hae made for me this last twalmonth. Ye begin by bungling wi’ the *Colin*, letting twa folk ken, as weel’s if ye’d told them the whole plan, how the thing was brought about.”

“How will I know there was two? There was only one that I’ll thocht had a suspicion, and I shipped him out o’ the way to China—what more would you’ll hae?”

“Aye, and when the second turns up, and when my scheme was working brawly—better nor I could hae expected—ye canna leave things alane to work out their ain strife, but ye maun interfere and bring a storm about our heads that will only blow by when you’re at China or the deevil, I dinna care which, sae that ye never come back here.”

“She would shust as soon hae China o’ the twa, for the teil, oich, he’ll drive most as hard a bargain as you do.”

“Then ye’d better get awa’ wi’ ye afore you’re mony hours older, or the deevil will hae ye sooner than ye care for.”

“I’ll start this moment directly if you’ll shust let me hae the schooner and five hunder to start me, and you’ll never see me no more. I’ll never fear all the bailies and all the offishers that was in the world if I was on poard that schooner.”

The Laird hastily relit the candle and turned over the leaves of a ledger which lay at his elbow. He found the page he wanted, gave his spectacles a nervous rub with his handkerchief, placed them on his nose and examined the account before him.

“I canna gie five nor twa hunner either.”

“Then she’ll shust hae to bide here and be your fery coot friend.”

And with the utmost indifferent obduracy he drank another glassful, as if to the continuance of their good fellowship.

The Laird closed the book and closed his lips with a determined snap, as if the end of his endurance had been attained, and he had made up his mind to proceed not one step farther. He wheeled about his chair to the fire, and took several pinches of his consolation, as he sometimes designated his snuff. Consolation it appeared to afford him now: for when at length he spoke it was in quite a friendly way.

“I see we’re no like to come to any arrangement, Carrach, and it’s a pity after a’ the fash I hae had gaeing ower the accounts the day. Sae ye’ll e’en take your ain way. Be the consequence what it may, it’ll be waur for you nor for me. But mind, it’s no my fault that there’s nae arrangement come to atween us afore it’s ower late. Is the bottle toom again?—I’ll no stint ye the nicht, Ivan, for it’s my opinion ye’ll no drink mony mair bottles here or any other where, unless Auld Nick deals in his ain liquor.”

He refilled the bottle a second time. Then he made himself comfortable before the fire,

leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, and occasionally spreading out his hands to warm the palms. His composure was as perfect as the stolidity of his companion, whom his blinking eyes watched cunningly askance.

When the bottle, filled to the neck, was placed before him, Carrach, perhaps for the first time in his life, hesitated to drink. His protruding eyes rolled alternately over the bottle and the Laird, as if his wits were groping after some vague idea that the fulness of the former was associated with the purposes of the latter. His sunflower-like head began to roll like the eyes; and presently his habitual thirst, which rendered him incapable of resisting whisky or brandy wherever he saw it, overcame his suspicions and his caution. He drank.

Silent and watchful sat the Laird warming his hands. Silent and stubborn Carrach continued to sip glass after glass, until the bottle was more than half empty, and the candle consumed to within an inch of the socket. Then the sunflower began to roll steadily

from side to side, and at length he grunted, a little more gutturally than usual, but that was all—

“What’ll you do then?”

“Me?—nothing.”

“What’ll you give if I’ll go?”

“Oh, there’s nae use saying a word about what I might do, seeing that you’re determined to bide where ye are, unless I do what I canna do.”

“Say your spoke and then we’ll know.”

The Laird faced him suddenly.

“Weel, I will tell ye what I’ll do: I’ll gie ye the schooner since ye hae taen sic a notion o’ her, and though she cost a heap o’ siller, as ye ken; and I’ll gie ye a hunner pounds forbye, if ye’ll gang awa’, and sign that bit paper there as a receipt.”

“The hunner in gold?”

“If ye like.”

“What’s in the paper?”

“Just an acknowledgment o’ twa or three things that would gie me the power to hand

ye ower to the sheriff's officer if ye should ever set foot on this land again."

"Let me see her."

The paper, a sheet of foolscap pretty closely written on both sides, was handed to him. He stared at it vacantly upside down, and in every conceivable position; but he was none the wiser, for his educational acquirements were not extensive enough even to read writing.

"There's a lot o' her," he muttered.

"It's just the form o' thae things."

"When'll she get the siller?"

"The day after the morn."

"Very coot; you'll give me the papers to clear the schooner at the port o' Ayr. I'll bring her up, and lie off the links the night after to-morrow's night. Then you'll bring the siller, and I'll make my cross on the paper like a man. She will, and may she be droont in whisky if you'll ever get the chance o' using her against Ivan Carrach. No—Petam."

CHAPTER XI.

SCANDAL.

“Preserve us a’! what shall we do,
Thir dark unhallowed times?
We’re surely dreeing penance now,
For some most awfu’ crimes.”—*J. Robertson.*

On quitting Girzie Todd’s cot, Jeanie and her father had driven slowly away in the cart which had brought them from Cairnieford. At the corner of the road they waited for Boghaugh, and as soon as he joined them started again.

Adam was irritably indignant, uttering repeatedly fretful ejaculations against Robin. Jeanie, on the other hand, was calmer than she had been for a week past. The consciousness that she had done all she could do, all she ought to do, to place her conduct in the proper light before her husband, and to dispel his doubts, supplied her with a for-

itude which enabled her to look with steady eyes toward the future, now that she knew the worst of the present.

A strong feeling of pride, too, entered into the composition of this fortitude. She had been blamed and scorned without cause; unmerited reproaches had been heaped upon her until she had been distracted, and the natural reaction had followed. She would prove by the conduct of her life that she had been blameless; but she would never again stoop to defend herself against a charge so false. However much she might smart under the disgrace of the equivocal position in which she was placed, and the knowledge that the tongue of scandal was busy with her name, she was prepared now to submit to all without murmur. The consciousness of her innocence was like a coat of armour, against which all the slings and arrows of malice would strike harmlessly.

Of her husband she could already think more in sorrow than in anger. She pitied what appeared to her nothing short of wilful

blindness in his persistent rejection of the truth, and she would have been glad if she could only have discovered some means of relieving him. But for all that, she was as sincerely determined that their separation should be final as he had been at the moment when in his frenzy he had cast her from him at Askaig.

If sickness or other calamity befell him, she would not refuse to tend him and to give him what assistance she might have in her power to give—this for a sad sweet reason of her own apart from whatever affection she might bear him—but they should never again dwell together as man and wife. With that conviction had come the calm deep sorrow of a strong nature which accepts the inevitable, and, instead of wasting time in vain regrets, quietly gathers its forces to do the best that may be done under the circumstances.

Adam had declared his intention of quitting Cairnieford that night, and Jeanie had purposed carrying the intention into effect.

But she took a more sensible view of what ought to be done now; and in answer to one of his irritable ejaculations, she said quietly—

“No, father, we canna win awa’ frae the house this night.”

“Hoo?—would ye bide a minute langer than was necessary after what he has said to ye? I’ll no hear o’t.”

“No, father, I’ll no bide a minute langer than is necessary; but ye ken that we daurna shift my mither the nicht when we hae nae place ready to take her to. Besides, I’ll hae to put everything in order at the house, and leave it in charge o’ somebody that winna take advantage o’ the absence o’ the master to waste his goods. I’ll no rin awa’ frae the place as though I was guilty o’ a’ he charges me wi’. I’ll do what his wife should do on his account.”

“Do ye mean ye’re gaun to bide there yet?”

“No (shaking her head sadly); I hae told ye only as long as may be necessary to put things in order, and to leave them in safety,

and until we hae gotten some place for mither."

"We'll get our auld house back again."

"That ye canna see about till the morn."

Adam grumbled, but Boghaugh interrupted him.

"Seems to me the guidwife takes a plain common-sense view o' the matter, and it would be still mair in accordance wi' my idea o' what she should do, if she was to jist bide in her ain hame until Robin has time to come to himsel'—for he's no himsel' enow, or he never would hae said what he has done."

"I canna do that."

"Ye sha'na do that—no though I should hae to drag ye out o' the house by the hair o' the head," said Adam sternly. "It shall never be said that while I lived my dochter bode aneath the same roof wi' a man that has cast black shame on us a'."

His irritation was made all the keener by the remembrance of his own share in bringing the marriage about. How proud he had

been of his son-in-law; how proud he had been of his daughter's home! and, now that his pride had been humiliated—dragged in the mire as it were—he felt as if he had been personally injured, and was resentful accordingly. It was not so much a comprehension of his daughter's suffering that moved him, as a bitter feeling that he, a man who had walked uprightly in the eyes of his neighbours all his life, was degraded in his old age.

On arriving at Cairnieford, there was another reason discovered for delaying the departure, stronger than any Jeanie had advanced to him. Her mother, who had been excited in the early part of the day by the vague rumours she had caught of what was passing, had been still more affected by the distorted narrative of the events which she had received from the servants since Jeanie had been absent; and she was now so ill that she required all her daughter's attention throughout the night.

They had to send for the doctor, for in-

deed they began to fear that the shock she had received might prove fatal. He came at a late hour, and his report of her condition was so unfavourable that a new source of alarm was added to Jeanie's already too numerous troubles.

A potion the doctor had administered, by and by soothed the invalid to sleep. Through the weary night Jeanie watched beside the bed, obtaining only a few minutes' sleep at intervals on the chair, from which she would start up in the terror of some wretched dream the disturbed state of her mind induced.

When the morning came at last, the patient, who suffered everything with that meek resignation her long illness had cultivated, was better—that is, she was less feverish—but she was still so enfeebled that she could scarcely raise her hand to her head. The doctor had cautioned Jeanie to be very careful to keep every possible cause of excitement away from her; and on that account she dared not tell her that they were to quit Cairnieford. Even Adam with all his stub-

bornness, when he looked at the ghastly face of his wife, had not courage to harass her with the account of the misery which had befallen their daughter.

He, however, went off shortly after breakfast to see about the cottage and arrange for its speedy occupation. This he expected would be an easy matter, as it had not been let since he had left it. Rest and reflection had not in any degree softened the feelings with which he regarded Robin. His sullen wrath was undiminished, and what he heard in the town tended rather to increase his spleen than to subdue it.

The girl whom Jeanie had sent with the cart for Rob Keith's wife had, after discharging her mission, taken advantage of being in the town to call on her acquaintance, Miss M'Claver, the mantua-maker. To her as an interesting secret the girl had communicated an account of the singular doings at Cairnieford, which were undoubtedly caused by the unlooked-for return of James Falcon. That was enough to enable Miss M'Claver to settle

in her own mind all the ins and outs of the story.

“Deed it’s nae mair nor I or onybody ex-peckit,” she exclaimed with much apparent self-satisfaction in her own foresight; “it couldna be possible that she could hae cared for Falcon or she wouldna hae married an auld man like your maister—though it’s no but he’s a stout chiel’ yet, an’ a worthy man. But if she didna care for the puir lad Falcon then she had been makin’ a fule o’ him: an’ they wha can mak’ a fule o’ ane will be like to mak’ a fule o’ anither.”

“Hech, sirs, but it’s ower true,” exclaimed the sympathetic domestic.

“But if she did care for her auld lad and yet married Cairnieford, wha could look for onything but that whan the auld love turned up she would be awa’ wi’ him, let her honest guidman dae what he liked? Sae that, tak’ it ony gate ye like, she was fuling a dacent man, and it’s just a burnin’ shame still. Eh, puir man, what’ll he dae wi’ a rinawa wife,

and no able to marry ony sensible woman that might console him?"

And Miss M'Claver's virtuous indignation was much heightened by this melancholy view of the case. Whether or not she regretted the loss of the opportunity to prove herself a particularly sensible woman, she took the earliest occasion, which was in about five minutes after her informant had retired, to visit her friend the flesher's wife, and convey to her the intelligence she had just received. Mrs. Gabbock was interested, and horrified, as any faithful spouse might be, at the depravity of the guidwife of Cairnieford. She took Miss M'Claver into the back-shop, and there, assisted by something pleasant to the palates of both ladies, they speculated over the story until they had embellished it with so many of their own surmises as facts that it turned out of the back-shop very similar to one of Mrs. Gabbock's sausages—containing a great deal of spice to very little meat.

It spread amongst the good-wives of the

Port with the marvellous rapidity of all scandal; and, of course, as it spread it gathered fresh colours, so that by morning it had become huge in proportion and as unlike the reality as possible.

By that time it had reached the ears of the minister, and he knowing enough of the truth to be able to contradict on the spot the general opinion that Jeanie was the most wicked of women, but anxious to learn really how matters stood, and to use his influence as peacemaker, hastened to Cairnieford.

It will be remembered that on the morning succeeding the night Falcon had slept at the manse, when Mr. Monduff discovered the absence of his guest, he had gone out to seek him. His search had led him up the glen, and he had seen Jeanie. She had acquainted him with the resolution come to by Falcon and herself, which he had heartily commended, and there he thought and hoped the affair had ended.

His visit now was most welcome to Jeanie on her mother's account, for nobody possessed

more soothing influence over the poor bed-stricken woman than the genial minister. Before proceeding to her, however, he inquired what ground there was for the absurd report he had heard.

Jeanie's face crimsoned and then became pallid; the scandal was already out, and the shafts of scorn were already winging toward her. Her weakness endured only for an instant; then she told him all.

"Hoots, guidwife, here's a fine hurley-burley about nothing at all," he said, affecting to treat the matter lightly. "Robin will come to reason when I see him, for I can bear testimony to part of your explanation, and I'm ready to pledge myself that the rest is as true. Pooh, this is but a bit stubborn anger on his part, and, I'll warrant, if you could only see him this minute he's as vexed with himself about it as you can be."

"Ye needna heed, sir, to say anything to him on my account. I would rather he wa left to see things for himself now; for I couldna accept grace when I hae done nae-

thing wrang. Though I did hide frae him that Jeamie had come hame it was through kindness to him."

The minister saw that there was to be stubborn work on both sides; but he did not despair of bringing affairs to a speedy and happy settlement as soon as he could find the guidman. The whole thing appeared so simple to him that he had some difficulty in comprehending how it had grown to such unpleasant proportions—so hard is it for one who has never known the pangs of jealousy to realize its power, which, like a whirlwind of fire, sweeps away reason and love, leaving the heart charred and blackened in its wrath to taint every thought that reaches it.

Mr. Monduff could not feel this, and would have poohpoohed the idea if anybody had expressed it to him; consequently, he was sanguine of the result of the task which both duty and inclination to serve Mr. and Mrs. Gray thrust upon him.

In spite of Jeanie's grave assurance that the misunderstanding could not be soldered,

he was in good spirits when he entered the invalid's chamber. He remained with Mrs. Lindsay an hour, and would have stayed longer only he was eager to start in pursuit of Robin. He left her, however, more soothed by his cheery conversation than she had been by the doctor's drugs.

He was standing at the front door with Jeanie, and was just about to set out to Boghaugh when they saw the lad who had given Robin the information about the gig, and whose name was Willie Boyd, running up the loaning with breathless speed. As he passed round the corner of the house to enter at the back door, the minister noticed that the boy's face had the scared expression of one who has looked on some horrible sight.

The door of the kitchen was just behind Mr. Monduff and Jeanie, and as it was partially open they presently heard the boy exclaim, pantingly—

“Tam Mackie sent me for ane o' the haps that he brocht up to dry.”

“They're hanging ower the chair there, but

they're no dry yet," answered the lass whom the boy had addressed. "What does he want it for—od's sake, and what's the matter wi' the laddie?"

"Eh, it was awfu'."

"What was awfu'?"

"What I saw."

"What was't—can ye no speak?"

"I wasna to say onything about it. I maun rin awa' back wi' the hap."

The announcement that he was to say nothing about what he had seen, as might be expected, quickened the woman's curiosity.

"Ye'll no get the hap unless ye tell me what it was ye saw."

The lad apparently hesitated, for there was a pause. Then he said, lowering his voice—

"They hae found a man drooned in the burn and a' smashed to bits, and they say it's Jeamie Falcon. Noo gie me the hap and let me awa'."

Jeanie and Mr. Monduff heard every word. She with a smothered cry of fright, and startled eyes, clasped her hands tightly on

her breast, as if to subdue its convulsive agitation, and staggered back.

The minister saved her from falling, but for the moment he was too much horrified himself to find speech.

“See if it’s true—see if it’s him,” she gasped, and starting away from him she ran into her bedroom, closed and locked the door that none might look upon her agony, the source of which was not sorrow for the dead but terror for the fate of the living.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT WAS FOUND IN THE BURN.

“She sought him up, she sought him down,
She sought the braid and narrow;
Syne, in the cleaving o’ a craig,
She found him dooned in Yarrow.”—*Old Ballad.*

The minister was alike confounded by what he had heard and by Jeanie’s singular conduct. He was recalled to himself by seeing Willie Boyd running away with a coarse horse-rug rolled in a bundle on his shoulder.

He shouted to him. The boy looked back, and immediately halted when he saw who had called him. In answer to Mr. Monduff’s inquiries, he repeated his statement, with a few details which increased the minister’s horror. He told the lad to run on with the rug and he would follow. Even without Jeanie’s request that he would see whether or not the boy’s information was correct, he

would have been anxious to satisfy himself as to the identity of the drowned man.

“It’s sad to think,” he exclaimed, “that the poor fellow, after passing safely through all the perils of fire and tempest and sea, should have come hame to perish in this miserable fashion.”

And, at his best speed, he continued his way to the spot which the boy—who was already almost out of sight—had described to him.

Young Dunbar had said nothing to his folks at home of his suspicion that there was a man lying drowned in the burn at the cleft rock, chiefly because his companions had laughed at the idea, and partly because Robin Gray was in the house that night.

He had purposed starting early in the morning to satisfy himself on the subject, but had found no opportunity of getting away until the dinner-hour at noon. Then he had walked over to Cairnieford, and in spite of their incredulity, the grieve, Mackie, and the two men who had been with them on the

previous night, accompanied him to the place. Willie, with boyish curiosity to know what they were going to do, had followed them.

On arriving at the place they found the rope secured by the stone as they had left it. Dunbar was the first to advance to the ledge. He dropped on his knees and leaned over. The water in the burn had subsided almost within the limits of its ordinary winter channel. The red sun was shining overhead, but the cleft rock was dark, slimy, and dismal.

The men were still bantering him as to the probability of his finding a blind sow or an old ewe, or maybe a bundle of straw. But the banter was hushed, and their broad grins changed to stupified stares, when Dunbar raised his head and looked round with a white scared face.

“It’s a man,” he said in a low voice. “I see his hand sticking out frae aneath the rock.”

None of them moved; and Dunbar re-

mained on his knees wiping the cold perspiration from his brow with his cuffs; feeling an almost unconquerable repugnance to look down again to where the Thing lay.

"We'd better try to get him out," said Mackie, the first to recover the use of his tongue, but speaking in a whisper, as they all did afterward, as if they were afraid to wake the dead.

Dunbar glanced shudderingly over his shoulder.

"Aye, but how?"

"Ane o' us will hae to gae down and tether the rope round him."

But who was to go? None of them seemed to have courage enough to venture down into the black hole to drag up a dead man; and so each looked at the other expecting him to volunteer. Then Mackie and the two men behind him turned their eyes on Dunbar, as if agreed amongst themselves that as he had brought about the discovery he was the proper person to complete the work.

Apparently comprehending them, although

no word had been spoken, Dunbar rose silently, threw off his coat and placed the end of the rope in the hands of his comrades.

“Keep a ticht haud,” he said.

He slipped over the side of the rock and slid down to the bed of the burn. His gorge rose with disgust at the work he had to perform; but he set his teeth firmly, and averting his eyes, doggedly persevered.

He griped the wrist of the corpse—a cold shiver passed over him as he did so—and drew it out from its hiding-place under the rock. Still keeping his face averted, he passed the rope round the body under the arms and knotted it.

“Haud firm,” he cried to those above, and he climbed to the surface by the rope, hand over hand.

As soon as he had gained his feet, a jerk of his head signalled to the men to hoist up the load. Turning their heads away and in breathless silence they began to pull slowly. It seemed strangely heavy, or their repugnance to the work took the strength out of

their arms. They felt the Thing swinging from side to side of the cleft as it rose; they felt it rubbing in a slow heavy fashion against the rock, and nothing but the superstitious awe which was upon them prevented them relinquishing the rope and leaving the task to other hands.

The movement of the tackle was suddenly checked; the body had reached the edge of the rock, and was jammed against it. Dunbar seized the rope short and lifted the burden on to the sward.

As it lay there, an influence—a species of fascination—which overcame his repugnance, impelled him to look at it, and the instant he had done so he sprang back with an ejaculation of horror, covering his eyes with his hands.

“Heavens aboon!” he cried, “it’s Jeamie Falcon, and oh sic a sicht!”

Mackie and the others looked then and shuddered. The body in its course down the stream had been dashed against the rocks until it had stuck fast in the fissure where

they had found it, and had been lacerated even more than the horse Brown Jock had been. The face and head were so battered that there was not a feature recognizable, and there was scarcely a particle of hair or scalp left.

Dunbar walked hurriedly down the brae a short distance, and seated himself on the grass with his back toward the spot where the corpse lay, although the rise of the hill would have concealed it from him where he sat even if he had looked round.

The others followed and stood near him, as if expecting him to say what should be done. He looked up to Mackie.

“Ye had better send ane of the lads for Geordie Armstrong,” he said; “he’ll ken what to do, for I dinna. Anither had better gang ower to Clashgirn and tell the Laird.”

Mackie sent the men off at once, and sat down beside Dunbar. They remained there for nearly an hour without speaking a word. At last Mackie rose.

“It’s gey cauld; we’d better move about or

we'll get frozen," he said, slapping his hands against his shoulders to warm them.

He caught sight of Willie Boyd; called him and questioned him as to how long he had been there. The boy confessed that he had been lurking about all the time and had heard and seen everything. The grieve told him to go for the rug, cautioning him to say nothing of what he had seen to anybody. The lad departed, and acquitted himself of his errand in the manner already described.

"It's a bad job," muttered Mackie, rejoicing Dunbar, who had now risen and was walking about smartly to stir the circulation of his blood.

"Aye, it's a bad job."

And the men as they walked up and down regarded each other shyly; for both had said it was a bad job, with a remote sense that the epithet in some way suggested consequences which did not appear on the surface. At any rate, they did not mean that it was a bad job merely because the man had met

such a fate, although that was bad and sad enough.

“It would hae been better for him, puir chiel’,” said Dunbar, “if he’d never come hame. I wish, noo, I hadna been sae ready to take the huff at him on Saturday.”

“Aye, ane doesna like to think o’ a hard word spoken to them that’s ta’en awa’, especially when they’re ta’en awa’ yon way.”

The man who had been despatched to Clashgirn came back. The Laird was in a “bad way at the news,” and was coming directly. Next the man who had gone to the Port for the peace-officer, Geordie Armstrong, returned with the information that they were all to await his arrival, but not to touch the body. Geordie had posted off for the fiscal, and might be expected in the course of an hour.

When Willie Boyd brought the horse-rug Mackie took it, went up to where the body lay, and covered it. That was better, they all thought; for somehow, so long as it had remained exposed, the whole landscape

seemed to be affected by the spectacle; and they could not look anywhere without fancying they saw the ghastly form lying before them. Superstition and the awe of death quickened their imaginations, which were dull enough on ordinary occasions: and sometimes the grotesque fancy struck them that the corpse was sitting up looking about and wondering what had happened.

The boy, fearing that he might get a thrashing for having disobeyed the grieve, had said nothing about the minister; but when Mr. Monduff appeared they were all heartily glad to see him, for so long as they had daylight, and the minister with them, they had no fear of any supernatural phenomenon.

Mr. Monduff had scarcely spoken half a dozen words when the Laird arrived on his Shetland pony. He was not a popular man; indeed, he was pretty generally disliked by the poorer folk of the country side, and any misfortune which befell him was rather the subject of laughter and uncharitable satisfac-

tion than commiseration. But in the present instance, apart from the sad character of the event, those who looked at him could not help experiencing a shade of pity.

His face was haggard, his eyes sunken, and his lips and hands shaking with nervous excitement. He dismounted, but he seemed too weak to keep his footing, and he leaned heavily on the pony's neck.

"Take my arm, Laird," said the minister kindly; "it's a sore sight you have to look on, but we must bow to His will."

"Thank ye, Mr. Monduff, thank ye, I can walk my lane" — (shivering and leaning heavily on his staff, whilst he gave the reins of the pony to Willie) — "it was just the shock o' the news that upset me; but ye ken that I hae never murmured at the will o' Providence. I hae ay humbly bowed before it, and I do that now."

With this, spoken in his meekest tone, he attempted to walk up the hill; but it was evident that the shock had been greater than he wished them to believe. Although he

strained every nerve to walk steadily, he staggered occasionally, in a manner which his lameness was not sufficient to account for.

He reached the place, however, without being compelled to seek the assistance he had declined. He shaded his eyes with a trembling hand for a second, as Mackie proceeded to uncover the body.

The minister looked gravely and sadly on the mangled remains of one whom he had liked so well, and who had promised to be so worthy of all his interest. But the Laird uttered a sharp cry of affright.

“Hide it, hide it awa’ frae my e’en,” he cried, shrinking back.

At a motion of the minister’s head, Mackie obeyed; but the Laird stood shivering, leaning all his weight on his staff, and evidently trying hard not to look at the covered heap on the ground, whilst some power stronger than his own will drew his eyes toward it again and again.

They were all sorry for him, except Dunbar, and he was surprised.

“I never expeckit him to take on that gate,” he whispered to Mackie; “he never did onything particular to my kenning to show that he was sae dreadfu’ fond o’ him when he was livin’.”

“Aye, but ane feels it mair when a friend’s dead.”

“He didna seem to me to feel it ony mair when the news cam’ that Jeamie was lost in the *Colin*, although he sneevilled a heap about it tae.”

By this time the Laird had partially recovered, and he seized the minister’s arm, dragged him down the brae at a slow pace, every step appearing to cause himself pain.

“It’s a dreadfu’ sicht, Mr. Monduff; ye canna blame me that I’m a wee thing mair upset nor a Christian man should be about ony mere worldly loss,” he said nervously; “but I liked the lad weel and—man, yon’s awfu’.”

Another shivering fit passed over him; and although he gave humble attention to the

commonplaces of consolation which were all the minister could offer him, and meekly professed his submission, it was clear that the fright he was labouring under was not much if at all alleviated.

He was eager to learn what had been done and what the discoverers of the body proposed to do. He suggested that they should carry the body to Clashgirn, and he would have it decently interred at his own expense. But when he was told that the fiscal had been sent for, and that the body was not to be removed or touched until his arrival, he regarded Mackie, who was his informer, uneasily: first declared that he would leave them to acquaint the fiscal with his proposition, then altered his mind and said he would wait himself.

He had not long to wait, for Geordie Armstrong had been fortunate enough to find the fiscal at a village not far from Portlappoch, and he had immediately driven with him to the place where his services were more particularly required. One of the men saw the

gig coming up the road, and ran across the fields to meet it.

The gig stopped, and the man took the reins. The fiscal—Mr. Matthew Smart, a tall muscular man of about forty years, with a ruddy commonplace visage and a cheery smile—jumped to the ground. He had quick intelligent eyes and agile movement of limbs, but there was nothing in his dress or manner by which a stranger could have distinguished him from a well-to-do farmer. He was a farmer in a small way, and devoted all the leisure time he could command to agriculture.

He was followed by the old pensioner, Geordie Armstrong, with all the stiff dignity of a man who feels that he has done his duty well, and is capable of doing as much more as well.

The fiscal crossed the fields at a quick pace, nodded to the Laird and the minister, and asked where was the body. Dunbar and Mackie showed him, and without asking another question he proceeded deliberately to examine it from the head to the feet.

The men stood at a short distance watching him. Armstrong stood beside him ready to render any assistance his superior might require. But he required none; and for half an hour he continued his labour without speaking a word.

When he had finished he rubbed his hands on the damp grass and wiped them with his handkerchief. He stepped toward the Laird and Mr. Monduff.

“This is no case of accident,” he said quietly; “it’s murder.”

CHAPTER XIII.

CAIN'S MARK.

“ His days shall troubled be and few,
And he shall fall by treason too,
He, by a justice all divine,
Shall fall a victim to my shrine,
As I was his, he shall be mine.”—*J. Lowe.*

The announcement which the fiscal made so calmly amazed and bewildered the hearers, so that it was several minutes before any of them regained breath enough to speak.

“It’s no possible,” groaned the Laird, much shaken by the new phase which the calamity had assumed.

“No, it is not possible,” exclaimed Mr. Monduff, “that anybody could have lifted a hand against him, for he was liked by everybody who knew him.”

“Probably, probably,” answered the fiscal, unmoved in his conviction, and taking out a

pencil and note-book, he wrote down the result of his observations. That done he asked who had found the body, and Dunbar answered him.

“And you identified it at once?”

“Aye, I ken’d Jeamie Falcon before he gaed to sea, and I saw him on Saturday last wi’ thae claes on. But the Laird can speak to that as weel as me, for he was a frien’ o’ his.”

“And you also identified it?” (to the Laird).

“I’m sorry to say that I hae nae cause to doubt it’s my puir frien’, for I saw him in thae claes nae farer gone than Monday.”

And he was led with much unwillingness to give an account of his relationship to the deceased, and why he had gone to sea.

“Where was he last seen alive, so far as you know?” proceeded Mr. Smart, making a note of everything.

“At Askaig, I believe.”

“Then he was not living with you?”

“No (shaking his head mournfully); I wish he had been.”

“And how was that when you liked him so well?”

With the greatest reluctance the Laird was induced to explain that Falcon had come home, and finding his sweetheart married, had been a little touched in the head, he fancied, in consequence.

“Oh!” exclaimed the fiscal, “his lass married; and what’s her name now?”

He was told.

“And where does she bide?”

“At Cairnieford.”

“Aye, aye, I think I mind about her now—a daughter of Adam Lindsay, the fisher—a fine body, a fine body.”

And there he dropped that part of the subject. He questioned Mackie and the others who had been with Dunbar as to how they had come to discover the body, and that led to an account of the finding of the horse on the previous day and the search for their master, which had brought about the discovery they had made.

Mr. Smart did not betray the least sur-

prise at anything that was said. He accepted everything as quite a matter of course; and altogether did not seem to regard the event as half so serious as the persons he was examining thought it.

“As you are a relation of the deceased,” he said to the Laird when he had obtained all the information the men could give, “maybe you would not mind sending up a cart to remove the body?”

“Certainly, I’ll do that; but can I take it to my place?”

“There’s no reason why you should not.”

“And I would like to bury him—puir lad, it’s the last service I can do him; me wha thought he would hae been here to do that for me as my friend and heir.”

“Oh, you intended him to be your heir? yes, you may bury him when you like after the doctor has examined him.”

“Thank ye, sir; that’s some sma’ consolation onyway.”

And the Laird took a pinch of snuff, the first his agitation had permitted him to take

since his arrival. He looked much more like his own meek pawky self than he had done during the last hour or so.

“I will require to see all who are here now at the Port Inn to-morrow,” continued the fiscal, accepting the pinch which the Laird proffered him, “and meanwhile I’m going to Askaig, and I want one of you to go with me.”

“I hae to gang up at ony rate,” said the Laird hastily; “I’ll be pleased to accompany you, Mister Smart.”

“Thank ye, Laird, but I would not like to trouble ye.”

“Dinna mention it, I hae to gang to see how things are, and sae it’s no trouble.”

The fiscal nodded, and stepped aside to Geordie Armstrong, to whom he said something in so low a tone that none of the others could hear. Geordie said, “Aye, I understand perfectly,” and the fiscal moved toward the road. He turned back quite carelessly, feeling his pockets, and looking at the ground as if he had lost something.

He stopped beside young Dunbar, and with one of his cheery smiles—

“I thought I had dropped my pencil, but I hae got it here in my pouch all right. Did you say you had seen Cairnieford last night?”

“Aye, he was biding at our house a’ night.”

“I want to see him as soon as I can get time. I hae ta’en a notion of one of his queys. I’ll send you word at what time I want to see you to-morrow.”

Geordie Armstrong happened to be standing near enough to hear what was said. The fiscal again moved toward the road, and Mr. Monduff hurriedly followed him.

“I know I may take the liberty, Mr. Smart,” said the minister, touching his arm. “What causes you to think that this is a case of murder?”

“There can be no danger in trusting you, sir,” answered the fiscal, “as you are not likely to repeat what I say, and supposing you did, I think it would make little difference.”

“You may depend on my silence.”

Being thus assured that his confidence—which it appeared was much the same whether declared or kept secret—would be respected, the fiscal proceeded—

“In my business, sir, I make it a rule never to think anything about a case until it is actually before me; and then only to think of each part as it appears, bringing the first observation to bear on the second, and the second on the third, but never speculating as to what the next may be.”

“I see.”

“Well, my first observation here, without knowing any of the circumstances of the case, further than that the body had been found in this state, was that the head and features were unrecognizable. That this should be the result of the head being battered against the rocks was quite likely. Observation second: there are five teeth remaining uninjured, sufficient to show that the mouth had been violently clenched, and between these teeth are several particles of wool, as if the

man had been biting a plaid—not his own, for he had none, as you have seen.”

“But he might have had one, and lost it in striving to save himself.”

“Quite so; but he would not have been likely to bite at it unless it had been secured to some thing or person, and as he slipped into the water he might naturally have snatched at it with his hands, or with his teeth, if his hands had been otherwise employed. But he would not have snatched at it if the plaid had been on his own shoulders, except maybe by accident.”

“It is not probable.”

“I thought you would admit it, sir. Now for observation three: round the neck is a circle of blue marks. They resemble the marks which two hands might make in clasping the throat with the thumbs pressing against the wind-pipe. In fact, the resemblance is so perfect to my mind—and I have had some experience in such matters, as you may fancy—that I am quite satisfied they were made by the hands of the per-

son who heaved the young man into the spate."

"Was there anything else to confirm that opinion?" queried Mr. Monduff, unwilling to believe the worst so long as there was any chance of another explanation.

"Yes; there are marks round the left wrist showing that it had been grasped and twisted by a hand—a strong one too. It was an unlucky grip for the murderer, however, for it has left a trace which I think will enable me to find the arm and the body belonging to the hand."

"What was that, if I may ask?"

"A speck of tar—*that* does not rub out with one washing, and I think before it has time to wear out I will have the man in my grasp."

"But, my dear sir, a speck of tar is such a very slight clue. You will scarcely find a man at the Port who has not got tar on his hands. You will find tarry hands too amongst the farm folk wherever there has been a fence or a styre recently painted."

“Quite so, sir. It is a slight clue, as you say, and taken by itself would mean nothing. But it is the combination of these slight clues which enables justice to reach the criminal. You do not suppose I would arrest the first man I found with tar or the mark of tar on his hand. Certainly not. But if I found a man at whom the other clues pointed, and having the signs of tar on the palm of his right hand, I would arrest him at once, and be perfectly satisfied that I had secured the man I wanted.”

Mr. Smart spoke in the easy manner of one dealing with an ordinary topic of conversation, but still with a tone of perfect conviction which impressed his hearer. Mr. Monduff's eyes were bent on the ground, and his hands clasped behind him on his staff as he kept pace with the leisurely step of the fiscal, who, notwithstanding his placidity, had vanity enough to be pleased by the minister's attention and the display of his own acumen

“When I had examined the body,” he went on, “my next step was to learn who the man

was, and what was known about him. In the pocket of his trousers I had found a paper in the form of a pay-note of his Majesty's ship *Victory*, made out in the name of James Falcon. This, with the identification of the Laird and Dunbar, was enough to satisfy me on that point. Then the information I received from you all presented this case to me as one of the clearest and simplest I have ever had to do with—so far as I see at present."

"Then you already suspect who the unhappy man is who has committed the crime?"

"I do."

"Am I acquainted with him?" (hesitatingly, for he did not like to accept the conclusion to which all the fiscal's argument tended).

"That I cannot answer at present. But you will know by to-morrow."

The Laird on his pony overtook them. He had given Dunbar instructions to get a cart sent from Clashgirn to remove the body; and then having been assisted to mount, for he was too much shaken to get into the saddle unaided, he had followed the Fiscal.

The latter jumped into his gig, and with a farewell nod to the minister, drove off toward Askaig, the Laird trotting behind on his pony.

Mr. Monduff meanwhile walked slowly back to Cairnieford. He was depressed by the events which had just transpired; but still more by the conclusions to which they pointed. Whether these conclusions were right or wrong, he foresaw that there was much unhappiness still in store for Jeanie Gray, and the thought of the task he had set himself of reconciling her to her husband was almost completely lost in the shadow of graver matters.

He could not tell her all that the fiscal had said; and yet he was bound to recount enough to prepare her for what might follow. He felt his position to be an exceedingly difficult one, and he was at a loss how to acquit himself.

He was relieved of the difficulty by Jeanie herself.

She met him with a face white, cold, and

fixed as marble. He regarded her wonderingly, but he could make nothing of that still face; it was so much more like the face of a corpse than that of a living woman, that he experienced a chill as if he had been brought into contact with an iceberg. He had rarely seen such an expression—or rather entire absence of expression; and on the rare occasions on which he had observed it, he had known that despair had frozen the heart.

“Was it him?” she asked, whisperingly.

“Yes, there can be no doubt the poor lad is dead.”

She bowed her head, compressing her colourless lips, and clenching her hands spasmodically. He could not speak to her; all his experience suggested no words of comfort for such a case as this, the terror of which lay more in what was to come than in what had passed.

She looked up after a brief silence.

“Ye were anxious to meet my guidman before ye gaed awa' frae here? do ye want to see him yet?”

“I am, if possible, more anxious than I was before to see him.”

“Then seek him—find him, and dinna fash him or yoursel’ wi’ ony words about me; but just tell him that Jeamie Falcon has been found dead in the burn, and let him dae what he thinks best.”

The minister understood that the message she wished him to carry was in the shape of a warning by which a criminal might escape from justice. But looking at her face, thinking of all the circumstances which surrounded her, he had not the heart to refuse.

“Ye will find him at Boghaugh,” she said; “or if he’s no there, they’ll maybe be able to tell ye where he’s gane to. There’s naebody else he would heed but you, minister; and oh he needs a friend’s counsel sairly.”

“He shall have it from me.”

“Heaven bless ye for that, sir. I haena even thanks to gie ye enow, for my heart’s sae cauld and sae heavy that it’s like lead.”

The minister took a short cut across the fields to Boghaugh. There he learned that

Robin had left in the forenoon to visit Peter Carnegie, the writer, with whom he had some business to transact.

“He was in a dour miserable humour,” said the old farmer, shaking his head dolefully; “and a’ that I could dae or say wouldna bring him out o’t. He has ta’en the notion sair to heart that his guidwife hasna been sae upright as she ought to hae been, and he’s gaun to leave the kintry for a while.”

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNPLEASANT DUTY.

“Now farewell, light, thou sunshine bright,
And all beneath the sky,
May coward shame disdain his name,
The wretch that dares not die.”—*Burns.*

It was dark before the minister reached the lawyer's house in the main street; and as he approached the door he observed a man standing by it. The man was erect and motionless as a sentinel on guard.

“Is that you, Armstrong?” queried Mr. Monduff, peering at the man and recognizing him.

“Aye, it's me, sir.”

“Has the fiscal got back already?”

“No yet; but I expect him sune.”

“Then who are ye waiting for?”

“I'm no just at liberty to say, minister; and I'll thank ye no to mention that I'm here.”

By this time the door was opened by a servant girl, who ushered Mr. Monduff into a side room which was fitted up as an office. Mr. Carnegie was seated at his desk, busy writing down the instructions he was receiving from Robin Gray, who sat opposite him. Both turned toward the door at the entrance of the minister.

“Glad to see ye, Mr. Monduff,” exclaimed the lawyer, a stout little man who had evidently thriven on his profession; “glad to see ye, but I hope your business wi’ me is no very particular, for I hae been away from home, and here’s Cairnieford been waiting for me a’ day until he’s lost his patience, and will no wait another minute though it was the king himsel’ wanted me.”

“It was Cairnieford I wanted to see, Mr. Carnegie.”

“Aweel, there he is, and if ye can persuade him to take time to consider what he’s about to do, it’s mair than I could.”

Robin threw up his hands as if to repudiate any interference.

“For Heaven’s sake let there be nae mair said about it,” he cried. “I tell ye that there’s nae power on earth to gar me change my mind. Ye canna ken what I feel, and sae ye canna understand my reasons. I’m gaun awa’ frae here, and I want to leave things sae that whatever happens to me she may never come to want. There’s nae harm in that, I would think.”

“I didna say there was any harm in that part o’t,” commented Mr. Carnegie, biting the end of his quill; “on the contrary, I think that’s a very sensible provision.”

“Let it be done then at ance, for bide here anither night I winna—and canna.”

When he had raised his hands the flame of the candles standing on the desk had shone on them. Involuntarily Mr. Monduff had glanced at the palm of the right hand. He saw there a bluish mark such as a stain of tar would make.

On seeing that, he spoke hurriedly and with a shade of sternness in his tone; for however much he might sympathize with

the unfortunate, he could not feel quite comfortable under the suspicion that he was aiding and abetting a criminal to escape.

“I have not sought you for the purpose of trying to dissuade you from the course you have determined to adopt.”

“I’m glad o’ that.”

“But not many hours ago, when I first obtained the particulars of your unhappy misunderstanding with your wife, I did think that a little conversation between us would have set matters right. Now, I am here simply to deliver a message, although I will not refuse any advice or assistance you may ask for and I can give.”

“Who is the message frae?”

“Your wife. She bade me say to ye that the body of James Falcon has been found in the burn, and you are to do what you think best under the circumstances.”

Robin stared at him blankly; and then, with darkening face—

“I canna say that I’m sorry for him as I ance would hae been; for he’s made my life

a burden to me and a curse. He has made me an outcast without friend or hame, and I'm no sorry for him. I dinna ken though but I would like to change places wi' him."

He spoke in a grim sour manner that tended to confirm the horrible suspicion which had been forced on the minister.

"How did that happen?" inquired the lawyer, looking up quickly from his papers.

"Can ye no get that document finished first," interrupted Robin, "sae that I can sign it and get awa'? Ye'll hae time enuch after to hear a' the news o' the world."

"In a' my acquaintance wi' ye, Cairnieford," said Mr. Carnegie, dipping the pen into the ink, "I never ken'd ye in such a dour temper as ye are the nicht."

He bent over the desk, and proceeded to write rapidly.

"Where do you intend going to?" said Mr. Monduff.

"Guid kens—anywhere that I'm maist likely to forget what's happened."

“And have ye no message for your wife before ye go?”

“Did she bid ye speir that?” (bitterly).
“Maybe she thought that your news would gar me rin back to her like a thrawart wean that’s frichted by its ain thrawnness.”

“No, she did not bid me ask that.”

“Aweel, ye can tell her that if Jeamie Falcon was drooned fifty times ower it would make nae odds to me in what’s gane an’ by.”

“I never thought you were a coward, Cairnieford, till now.”

The man’s eyes flashed angrily, and then, with a jerk of his head, indicating his indifference to anything that might be said or thought of him:

“I canna help what ye think, minister, but neither can I see that I hae done anything but what ye might hae done yoursel’ with the same provocation. Onyway, I hae tried hard to look the matter fair in the face and to do what was right.”

“You cannot have much feeling for her, or you would not run away from the place

and leave her to bear the brunt of the scandal your rash temper has raised."

"Nae feeling for her!—Oh, man, if ye could only ken half o' what I hae suffered on her account ye wouldna say that. But dinna let us speak ony mair about it"—(huskily). "Speaking winna mend it noo. Maybe I hae done her wrang, and I'm no so blind to my ain madness as no to hae my doubts on that score. God grant that it may be so, for she'll be happier then, let folk say what they like, than I can ever hope to be."

"I see it is useless arguing with you, and indeed I did not mean to do so, but I would like to carry her a little comfort, and you have enabled me to do that in owning that you may have been deceived by your anger."

"Oh, aye, if it's ony guid to her ye can tell her that; an' ye can tell her too, if it'll do her ony guid to ken, that hell maun be a pleasant place compared wi' what this world has been to me since Tuesday."

The minister was as much shocked by the tone of the man as the words. The agony

of the contest between love and jealous doubt was fierce as ever within him. It had tortured him all night; and all day, whilst he had been waiting for the lawyer's return, it had been whipping him into new outbursts of frenzy. He had avoided everybody as he had been wandering about trying to kill time. That was an occupation, the nature of which he had never known until to-day, and a miserable one it had proved to him as to every one else.

He had nothing to look forward to except the one poor chance of finding the man who had brought the gig for Jeanie on the Tuesday afternoon, and of learning from him how far she had been deceived by his message. But there was little satisfaction in speculating upon the result of discovering the man, for at the best it could not bridge the black gulf which now seemed to sunder them for ever.

Shocked as he was by Robin's exclamation, the minister could not help pitying the evident misery which called it forth. Before he

had time to reply, however, there was a knock at the outer door.

Mr. Monduff, instead of delivering the stern rebuke which had been on his lips, hastily bolted the door of the room, much to the astonishment of Mr. Carnegie, who just then looked up.

“What’s wrang, minister?”

“Listen, Cairnieford,” said Mr. Monduff, in an under-tone, “I believe that’s the fiscal and the sheriff’s-officer—have ye any cause to fear them?”

“Me! what should I fear a hunder fiscals and as mony sheriff-officers for?”

“You are sure of that? There is still time for you to get out by the back window. For your wife’s sake Carnegie and I will turn our backs whilst you escape, if you wish to do so.”

Robin stared; the lawyer raised his spectacles and looked bewilderedly from one to the other.

“What would I seek going out by the window for when the door’s there?”

The minister drew a breath of astonishment and relief, saying at the same time—

“You remember what I told ye? Falcon’s body has been found.”

“And what, in the deil’s name, has that to do wi’ me and the window?”

“Then I may unfasten the door?—they are at it.”

“Surely.”

The minister regarded him, puzzled. Was it a manœuvre, or was he innocent?

He drew back the bolt, and the fiscal entered, grinning as good-naturedly as if he had just looked in to wish his acquaintances a friendly good-day.

“Hallo, Cairnieford, you’re here!” he exclaimed, grasping the farmer’s hand. “Man, it’s a while since I hae seen ye; and how are ye getting on? I heard ye were about to travel.”

“Aye, it’s true.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Weel, afore ye gang will ye part wi’ yon quey ye bought at

the Lammas fair? I'll gie ye ten pounds. Come, say the word, is't a bargain?"

He raised Robin's right hand, palm upward, lifting his own right hand as if about to bring it down with a slap on that of Robin, which is the usual token among cattle-dealers of the conclusion of a bargain.

"I canna bargain wi' ye about anything in the present state o' my affairs," answered Cairnieford, drawing his hand away.

But the fiscal had observed the blue mark, and now touched him on the shoulder.

"I would rather some other body had got this job in hand," he said seriously; "but since there's nae help for't I must do my duty. Robin Gray, you are my prisoner."

Robin stared stupidly, first at the fiscal, then at Mr. Monduff, and next at the lawyer, who was leaning back on his chair, eyes and mouth wide with astonishment.

"Ye were ay a joky chiel', fiscal," said Robin in a low agitated voice; "but I canna just see the fun o' this."

“It is no joke, Cairnieford, but sober earnest, and it’s the most unpleasant bit of business I hae ever had to do.”

“What do ye mean? what hae I done?”

“I hope you will be able to prove that you have not done it; but at present the proof is strong against ye.”

“Proof o’ what?”

“You are charged with the murder of James Falcon.”

Robin was like one struck dumb; and for an instant his huge form quivered. Then, with an angry roar like that of an infuriated bull, he flung the fiscal from him.

“It’s an infernal lee, and ye shall never make me a prisoner on sic a charge. Haud aff, or it’ll be the waur for ye. I hated the man, and when I found him and my wife thegither the deevil was strong in me to fell him on the spot. But I ran awa’ frae the place sae that I mightna be tempted mair than I could bear, and I haena seen him since. I’ll answer for a’ that I hae done in ony court, but ye shall not drag me to a jail

like a common thief sae lang as I hae pith in thir twa arms to keep ye aff."

"Your resistance only makes the thing look worse against ye," said the fiscal, not in the least disturbed, notwithstanding the fury and gigantic strength of the man who opposed his arrest.

The minister interfered to prevent what threatened to be a serious affray.

"If you are innocent, Cairnieford, go with Mr. Smart quietly. That will be the best and firmest denial you can give to the charge which he feels compelled to make against you. Be calm, I beseech you, and do not by your rashness add to the difficulties of your position. For your own sake, for your wife's sake, be careful what you do."

At the remembrance of his wife his vigour deserted him; his whole form seemed to collapse, and he covered his face with his hands sobbing.

"Aye, there's the sting o't," he cried bitterly. "To think that a' this comes o' carin' ower muckle about her. . . . Aweel, aweel,

what needs I care for life or onything that may befa' me? The warst and the best o't is that we can only dee ance. . . . I'll gae wi' ye, fiscal, peaceably. Do ye want to put me in airns? Here, put your handcuffs on my wrists and your shackles on my feet—dae wi' me as you like; I dinna mind onything noo."

His chin sunk on his breast; and his countenance presented the dull expressionless cast of utter indifference to whatever portion fate might have in store.

"There will be no necessity for such desperate precautions," said the fiscal in a friendly tone; "you'll only have to come over to the inn wi' me to-night, and you'll hae to let Geordie Armstrong sleep in the same room wi' you—that's a'; and I gie ye my word that ye shall be treated wi' a' the respect due to a man wha may be able to prove himself innocent."

"Thank ye"—(indifferently).

"And until you hae failed to do that," broke

in the minister, "do not think that your friends will forsake ye."

"Friends!—I hae few o' them; but gin I had thousands they could never gie me back the peace I hae lost, or clear the guid name that's trampled i' the mire this night."

He accompanied the fiscal without another word, but with his head bowed as if he could never raise it again to encounter the gaze of his fellow-men.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WORST OF IT.

“An eiry night, a cheerless day,
A lanely hame at gloamin' hour;
When o'er the heart come thoughts o' wae,
Like shadows on Glenfillan's tower.”—*G. Allan.*

She had been expecting the blow, and she met it stoutly.

There was no display of weakness, no visible sign of the terror at her heart, when Adam reached the house late that night in stern ill-humour—which was not improved by the extra glass of raw whisky he had taken at the inn, where he had got the news—with the information that Robin had been arrested.

Adam was hard and unforgiving toward Robin; but, having no opportunity of venting his wrath upon him, he seemed to fancy that the next best thing was to speak as harshly to Jeanie as if it had been all her fault in

marrying such a man. He did not show this when sober; but that extra glass had filled up his indignation until it overflowed upon the first object he approached.

She let his ill-humour pass without a word; indeed, she was too much occupied by the more important matter of his tidings to heed him.

Then Geordie Armstrong arrived by breakfast time next morning to summon her to the presence of the fiscal. With lips tightly clenched and head a little bowed she received his message, but she uttered no cry of alarm. She had never seemed stronger or calmer in her life than when she proceeded to put on her plaid, and started for the Port.

Her father was summoned too, but she did not wait for him. She only stayed to leave some directions with one of the lassies about her mother, and departed at once, as if she were eager to know the worst and have done with it.

She walked the distance, and Geordie Armstrong, who accompanied her, was amazed

by the firmness and rapidity of her steps. She seemed to gain rather than lose strength as she proceeded. The movement exhilarated her, and changed the deathly pallor of her face to a warm flush. But her lips were still clenched, her head a little bowed, and she would not speak.

At every step she felt as if she were beating down some part of the accusation against her husband. She would not believe him guilty, no matter what proof might be adduced. She would hold him blameless in spite of all that others might say, in spite of all her own knowledge of the events and the fatal inference to which they pointed so directly. She would hold him blameless, and she would devote her life to satisfy the world that he was innocent, in spite of all the wrong he had done her.

These were the thoughts which inspired her with a vigour and calmness that caused those who saw her to marvel. But, underlying all, there was a tremulous fear which she strove fiercely to thrust aside.

With the generous impulse of a good woman, the moment she heard of his peril she put away the anger she was entitled to feel towards him, and the reflection of the miserable future he had left for her, and thought only of how she might best serve him. Although they were separated, and nothing could ever bring them together again, she turned bravely to the task to which gratitude and love urged her—to save him.

In front of the inn she saw the Laird's pony, and that she took to be a bad omen, for Clashgirn carried ill-luck wherever he went to everybody but himself.

As she was about to enter the room where the fiscal was in attendance with his clerk, Rob Keith came forth. He looked confused and startled at sight of her, and slunk away like a dog with its tail between its legs, glad to have escaped an expected whipping. She just gave one quick glance toward him and entered the room.

The fiscal had expected to see a woman

in tears at least, if not in a state of hysterical agitation; and he was consequently astonished to see her standing there so quietly waiting for him to speak.

“You are Mrs. Gray?” he said, and the clerk’s pen proceeded to scratch busily.

“Yes, sir”—(modestly).

“And do ye know why I have asked you to come here?”

“Ye hae sent for me, and I’m here. Ye’ll tell me what ye want wi’ me, I suppose.”

“Then you do not know that your husband has been arrested?”

“I ken that, and I ken what for, and I’m ready to answer anything ye speir at me to the best of my ability.”

This was the most willing witness the fiscal had ever come across; and, like all men who are accustomed to view life from one side—and the worst—of its character, he was perplexed, and immediately began to seek a motive for conduct which was somewhat beyond his experience.

“Well, Mrs. Gray,” he went on presently

in his cheeriest tone, "I'm a friend o' your guidman's. Let that be distinctly understood between us, and you'll easily see that the questions I'm going to ask ye are as much for his own benefit as because they come in the way of my duty."

"I'm glad ye're his friend, sir," and she looked at him as if she could not quite reconcile his friendship with his present position.

"It's a melancholy affair," he said, catching her look and its meaning, "and puts us all in an awkward predicament. But I hope we'll soon get out o't. Now, I'll be plain wi' you, and no try to blind you wi' a roundabout way of questioning you, and I expect you to be as plain and straightforward in your answers."

"I'll try."

"Sit down then, and make yourself as comfortable as you can."

She obeyed him, clasping her hands on her lap, and keeping her eyes fixed on him, watching every movement of his features.

"You were at Askaig on Tuesday last?"

“I was.”

“What took ye there?”

She told him of the false message she had received exactly as she had told her husband.

“And whilst ye were there, Cairnieford arrived, and had some words with you and James Falcon?”

“Yes”—(breathing with difficulty).

“You were left alone in the house, and you went out. What caused you to quit the house on such a night?”

“I wanted to get home.”

“It was not anything you heard that caused you to go out?”

“No.”

“Well, when you were out, what took you round by the Brownie’s Bite?”

“I missed the road.”

“Did you see anything?”

“It was very dark.”

“Aye, but there was lightning; you might have seen something when it was flashing.”

She knew now that Rob Keith had told everything. Was she to confirm his state-

ment, and perhaps consign her husband to the scaffold? It was a cruel ordeal she was undergoing. She felt as if she were being suffocated—felt as if she were the guilty one, and that she was responsible for Falcon's death and Robin's trial.

“It was very dark,” she repeated, slowly, “and the lightning dazed my e'en.”

The fiscal drew his lips together and brought his hand across his chin, pursing the flesh.

“Well, you heard something at any rate?”

“The wind was blowing strong, and the spate was roaring loud.”

“Then do you mean to say positively that you heard nothing except the wind and the spate?”

“I was in sair distress, and it was an unco stormy night.”

“But you heard a cry like what a man might give if he was in danger? You must have heard that?”

She was silent.

“I thought you were to speak freely to me,” he said quietly. “Now, let me warn you, that you will just make the affair look all the worse for your guidman if you show any unwillingness to answer me.”

“Oh, man, how can you expect me to be willing to answer what may be the death o’ my man?”

“Then you did hear the cry?”

“Aye, Heaven help me, I did.”

“And after that, immediately or any time before you fainted, did you see or hear your guidman?”

She clutched the folds of her plaid, as if she found it necessary to seize upon something to support her.

“Come, Mrs. Gray, I’m sorry to fash you, but I have little more to ask you. What was it frightened you into the faint?”

“I canna rightly say what”—(chokingly).

“Was it not your husband’s voice?”

“I couldna say—I didna see him.”

“But you heard him—he spoke to you; perhaps he struck you?”

“No, he didna do that, he never did that——”

She checked herself; but there was no escape now; her vehemence had betrayed her; and the fiscal bent over a paper he had in his hand to conceal the satisfaction he could not help feeling at the success of that cunning stroke.

“No, he did not strike you; but he spoke to you, and that was what frightened you, and you fainted. Nae wonder ye were scared to find him there after what had passed, and just after that waeful screech. What did he say?”

“Naething.”

And she closed her lips with a firmness which showed that it would not be easy to get any more information from her.

“Aweel, aweel, that’s neither here nor there,” he said in his most good-natured tone; “but you have seen him since then—I mean since you got home from Askaig?”

“Aye, I saw him on Wednesday.”

“And did you know that he was going to leave the country?”

“He said he was gaun awa’.”

“What was his reason for that?”

“Naething but the quarrel atween him and me—and that’s been the cause o’ a’ his trouble and mine. Oh, sir, dinna speir ony mair questions at me. I hae naething mair to tell ye, and ye are rending my heart wi’ every word.”

And she threw the end of her plaid over her face to hide its pallid pain. But she uttered no sound; there was only the convulsive agitation of her breast to indicate the anguish she was trying so hard to smother.

Mr. Smart was not a hardened man, notwithstanding his profession and the scenes of misery with which it accustomed him. He was touched by her grief, and respected it. He turned his back toward her and spoke to the clerk, who was still busy writing.

When the clerk had finished, the fiscal addressed Jeanie again.

“I’ll relieve you in a minute, Mrs. Gray, if you’ll just listen to this, and sign it, if there’s nothing in it you object to.”

He read over the statement which his examination had wrung from her. Every word beat upon her ears like the blow of a hammer. Every word seemed to strike a nail into the gibbet which was looming so darkly before her. There was nothing she had not said, and yet the statement read to her by the fiscal seemed so black, so fatally suggestive of Robin's guilt, that her flesh quivered, and she sickened at the thought that she had spoken his doom.

“Will you sign it?” said Mr. Smart gently.

“Maun I sign it?”

“I am afraid I will have to insist, unless there is anything in it you think you have not said.”

“There is nothing, but——”

“You are afraid it will go against him; but you must not lose heart. I hope he'll come through all right yet.”

“Do ye think that—oh, sir, do ye think that?”—(with painful eagerness).

He did not think it, but he felt obliged to say something to console her.

“I hope so, Mrs. Gray. I’m trying to find the man that brought the gig for you, as I fancy he might give the whole affair a new turn.”

“Do you believe that?”

“It’s possible.”

“Then I’ll find him,” she said firmly, and taking the pen without further hesitation she signed the statement in the slow awkward manner of one little accustomed to penmanship.

“Have you any notion who the man was?” queried Mr. Smart, whilst the clerk folded up the paper and docketed it.

“No, but I’ll find him.”

“We got word that he was the ostler at the Drybrig Inn, but it was not him. How do you propose to seek him?”

“I dinna ken yet; but will ye let me see my guidman for a minute? I hae just ae word to speak to him. Oh, sir, dinna refuse me. He’s in sair need o’ some one to bid him keep up his heart; and maybe if he kens that I’m trying to save him it would gie him

courage to bear the cruel shame that's on him."

"Aye, ye can see him, and I wish ye may be able to cheer him, for he's more dooncast than any man I ever saw. Come this way. He's to be taken away to the jail this afternoon."

He conducted her himself to the room in which Robin was confined. An officer, who had been summoned to the Port with the clerk, was on guard. The fiscal had considerately left the prisoner to himself, although it would have been no very difficult task for Robin to have made his escape by the window, if he had been so inclined. But the fiscal's confidence was justified; and the prisoner was apparently too indifferent as to what might become of him to have quitted the room, even if the door had been left wide open and unguarded.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TEST.

“Roll on, thou cold and stilly hours,
Roll on, like waves that gently fan
The morning with her honied flowers,
When leaves grow brighter every one.”—*W. B. Sangster.*

He was sadly changed since she had last seen him. He looked so old, so broken down and helpless, that her impulse was to run to him, fling her arms round him, and soothe him with sweet words of comfort and love. Yes, love, for the throbbing of her heart, its wild yearning toward him, could spring from no other cause. His suffering, his mad jealousy and his peril, all conspired to teach her how dear he was to her.

She had never cared for him as she did now—now that she could not claim the right to comfort him. It seemed as if it were only in losing him that she was to learn how

much she valued him. Something swelled in her breast, and seemed to be about to burst, so that she stood still, and could not speak. That impulse to clasp him in her arms was strong upon her, and would have been obeyed had it not been checked by the cold glance with which he regarded her.

He had been sitting by the window, looking down at the street, watching with hopeless eyes the people passing to and fro. He could never move amongst them again. Even if he escaped the fate which threatened him, he could not walk down that street where he had been always greeted by friendly faces and tongues, and meet the doubting glances which would be cast upon him, and hear the whispers of his shame.

But his pain was not acute now; he had passed into the stage of dull hopeless misery, and he only wearied for the end to come speedily and release him. As he looked out and yearned for the precious liberty which was denied him, and which those folks down there appeared to hold so lightly, it seemed

to be another person who was longing for freedom. He seemed to be possessed of two individualities, the one still clinging to life and its privileges, the other weary of it and ready to die.

When the door opened he had not moved, thinking probably that it was his jailor or the fiscal, but when Jeanie's suppressed breathing found vent in a low sob, he looked round slowly. There was no gleam of pleasurable recognition on his features, which had grown so sharp and shrivelled, and that was what stopped her. Even if he had regarded her with the anger or scorn he had displayed at their last meeting, she would have been less pained than she was by that stony look. However, it nerved her to the task which had brought her hither.

He rose slowly from his seat and stood as if expecting her to speak. She noticed then how his tall form, which used to be so erect and firm, was bent as if under a load too great for him to bear. But he made no movement toward her, made no sign of any

tender memories, and womanlike she felt as if she were humiliated in the service she was trying to render him.

“I see ye’re no pleased that I should come near ye,” she faltered, “even when ye’re in sic sair need o’ friends as ye are enoo; but I winna fash ye lang.”

“I wasna expecting ye,” he answered in a low husky voice.

“No”—(with a tone of sad bitterness)—“ye couldna think weel eneuch o’ me to fancy that I would care what came o’ ye. Ye thought that I would just leave ye to whatever might happen without trying to help ye. Maybe I should hae done that, but I couldna. I dinna care what ye may think o’ me, but I couldna sit idle at hame and ken ye needed help without trying to gie it ye.”

“I’m thankfu’ to ye.”

“I dinna seek your thanks, I dinna need them. Wi’ Heaven’s will I shall do what a wife should do for ye in your trouble; but when that’s by, ye’ll find that I can keep awa’

frae ye—aye, as dourly as ye would keep awa' frae me."

He passed his hand absently over his brow, and his lips trembled. It was a wretched sight, this strong man weak and helpless as a child.

"I'm thankfu' to ye," he said again feebly.

And at that all her bitterness vanished, leaving only the fond sympathetic woman. She advanced to him and laid her hand on his arm. He trembled at her touch, but he made no effort to thrust her from him, as she had half feared he would do.

"I hae just ae question to speir," she said softly; "and after that I'll no fash ye ony mair wi' my presence."

"I'm listening."

"Did ye meet Jeamie Falcon after ye left me in Askaig house? Did ye see him again, or hear him, or come near him in ony way?"

She watched him with terrible eagerness as she pronounced the words.

The question seemed to rouse him from his lethargy. He rose to his height, erect

and firm as he had been before this calamity. He shook her hand from his arm and his eyes flashed angrily.

“You too doubt me!” he exclaimed hoarsely; “but what else could I expect? you wha never cared for me and loved him, —what could ye do but be the first to think me guilty?”

“Oh man, dinna speak thae cruel fause words to me the noo; but answer me—answer me frae your heart truly as though ye was at the Judgment-seat, and gie me strength to save ye.”

He regarded her fixedly for an instant, and then answered with a steady voice, only avoiding Falcon’s name—

“I never saw him, or heard him, or came near him to my knowledge, after I left him and you in Askaig house.”

“God be thanked—O God be thanked for that,” she cried, dropping on her knees with clasped hands upraised and tears of grateful joy streaming down her cheeks.

He turned his back upon her, for he could

not look upon that face so bright with faith in him without a sharp twinge of remorse for all he had done to cloud it. She whom he had so readily doubted, whose truth he had so doggedly refused to credit; she whom he had spurned from him, accepted his single word against all the evidence in the world. That was the sharpest sting of all, to feel that she could trust him so much when he had shown so little trust in her.

She misinterpreted his movement; she thought he was unrelenting, still believed her guilt and wished her gone. But she did not care for that now. The lingering shadow which had lurked in her mind, and against which she had striven so hard to close her eyes, was dispelled, as a stream of light chases the darkness from a room when the shutters are thrown open.

She rose to her feet, strong and resolute to save him, indifferent whether he doubted or believed her, loved or scorned her. It was no part of her calculation that she should win him back to her by rescuing him from his

present danger. She would have shrunk with loathing from the thought if it had occurred to her. It was the pure motive of a generous nature to serve one to whom she was grateful for much kindness in spite of all his latter cruelty. And as resolute as she was to save him, just as resolute was she that, the task accomplished, she would leave him to follow his own course in life.

“Dinna be dooncast,” she said in a low hopeful voice, and it had never sounded so sweetly as now; “ye sha’na die the death o’ shame; Heaven winna let it be, and there are thae wha’ll rest neither day nor night till a’ that looks sae black against ye is made clear. Tak’ courage in thinking o’ that.”

“Jeanie, Jeanie,” he cried with broken voice, “ye make my heart ache wi’ the thocht o’ the wrang I hae done ye. Oh, I hae been mad—mad, and God help me. I only see it noo when it’s maybe ower late—Jeanie!”

He called her wildly, but she had gone before he had turned round; gone the moment she had finished speaking without having

heard that outburst which would have comforted her so. There was nothing but the closed door to answer him; and somehow the fancy came and chilled him that his own hand had closed and barred the door between himself and his happiness.

But her sweet words were echoing in his brain, wooing back the desire to live, and with it were coming courage and hope. He began to pace the floor thoughtfully, agitatedly, and the sunshine seemed to have penetrated the chamber since she had been there.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EVIDENCE.

“Let come what will, I’ll ne’er believe
But truth will get the better o’t:
The mirkest hour ay brings reprieve—
The doubt o’ truth’s the traitor o’t.”—*The Cateran.*

Jeanie, with rapid steps, proceeded to the house of the lawyer, Peter Carnegie. She required guidance, and he was the man from whom to seek it. She was not going to waste precious time by any blundering which her ignorance of the work she had undertaken might cause. She would seek help from whomsoever and wherever it might be obtained. She had promised to prove Robin’s innocence, and she meant to do it, although she had not at present any clue to the riddle she was determined to solve. Her prompt decisive steps indicated that she brought strength and courage to the task.

Mr. Carnegie was not at home, but the servant-girl who admitted her said he was only over at the inn, and would be back soon. Jeanie was ushered into the office, where a boy was busy copying some documents, and there she waited. The boy did not speak, but he looked a great deal at the client, and indeed gave her almost as much attention in that way as he gave his work.

The lawyer came at last, much to Jeanie's relief, for her patience was limited by her excited desire to be doing something, and sitting silently there did not appear to be furthering her business much.

Mr. Carnegie had a bundle of papers in his hand, and he wore an expression of much pre-occupation. When he perceived who was waiting for him, he saluted her gravely, and before permitting her to speak he despatched his boy on some errand.

“That'll keep the callan' out o' the road, Mrs. Gray, while we hae a crack—he's got the langest lugs and the glibbest tongue of any laddie of his ain age in the town. He'll

make a capital lawyer if he doesna fa' into some mischief or he's auld enough. I suppose ye come about your guidman? Aye, it's a sad business, a sad business."

"But we must bring him through't, Mr. Carnegie, for he's innocent."

"We!" raising his eyebrows and pulling his vest straight on his little stout body. "I'll do everything in my power for him, Mrs. Gray, but the affair looks bad at present, I'm compelled to admit."

"That doesna matter, sir, we maun save him."

"We! Are you prepared to suggest onything that may throw a new light on the subject then?"

"I canna say yet; but I want to ken a' the particulars o' the evidence they hae arrested him on."

She spoke with so much firmness that Mr. Carnegie, who was at first a little huffed by her apparent desire to relieve him of some of his responsibility without even asking permission, at once complied with her request.

That was saying a great deal for the impression she had made on him; for although he was a sociable sensible little man in other respects, he was apt to take prejudices so strongly that they sometimes interfered with his duty; and on no subject was he so ready to become prejudiced as on anything which ruffled the sense of his own importance.

“I hae been over at the inn all morning, for of course being Cairnieford’s regular agent I took the matter in hand the moment I heard about it. I hae got, partly from the fiscal himsel’—he and I are capital friends ye ken—and chiefly frae the folk he examined, a summary of all the evidence he has before him, except what you told him, and that of course ye’ll let me ken at once with ony additions that may occur to you.

He unfolded the papers he had brought in with him, arranged them before him in their proper order according to the figures on each, and proceeded—

“The first thing I have here is the evidence of the finding and identification of the body,

by John Dunbar the younger, in the service of his father at Boghaugh, Thomas Mackie, grieve at Cairnieford, and George Barr and David Hogg, ploughmen at Cairnieford aforesaid——”

“I ken a’ about the finding o’ the body, sir; what I want to ken is how they connect my guidman wi’t?” she interrupted.

Mr. Carnegie was a little put out by this check. He cleared his throat, however, and resumed—

“I must place the business before yē in due order, Mrs. Gray, or you will never see it clearly; but I’ll pass over anything you may be already acquainted with if you’ll just let me ken when I touch on it. Well, when the body was found, it was supposed that death had resulted from accident. But the fiscal, from certain unmistakable marks on the person, declared at once that it was a case of murder. Dr. Lawrie, surgeon of this town, having subsequently examined the body, confirms the fiscal’s assertion, in so far as that there was certainly violence used by

some person on the deceased immediately prior to death.”

“But that’s no to say who used the violence.”

“No, but the crime became associated with Robin Gray, farmer, of Cairnieford”—(he was very particular about names of persons and places)—“in this manner. John Dunbar and Thomas Mackie being interrogated as to what had induced them to search the stream—for without a search the body might have been for years undiscovered—deposed that it was in consequence of an alarm on the previous day (Wednesday), that Robin Gray had met with some accident; said alarm being raised by the discovery in the burn of a horse on which he had quitted his home on Tuesday evening in violent haste and passion.

“In the course of the inquiry a very distinct cause of disagreement between deceased James Falcon and Robin Gray was revealed—I need not tell you what that cause was, I suppose?”—(looking over the desk at her).

“I ken what it was”—(calmly).

“The question being asked where deceased had been last seen alive, Nicol McWhapple, Esquire of Clashgirn, affirmed that, to the best of his knowledge and belief, it must have been at Askaig, an upland farm, the property of deponent. The fiscal proceeded to Askaig, and Robert Keith being interrogated—

“I ken a’ that he could tell.”

“Very well, but there are two important points in his evidence which it may be as well to remind you of. After relating that he had seen Falcon lying on the floor, and Cairnieford kneeling on him with every appearance of great anger, he deposed that Cairnieford had called to him, Robert Keith, to keep James Falcon away from him, or ‘he would be the death of him.’ That’s the first point; the second is even more condemnatory. Keith, having at your instigation gone out to seek your guidman, after wandering about some time without finding him, had heard voices, followed the sound, and got to the back of the house which overlooks the precipice known as the Brownie’s Bite. A flash

of lightning enabled him to see two men; and the instant after he heard a loud scream. He moved two or three steps forward, when he heard a man's voice; he griped the man, and recognized him as Robin Gray.

“That, in conjunction with the previous quarrel and the threat, is a very awkward bit of evidence. Next, it is shown that the accused has not been at his own house since the night of the spate, and has been going about in a very disturbed state of mind, making arrangements for leaving the country immediately.”

“It was all on account of the quarrel between him and me—no because he was feared to bide at hame, or he would hae gane at once,” she said, uneasily.

“No doubt, and I mark it as a great point in his favour that he did not disguise his intention of going away from anybody who spoke to him. But the fiscal puts another construction on it, and there's no denying that it might be the case, that's to say, that he did not hide his purpose because he did not expect

the crime to be detected so soon, and in his absence, when it would be discovered, the fact that he had gone away openly and without concealment of any sort would have tended to divert suspicion from him, if events had come about as he is supposed to have calculated."

"Ye say that as though you doubted that it might be true."

"I'm just putting the evidence before you, and in these cases a legal adviser's duty is like a doctor's—first let him ken the worst of the disease, and syne he'll try to find the cure."

"Aye, sir, aye, let me ken the worst."

Mr. Carnegie glanced over the desk again. He was surprised by her calmness and the sharpness with which she seized upon every point of the evidence; and the surprise increased as he proceeded.

"As you can see," he went on, all this with very disagreeable directness associates Robin Gray wi' this crime. Now, one thing which showed the fiscal that the deceased had been

assassinated, was the finding of several particles of wool between the teeth of the dead man, as if, in the struggle to save himself, he had seized his antagonist's plaid between his teeth."

"But Robin had nae plaid on that night," she said, with brightening eyes; "he had thrown it aff when he got hame frae the market on Tuesday afternoon, before he ken'd I was awa'. He didna bide to put it on again, and the plaid's lying in the house yet to prove it."

The lawyer seized a pen, paused and looked at her as if the something he thought he had found was not quite so sure in his grasp as at the first moment appeared.

"Did you notice on that night at Askaig that he had no plaid on?"

"No"—(a little damped, but brightening again)—"I was ower muckle put about to notice onything o' that kind; but some o' the men would hae noticed that he gaed awa' without it, if ye'll speir at them. Besides, you said enow that it was proved he hadna

been at hame since that night. Weel, he has only twa plaids, and they are baith in the house."

"That's important for our side."

And with a glow of satisfaction he made a note of the statement.

"There, I think that will puzzle Mr. Smart, for he's wonderfully particular about every item o' a case dovetailing with ane anither. He's a clever man, and no a bad chiel' either. Weel, that's one point settled; but here's another that's more fatal in its proof, and I'm afraid ye'll no manage to get rid of it so easily. On the left wrist of the dead man, which was blue marked by the grip of somebody, there was a speck of tar. On the palm of Robin Gray's right hand when he was arrested there was a bluish mark like what tar would leave for a day or two."

He paused as if to permit this startling coincidence to obtain its due effect. Jeanie did not appear to be startled, however; she pondered with knitted brows as if seeking

the explanation which she was satisfied was to be found somewhere.

“Hae ye asked Robin himsel’ how that happens?” she said, lifting her eyes.

“I have his deposition here, exactly as he made it to the fiscal, he says. I will come to it directly. You can see that circumstance argues against him with the rest. I think I have told you everything of importance now—oh, aye, except that at the top of the precipice called the Brownie’s Bite, the fiscal saw plain signs of a struggle near a place where the paling was broken, and he found not far distant from that spot a bonnet, which has been identified by Robert Keith and Clashgirn as having belonged to the deceased.

“Now look at the whole evidence honestly; first, the well-known cause of disagreement between the men; second, the quarrel which took place on the night of the spate; third, the threat or caution; fourth, the presence of the men at the dangerous place; fifth, the fact that Robin Gray was seen there immediately after the scream was heard;

sixth, the tar on the wrist of the dead man and on the palm of the living; and seventh, the fact that the prisoner was about to leave the country; and you cannot help owning with me that it has an ugly appearance."

Mr. Carnegie leaned back, crossing his hands and shutting his mouth, regarding his hearer with the air of a man who has propounded an unanswerable problem, and awaits complacently the futile attempts to expound it he expects to be made.

But whatever attempts Jeanie made mentally, she did not express them. She fixed her eyes on the floor for a little while, and then said quietly—

"Will ye let me hear noo what Robin himsel' answers to it a'?"

"Certainly; but first let me explain the theory of the case—that is, Mr. Smart's theory, as far as I can make it out from what he has said to me. His idea appears to be that Cairnieford and the deceased by some mischance met again after they had quitted the house; that the quarrel was renewed, and in

the struggle Falcon was tumbled over the precipice. He so far acquits him of the intent to murder; but that does not mend the matter much."

"But it's ay something to ken that they dinna think he could do sic a deed intentionally."

"You mus'n't fancy that the fiscal will admit that in prosecuting; but we'll have to use it as a plea for recommendation to mercy if we should fail in everything else."

She could not help a slight shudder at the cool way in which he suggested that possibility, as if it had been one of the commonest things in the world.

"Here's his deposition"—(peering into the paper)—"and it's short enough to be true at any rate. He admits everything,—in opposition to my advice and wish, you will understand; he should not have admitted anything. He admits everything up to the moment he quitted the house, then he deposes—

"I found that my horse had broken from its tether. I wandered about, seeking it,

down by the road as far as the burn where the spate was at its worst, and back again and round by the house. I was more than two hours seeking the horse, as near as I could calculate. I did not heed the rain or wind or cold. I was too much agitated at the time to attend to anything outside of me. I had no thought where I was going or of the danger of falling over any of the crags, until my progress was checked by the paling which stands by the edge of the Brownie's Bite.

“As soon as I touched the paling, I caught glimpses of the white foam of the waters below, and I knew where I was. I stood there some time. Cannot say how long, or what particular reason I stopped there for, except that in the humour I was in then I liked the wild sound of the spate and the cold rain falling on me.

“At last I was turning away from the place when I heard an eerie shriek. It startled me, for I was not so cool as I am for ordinary. I minded the stories I had heard about the kelpie, and could not think of any-

thing else that it might be at such a time and in such a place.'

"That's the weakest bit of it all," interrupted the lawyer, and read on—

"I looked about and saw nothing. There had been a flash of lightning just before the shriek, and that dazed my eyes for a minute. It did occur to me presently that somebody might have fallen over the Bite, unlikely as it seemed for anybody to be out on such a night; but I thought again that it must have been all a mere fancy. I was too much disturbed to think or reason coolly, and was hurrying away from the place when I stumbled against a woman.

"Recognized her to be my wife, and in consequence of what had passed between us, was about to quit her when she fell to the ground in a faint. Almost at the same moment Robert Keith griped my arm, and asked me what I had been doing. Did not mind his question at the time, but told him to carry my wife into the house, and broke away from him. Gave up the attempt to

find the horse, and proceeded across the hills, down to the low road by the shore, and walked on to Portlappoch, where I arrived some time in the forenoon.

“It is a dangerous pathway across the hills, and is rarely used; but have travelled it several times before; certainly not in the dark. It was very dark on this night. Cannot say how I occupied the time from Askaig to my arrival in the town. Was too much agitated to pay much attention to where I was going, and I suppose the time was occupied in wandering about the hills. Know that I lost the way frequently, as I could have travelled the distance thrice in the same space of time under ordinary circumstances.

“Went to Girzie Todd, the fishwife’s, and stayed in her cottage, whilst I sent her to Cairnieford for my father-in-law, Adam Lindsay. Did not care to go myself, because I did not want to see anything which would remind me of my wife. In consequence of what had passed between her and me, was

preparing to leave Portlappoch for a time, but without any fixed plan as to where I was going, or how long I might be absent.

“The mark on my right hand is from tar. I got it in the market on Tuesday when I was examining some sheep which were marked on the back with tar that forenoon, so that it was not dry and stuck to my hand when I accidentally touched it. Noticed it at the time, and rubbed my hand in the wool of the sheep. Do not think there was sufficient left on my hand to stain anything afterward, and it dried in a little while.’

“There,” ejaculated the lawyer, thrusting the paper from him with strong disapprobation: “ye see he admits everything just as if he was in a hurry to ram his head into the noose. It’s the most ridiculous deposition for a man to make wi’ the gallows lowering on him that ever I saw or heard o’.”

“Aye, but it’s the deposition of an honest and an innocent man,” said the wife, proud of his truth in defiance of the peril of it.

“No doubt; but a man may be as innocent

as he likes, if his own and everybody else's testimony proves him guilty, they'll hang him a' the same."

"But they sha'na do that. I tell ye we maun save him."

"That's easy said; but how are we to do it? We'll have to find first somebody to take his place, and that somebody must have tar on his hand and a big grudge in his heart against the deceased. And that will be no easy job, for, by all accounts, Falcon never sought to harm anybody, unless it might be your guidman."

"Never sought to harm onybody," she repeated thoughtfully; and suddenly she sprung to her feet, crying excitedly, "I ken the man!"

"Lord's sake, what's the matter!" exclaimed Carnegie, infected by her excitement, and jumping up also.

"On the morning when Jeamie Falcon came to Cairnieford, he promised me that he would gang awa' and never come back," she said breathlessly; "he didna gang, and on that awfu' night when I charged him wi' deceiv-

ing me and trying to come between me and my guidman, he tauld me that he had waited only that he might do an act o' justice. He had determined to bring Ivan Carrach, the skipper, to the scaffold, for some ill he had done, and Ivan Carrach that he was waiting for came and killed Jeamie to save himsel'."

"Eh, EH, EH!" ejaculated the lawyer in a crescendo tone of amaze, "can you prove that? hae ye ony proof o' that?"

"He told me himsel' what he was waiting for—isna that proof?"

"But did anybody else hear him say it?"

"No"—(reflecting, then briskly)—"Aye, Wattie Todd was in the room at Askaig when he said it, and maun hae heard him."

"Wattie Todd, the daftie?"

"Aye."

Mr. Carnegie's countenance fell.

"I doubt that will no serve us much, unless we can get some proof apart from you that Ivan Carrach had done something that Falcon meant to deliver him over to the law for. Ye see, as you are the wife of the

prisoner, it would be suspected at once that your story was a make-up; and Wattie Todd's evidence would be little counted on. But where is he?"

"He gaed awa' that night seeking Falcon, and his mother, Girzie, is awa' seeking him. I haena seen him since."

"That's worse yet, for little help as he might hae been it would hae been better than none. Let's see now—has Carrach been seen about, immediately before or on Tuesday, or onytime since?"

"I dinna ken, but the Laird could tell us."

"Just wait here till I come back."

He put on his hat and went out hastily. During his absence Jeanie was busy searching her memory for any hint Falcon might have dropped in their conversation as to the possible cause of his enmity against the skipper. Like a flash of light Falcon's words recurred to her—

"I blame him for all the misfortune that has befallen us."

Why should he blame him? She had just

remembered the answer to that question when Mr. Carnegie returned with disappointment on his visage.

“I met the Laird at the bank,” he said, shaking his head, “but he has not seen Carrach for a long while, though he believes he is no farther away than Ayr, and may be here to-day or to-morrow.”

“I believe he’s telling a lee,” she exclaimed sharply; “but I’ll find out without his help. I can tell ye now the cause o’ the quarrel between Carrach and Jeamie.”

“What was it?”

“Ye mind that the *Colin* was burnt?”

“Quite well.”

“Jeamie tauld me that Carrach himsel’ had kendled the fire and burnt the brig, though he didna ken what his purpose was. That was what he blamed for parting him and me, and it was for that he said Carrach should swing on the gallows.”

“For mercy’s sake, Mrs. Gray, take care what ye say,” cried the astonished lawyer, “or ye’ll bring yoursel’ into trouble. Do ye

know that this would almost involve Clashgirn himself in a conspiracy to defraud the insurance company? The *Colin* was insured in the office I'm agent for, and it was a considerable loss."

"Then that would be a reason for the Laird telling you a lee about Carrach. Oh, Heaven be thanked the light is dawning on me now, and I'll get at the bottom o't before many hours are gone."

Mr. Carnegie was trotting about the floor in violent agitation.

"Where are you going?" he asked as she moved to the door.

"To Clashgirn."

"Stop a minute; if we're to make anything by this extraordinary clue, we must handle it calmly. What are you to do there?"

"See Mrs. Begg and the servants, and get out o' them ae way or another whether they hae seen Carrach or no lately."

"I wonder if it's safe to let you go—you might spoil everything if you were to let the Laird guess what you were driving at."

“Hae nae fear. Robin Gray’s life is depending on me, and that thought will guide me as cunningly as all your experience could do.”

The little man looked at her calm resolute face, and an expression of confidence overspread his own.

“I’ll trust you,” he said, nodding; “it’s wonderful what a woman can do when her blood’s up. You’re a brave woman, Mrs. Gray, and I believe you’ll manage this better than I would myself, though I am counted a gey sharp hand at ferreting. Just keep cool, question everything, and admit nothing, and you’ll manage it. In the meantime I’ll turn up all the facts about the *Colin*, and if the point o’ a needle can prick a hole in them I’ll do’t. Come back here as soon as you can, and if I’m no in, send for me.”

Jeanie’s heart was throbbing hopefully, and with a light step she took the road to Clashgirn. The clouds were clearing as she thought.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIRST STEP.

“ Ah, woman, I’ll tell ye what I heard yestreen,
 Somebody was someway they shouldna hae been,
It’s no that I’m jalousin’ ocht that is ill,
But we ay ken our ain ken, and sae will we still.”

—*A. A. Ritchie.*

She approached the house cautiously. There was a keen frosty wind blowing, and that would have been excuse enough if any one had observed that her plaid was drawn tightly round her and over her head, thus screening her features. The day, too, was already beginning to darken, and that rendered it difficult for any one to recognize her at a distance.

She was anxious to escape the observation of the Laird, at any rate until after she had seen the housekeeper. She passed round to the back of the house and entered by the kitchen door.

Two strapping lassies with red arms were bustling about preparing the luggies and the dishes for the evening's milk. Both recognized her and both paused in their work, exclaiming, "Hech, sirs!"

"Is Mrs. Begg in?" she asked.

But before either of the girls could reply, Mrs. Begg made herself heard, for she had just entered the kitchen from the lobby.

"What are ye standing there glowerin' at noo, ye lazy tawpies, as if there was nae work to be done in or out o' the house? It's my opinion ye would stand and glower at ane anither if the house was in a lowe, though ye're no that bonnie either."

"How are you the day, Mrs. Begg?" said Jeanie, advancing to her.

"Hech, sirs, Mistress Gray!—I'm fine, thank ye for speiring; and what in a' the world brings ye this gate?"

"I came ower to speak wi' ye, Mrs. Begg, for there's nae other woman frien' I hae sae near me to advise me except Mrs. Dunbar, and she's auld, ye ken."

Whether Jeanie had intended it or not, her address pleased the good-natured housekeeper of the Laird, by flattering her with the idea that she was a more likely person to apply to for advice in a difficulty than anybody else of Jeanie's acquaintance.

“Aye, aye, and I'm glad to see ye, guid-wife, and glad to see that you're no looking sae cast down as I feared ye would be when I heard o' Cairnieford's misfortune. But come your ways but the house and we'll get sitting doon. The men'll be in enow to their supper, and we couldna weel hae our crack when a'boddy was guzzling and listening round us.”

She gave certain instructions to the lassies about their work, and gossiping all the way conducted Jeanie across the lobby and into a little chamber, which was called Mrs. Begg's room. In this apartment she entertained the friends who might call on her, and here slept, in the usual cupboard-like bed, the door of which being closed during the day, left a space of about ten feet square to serve as parlour.

Jeanie had been several times in this apartment since her marriage, for immediately after that event Mrs. Begg had visited her and claimed her as a neighbour and a particular friend, for the sake of the liking both had borne James Falcon. The goodwoman had at the first been inclined to blame Jeanie for marrying so soon after the news had come of her lover's loss, but she became her firm friend and defender against envious tongues after a very brief conversation with her on the subject.

She had begun to speak in a lower tone than she had used in the kitchen as she had crossed the lobby, and the modulation was retained even in her own room, with the door closed. The reason was soon made known.

"Eh, but it's been sad wark," she said, shaking her head mournfully; "whaever is at the bottom o't, it's been sad wark; and there's the puir lad that I couldna hae been fonder o' if he'd been my ain bairn lying up the stair in his coffin—him that I expeckit would hae seen me to my hame."

“Up the stair,” exclaimed Jeanie below her breath, and agitated by the thought that she was so near all that remained of the man she had so dearly loved, and whose love had been so fatal to them both.

Mrs. Begg wiped the tears from her eyes, and went on more composedly.

“Aye, just aboon our heads, ready to be buried the morn. He was a bonnie lad, and a kind-hearted ane, and noo I daurna ask ye to take a last look o’ him, for the sicht would haunt ye a’ the days o’ your life. But there’s nae use greeting ower spill’d milk; he’s gane, puir lad, and he’s happy, and that’s mair than he ever would hae been here, I think, without you.”

“They’re surely gaun to bury him soon,” said Jeanie, huskily, and not knowing well what to say.

“Aye, it’s no usual, and it’s scarcely decent to gie the body to the mools barely a day after the breath is awa’; but the Laird’s maist in as big a hurry to get him out o’ the house, noo he’s dead, as he was to get him out o’t

when he was living. He says the sooner it's a' by the better; and for ance I agree wi' him; for I want to get awa' frae this house, and I'll gang as soon as the burial's by."

"Do ye mean that ye're to leave Clashgirn a'thegither?" queried Jeanie, much relieved by this change of subject, which enabled her to direct her thoughts to the purpose of her visit.

"Deed and I am gaun awa' for a'thegither, an' they'll be clever folk that catch me across the doorstane o' this house again. No, I wouldna bide here noo for a barrow fu' o' gowd."—(With all the complacent dignity of one who resists a great temptation).

"I ay thought ye were weel settled. What's gar'd ye change your mind?"

"Everything's gar'd me change my mind, Mistress Gray. The way I hae been used by that hirpling heepocrite that folk ca' the Laird——"

And her tongue, once loosened on that topic, ran on untiringly for an hour, with the details of the indignities to which she had

been subjected, and seemed capable of continuing in the same strain for any length of time. She only paused once, to produce milk, bread, and beef, and to insist upon Jeanie partaking freely of them all.

Jeanie had no appetite, but she forced herself to eat for the pleasure of her hostess, and she was refreshed and strengthened by the meal. She listened patiently to Mrs. Begg's tirade, interested because no word could be spoken about Nicol McWhapple now which would not have interested her. Her patience obtained its reward.

"Ye ken that I'm no ane to speak ill o' my neebors without guid cause," proceeded the housekeeper; "but it does seem to me that a man wha locks himsel' up in a room o' his ain house, an' winna see naebody for a whole day, while he's got some ane locked in wi' him, canna be about ony guid wark."

"Did the Laird do that?"

"Aye, nae farther gane than Wednesday. Oh, ye needna be scandaleesed, it wasna a woman that was wi' him but a man."

“And wha was the man?”—(holding her breath and trying to speak calmly).

The short winter gloaming had already made the room so dark that Mrs. Begg could not see the eager face which was turned toward her.

“I couldna be sure; but I heard them speaking in whispers like, and at night, when the Laird thought a’ body was in bed, he let the man out as quietly as though it had been a robber that he had been helping to rob his house.”

“Ye saw the man syne?”

“I got a glint o’ him frae the door there.”

“And wha do ye think was he?”

“I couldna be sure, as I tauld ye, but I believe it was nae ither body nor that drucken sot Ivan Carrach.—Mercy keep’s! What’s the matter wi’ ye?”

Jeanie had stretched out her hand and griped her by the arm.

“Dinna speak sae loud, Mistress Begg, he might hear ye. Is he in the now?”

“I dinna ken, an’ I dinna care whether he

hears me or no"—(raising her voice to a higher key in defiance of eaves-droppers).

"But whisht ye, hinny, for my sake"—(in a low agitated tone)—"I wouldna like him to ken I was here, and—oh, Mistress Begg, I can trust you as my best friend?"

"Surely ye can do that," responded the housekeeper, astounded and curious.

"I'll tell ye then. I want to find Carrach—for I think he could gie testimony that would clear my guidman."

"Save's a', what gars ye think that?"

"Did ye no say that it was Wednesday he was here?" she said, without answering Mrs. Begg's question.

"I dinna say it was him, but I thought it was."

"And it was Wednesday?"

"Aye—that was the day."

"And ye didna see him coming in?"

"No—naebody about saw him that I ken."

"Then he might hae come in through the night?"

"Aye, or early in the morning."

Jeanie was silent. That was the morning after the spate—the morning after the crime had been committed. If she could only prove that he had been lurking about the place on that night, and that he had stolen away on the succeeding night like a man who dreaded observation, that would be one great step gained in her purpose. Her conviction of his guilt was now positive, and with much cogency she argued out her course.

The Laird was clearly in some way involved with him; for he had concealed him in the house, and he had denied having seen him lately. No doubt he would endeavour to warn him that from some source suspicion had been raised against him. As he had said that the skipper was likely to arrive on this day or the next, he might arrive at any hour, and the Laird would inform him of his danger, and he would escape.

The way to find Carrach, then, was to watch the Laird.

Mrs. Begg's curiosity had kept her silent for an unusual length of time, peering through

the rapidly deepening darkness at her visitor, expecting her to speak.

“I’ll get the lamp lighted,” she said at last, rising. “I dinna like to sit in the dark wi’ him lying up the stair—it gies me a kind o’ cauld shiver at every blast o’ wind.”

Jeanie shivered herself at the reminder of what was so near, but she pressed the woman down on her seat.

“No yet, dinna get the light yet,” she whispered. “I’m gaun to ask ye a favour, Mrs. Begg.”

“Onything I can do for ye——”

“You will do, I ken. Ye said ye were gaun to quit Clashgirn after the funeral; will ye gang ower to Cairnieford, then, and bide wi’ my mother for twa or three days? She’s unco puirly now, an’ I canna get attending to her while Robin’s in trouble. Ye would cheer her up I’m sure, and it would gie ye time to look about ye to see where ye were gaun to bide or what ye were to do.”

“I’ll be right weel pleased to do that; but is there naething else I can do for ye?”

“Aye, let me bide here wi’ ye the nicht.”

“I’ll be glad o’ your company, and syne ye’ll hae plenty o’ time to tell me a’ about your guidman’s difficulty, and——”

“But I want ye no to licht the lamp, an’ no to speir at me my reason for asking this till the morn.”

“I’ll no speir a single question, though I would like to ken what ye expect. Ye surely dinna think Carrach’s in the house yet?” she said, breaking her promise in the same breath which gave it.

“I couldna say, but I can tell ye this, that the Laird’s no willing to let us ken where he is.”

“Is he no? then we’ll find out in spite o’ him,” exclaimed the housekeeper, brightening at the idea of being able to do anything to spite her master.

“Can ye find out if the Laird has come hame yet?”

“That can I, and will in a minute.”

She quitted the room, returning presently with the intelligence that the Laird had been

at home for the last hour. Jeanie thereupon moved her seat to the door, taking a position from which she could command the whole of the lobby when the door was slightly ajar. Her movements were very resolute, although very quiet; and excited the curiosity of Mrs. Begg so much that she kept up a constant fire of gossip, cunningly interlarded with inquiries which, if answered, would have enlightened her as to Jeanie's purpose. But whenever she made any glaring breach in her promise, she good-naturedly checked herself, and confessed that she could not help letting slip a word now and again, for she was really "unco concerned to ken what ye jalouse, and may be I could help ye mair nor ye think."

In spite of that inducement Jeanie was guarded in her answers, for although she would have trusted anything to Mrs. Begg's kindly intents, she could not trust her tongue.

She was relieved for about an hour, during which the housekeeper was away seeing to the disposition of affairs for the night. When Mrs. Begg came back, Jeanie was in exactly

the same posture by the door, listening and watching the lobby.

The servants had all retired to rest, and the house became quiet. Mrs. Begg still talked, but in whispers now, as if the quietude around her impressed her with more caution. She opened the door of her bed, and asked her guest if she were going to lie down.

“No yet, if you please.”

“Ye dinna mean that you’re to sit up a’ night?”

“I do.”

“And what guid will that do ye?”—(her tone rising.)

Jeanie was by her side in a moment.

“I maun tell ye what I’m waiting for, Mistress Begg. I believe that Carrach may come here the night again, and I want to make sure o’t. That’s the long and short o’ the matter.”

“Ye might hae told me that afore, and I’m sure I wouldna hae interfered. But I’ll no gang to bed either since that’s the way o’t. I’ll just sit up and keep ye company.”

And yawning she seated herself on the side of the bed, whilst Jeanie resumed her place by the door. Mrs. Begg kept awake for some time after her usual hour of going to bed, and would probably have kept awake all night if she had been at liberty to speak. But Jeanie had begged her to keep silence lest the Laird should overhear her—a very probable event in the stillness which prevailed—and her desire to spite him was sufficiently strong to obtain her submission even to that troublesome condition.

The result, however, was that she yawned a great deal, had to check herself often in the act of breaking the rule, and at last, resting her head on the pillow, fell asleep, snoring loudly.

Jeanie calculated that it must be past midnight. It was certainly more than an hour since Mrs. Begg had gone to sleep, when her pulse quickened as she fancied she heard a slight creaking sound as of the handle of a door being cautiously turned.

She bent forward with greedy ears and eyes.

The sound had ceased, and there was a long pause, during which she heard nothing but the rushing of the wind outside and the snoring of her companion. Then there was a thin stream of light across the dark lobby, and she knew that the door of the Laird's room was stealthily opened.

He stepped out, his hat and plaid on, his thick staff and a small bundle in his left hand, whilst with the right he closed the door. He locked it, for she heard the click of the bolt as it shot into the socket. The lobby was dark again, but she could hear him creeping across it to the front door. He opened it in the same stealthy way as he had opened the other, and stepped out, carefully closing it after him.

She started to her feet, and with swift noiseless steps gained the door. In another moment she was outside.

It was a clear frosty night. There was no moon, but there was light enough for her to distinguish objects at about ten yards' distance. She did not see him at first, as he

was passing under the shadow of some trees, but she heard his footsteps crunching the gravel, and that warned her to be careful of her own steps. She sat down on the doorstep, and, panting, removed her shoes. She did not think of the frost or the sharp stones which might cut her feet. Her heart was palpitating wildly with the hope that she was on the track which was to lead her to the proof of her husband's innocence; palpitating too with the fear lest any false step should betray her before she had made the discovery for which she was prepared to brave any danger.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE SHORE.

“ Her look, ance gay as gleams o’ gowd
Upon a silvery sea,
Now dark and dowie as the cloud
That creeps athwart yon leafless wood
In cauld December’s e’e.”—*W. Thom.*

Carrying her shoes in her hand, she stepped lightly after him, her eyes noting his every movement, so that if he should chance to look round she could drop flat on the earth and escape any casual glance. But whether it was because he was too confident of his security from observation at that hour, or his hurry to reach his destination was too great, he did not pause or turn his head.

He was proceeding at the greatest speed his lameness permitted. He suddenly turned off the road, passed through a gap in the hedge, and proceeded across the fields. He was moving straight for the shore, which was

little more than half a mile distant from the house in a straight line, although it was much farther by the road.

Jeanie divined at once where he was going to when he struck into the fields; and she was satisfied that he was either to meet Carrach or to erect some pre-arranged signal of danger.

She heard the loud swishing sound of the sea as the waves tossed on the beach, and receded, leaving a white track of foam. Then she could see the waters glistening in the dim light, and far out the waves rushing at one another, rising and breaking in dark mysterious forms. Then the Laird's figure became plain to her as he halted on the road which passed along the shore about fifty yards above high-water mark, and which was called the low road.

There, for the first time, he looked about him: she dropped down on her knees and crouched to the earth, watching him still and holding her breath. He delayed so long that she began to fear he had seen her; but at

last he moved on across the road and down to the pebbly beach.

Between the road and the beach there was a long track of green hillocks like a range of miniature hills and glens, which was called the Links. The innumerable hollows promised her greater security from detection than any part of the way hither had done, and she advanced boldly.

She had lost sight of the Laird since he had crossed the Links, and she was obliged to select her path carefully so as to move amongst the hollows, lest in crossing any of the mounds he should chance to see her.

She came suddenly upon the beach, and saw the man standing with his face seaward, but scarcely more than six feet from her, and she shrunk back trembling. The slightest slip of her foot would have made him aware of her presence.

She peered round to find some place from which she might watch him without having to expose her head, and a solitary whin bush growing near the top of the hillock offered

her the mask she required. Creeping up behind it on her hands and knees, she parted the stems and looked through the opening.

The Laird uncovered the small bundle he had carried in his left hand: a blaze of light flashed in her eyes and revealed to her that it had been a lantern he had brought to the place covered by a thick cloth that it might not attract the attention of any stray gauger or coast-guardsmen—the only persons likely to be abroad at that hour.

He slowly raised the lantern from the ground to his arm's length above his head and lowered it thrice. That done he hastily re-covered the light, glanced cautiously up and down along the beach, and then looked out to sea.

Far across the water Jeanie observed a speck of light rise and fall thrice as if in answer to the signal.

The Laird drew back to the hillock and seated himself just beneath the watcher's head. She fancied that he was so near that by reaching out her arm she might have

touched him. She fancied that, in spite of the rush of the wind and the splash of the waves, she could hear him breathe, and she almost stifled herself in her efforts to repress her own breath lest he should hear it, whilst for the same reason she was afraid to move from her unpleasant proximity to him.

She knew that an answer to the signal had been given from Carrach's brig, and she knew that Carrach was coming to him.

She was not insensible to the peril of her position in the event of detection. Alone on that solitary beach with two men rendered desperate by terror of the consequences of the discovery of their guilt, what might they not do, what mad crime might they not dare to commit, to secure themselves? Their lives might be at her mercy if she were to regain her home in safety; and if that were the case they would not hesitate to insure her silence at any hazard.

The question first occurred to her now, what was she to do when Carrach came? She was powerless to prevent him going away

again, and what value would her unsupported testimony possess to outweigh the oath of the Laird? No motive could be assigned for his participation in such a crime as that with which she purposed charging the skipper, whilst the strongest motive could be attached to her attempt to prove their guilt—namely, her desire to screen her husband.

She felt sick and disheartened at thought of her peril and its apparent uselessness. If she had only brought Mrs. Begg or somebody with her who could have borne disinterested testimony to it all, she might have secured the object which now seemed so near, and yet so far beyond her power of turning it to account. But she did not think of running away. With dogged tenacity she clung to her determination to see and hear everything. In what manner her knowledge was to be used was a question to be settled afterward.

She heard the dip of oars and their straining sound in the rowlocks. Presently she descried a dark object moving on the water to the shore, and gradually the object took

form and she saw a man in a small boat pulling with vigorous strokes through the surf. The keel of the boat grated on the beach; the man in a slow heavy way got out, pulled the boat half out of the water, fixed a small anchor in the sand and shingle, and then leisurely looked up and down the shore.

He had landed only a few yards west from the point where the Laird was waiting. The latter called, "Here," and the man, in his slow heavy way, strode up the beach, his feet grating on the pebbles. The Laird did not rise to meet him, but waited till the man found him, which he was enabled to do with the assistance of another call.

He halted in front of the Laird, and facing the bush through which Jeanie was watching. He did not halt like another man, but rather like a heavy stone which stops when the impetus has become exhausted. And like the stone he seemed to sink in the ground as if he were never to move of his own accord from the spot again.

"Oich, you was there," said Carrach in his

stolid way; "I'll thocht you was no coming you was so long."

"I came as soon as I thought it safe to come," answered the Laird pettishly. "Why hae ye no brought one of your men ashore with you?"

"I'll thocht it was better to settle our matters atween oursel's with nobody else."

"I told you to bring a man with you to witness you putting your mark to the receipt."

"Aye"—(rubbing his sunflower head and face slowly with his cuff)—"but there was shust two men on board, for I had no time to get hands at Ayr, and I couldna bring one o' them away."

"Ye canna work the schooner with two men only?"

"No; but I'll shust put in at the first port we come to and get the hands we'll want."

"Ye'd better mind where ye put in at, for I warn ye there's nae corner in this country safe for ye. Lawyer Carnegie asked me the day when I had seen ye, and where, and I

hae nae doubt that if he get's haud o' ye there'll be sma' chance o' your ever setting foot on board the *Ailsa* again."

The Laird spoke in a sharp uneasy tone; but the Highlander was as little moved by the information on which he placed so much importance as if he had told him that Mr. Carnegie had invited him to take a dram.

"Oich, thae law writers are always wanting to know something. But I'll no care to spoke wi' him any more. So you'll shust gie me the siller and I'll go."

"You must bring one of the men first to witness your receipt."

"What, go back all the way to the schooner and come here again? You'll no mean that?"

"But I do mean that. Do you think I'm to pay a hundred precious gowden guineas without some satisfaction for't?"

"I'll put my mark."

"That's no enough."

"There was nobody ever said that before, though I have put it to hundreds o' papers."

"That was different: I want to make sure

that ye'll no fash me again, and the way to do that is to make ye feel that if ye try it ye'll get the worst o't."

Carrach was silent for a long time, rubbing his cuff over his head and face twice to refresh himself. At length—

"You'll have them with you?"

"Aye, I got them out o' the bank the day."

"Weel, I'll shust told you my mind. You'll want to make everything right for yoursel', and I'll want to do the same. Goot. Then I'll took the siller from you and will give you no marks nor witness at all—Pe-tam."

The threat was pronounced without the least variation of his ordinary thick husky tone, being emphasized merely by the customary oath. He did not move from his position; he was so well satisfied that he possessed the power to execute his threat that he was in no hurry.

The Laird, however, jumped to his feet and begun backward to ascend the hillock on which he had been sitting, raising his heavy staff to protect himself.

Jeanie, trembling at the imminent risk of discovery, in which the Laird's sudden movement placed her, shrunk back into the hollow, and begun to crawl away.

"If ye touch me, I'll fell ye," shrieked McWhapple, flourishing his staff desperately.

"I'll no like that, for it was no pleasant to be fell—Pe-tam, what's yon?"

And with unexpected alacrity he started forward on to the hillock. The Laird, mistaking his motive, aimed a furious blow at him, which, however, fell wide of the mark; the Laird in consequence, losing his balance, rolled down on the shingle. His chagrin at this accident was lost in his amazement at the disappearance of Carrach, and next at the wild frightened scream of a woman which echoed along the shore.

He sat bolt upright, staring vacantly before him, and shivering with vague alarm.

It was Jeanie who had screamed. Stealing away from her hiding-place, she had in her haste to escape miscalculated the height of the mound behind the one she had just

quitted, and in passing over it she had become visible to the Highlander.

He, suspecting treachery of some sort on the part of the Laird, rushed after her, and almost before she was aware of being pursued—certainly before she had time to regain her feet for flight—he had seized her by the plaid. She screamed; but she was up instantly, facing him with terror trembling on her lips, and rage flashing in her eyes.

He held the plaid with a firm grasp, and his big bovine eyes rolled all over her in dull wonder and perplexity. The idea which was slowly forming in his mind was that the Laird had chosen a singular mode of betraying him, but decidedly a pleasing companion.

Quick as the thought came, she slipped out of the folds of the plaid and left it in his hands. She fled with the swift feet of terror over the uneven ground.

Carrach was a slow man, slow in thought, and slow in action; but in an emergency which threatened his life, even his dull wit was quickened, as he had proved once already on this

night. So he stared stupidly at the plaid which the wind fluttered in his hand, then dropped it with a hoarse growl, and was after her before she had made twenty paces from him.

She was light, and was spurred by fear. He was heavy; but he too was spurred by fear, and he had strength, and the dogged persistence of a man who, being slow to catch a thought, is still slower to relinquish it. He had caught the notion now that it was necessary to his safety to stop the woman, and held on steadily in spite of many stumbles.

Still, it was probable that, aided by the night, and the concealment afforded by the many hollows she traversed, that she would have succeeded in eluding him; but her foot struck a stone, and she was pitched headforemost over one of the hillocks. Her head struck the ground, and she lay for several minutes stunned.

She was on her feet again, and was somewhat confusedly looking back to see how near her pursuer might be, when his fat dirty hands grasped her arms.

“You’ll no do that again—Pe-tam,” he gasped.

Her whole strength seemed to desert her at his touch, and her limbs shook with the enervation of the strain which had been upon them. She was utterly exhausted and helpless in his hands.

Uttering a savage growl at every step, he dragged her after him back to the place where the Laird still sat, bewildered and trembling under all the horrors which his own cowardice and fears conjured up.

As they approached the place, the sharp wind cooled her feverish cheeks, whilst the sense of danger gradually restored her vigour, and she made a sudden and violent effort to release herself. But she was like a child in the clutch of a bear. He just folded his arms round her, pinioning her arms to her sides, lifted her up, and carried her the rest of the way in spite of her despairing struggles. She screamed, he growled, but did not halt until he set her down close to his boat.

As he had passed the Laird, the latter had

risen, followed, and, recognizing her, stood cowering in abject terror.

“We’re lost—ruined,” he whined cringingly as if about to drop on his knees and crave mercy.

Dull as he was, the Highlander had no need to ask the Laird how far he was responsible for the woman’s presence.

“Hold your whisht, woman—Pe-tam,” he growled; “you’ll shust spoil your voice, and there’s nobody to hear your spoke.”

He drew her wrists together behind her, and held them fast in his left hand, whilst with his right he took off the thick kerchief which was tied loosely round his throat.

“Put that round her mouth and shut up her noise,” he said, addressing the Laird. “Oich, I’ll never hear nobody skirl like that before.”

The Laird, with trembling fingers, complied, passing the kerchief across her mouth twice, and tying it at the back of her head, moaning all the while over the predicament.

Carrach next handed him a knife, from

which the Laird shrunk with as much dread as if it had been raised to strike him.

“What’s that for?” he gasped, with chattering teeth.

And Jeanie, still struggling, felt a cold chill pass over her as if her last hour had come.

“What did you’ll thocht it was for?” demanded the Highlander savagely. “Go and cut the rope from the anchor yonder—that’s what it’s for.”

“What are ye gaun to do?”

“Get the rope and you’ll saw.”

“I’ll have no more violence,” shrieked the Laird vehemently. “It’s a’ your fault that I’m in sorrow and trembling this night—a mad fool I was to think that your thick stupid head could ever hae done onything right. But I’ll hae nae mair violence—in the presence o’ a witness I protest against it.”

The selfish alarm of the wretch, which even in that place endeavoured to shift all blame from his own shoulders, produced the singular effect on the stolid skipper of cooling whatever passion he had shown.

“Very goot,” he said, in his usual slow way and husky voice; “very goot, we’ll took aff the clout that’s stuffed her mouth, and we’ll let her go safe home. Oich, aye, to be sure. She can do no hurt to me, for I’ll be away; but you’ll see all your friends the pailies, and the provosts, and the fiscals, and the sheriff-offishers all wanting to shake hands with you at Clashgirn fine and early in the morning. Oich, yes, let her go, it’s all the same one thing to me, and she’ll foucht till I’ll be tired of her—Pe-tam.”

“I’ll get the rope.”

The Laird took the knife, and with nervous haste hirpled to the boat and cut the rope close to the rings. Carrach roughly tied her hands and feet; then lifted her into the stern of the boat with about as much care as he might have used had she been a keg of whisky. His respect could not go farther than that.

“She’ll do there,” he muttered, seating himself on the edge of the boat; “and now, Laird, we’ll shust finish our business. Where’s

your paper, and I'll put my mark, and she'll be witness to't."

"Her? What are ye gaun to do with her?"

"Took her away with me, you said."

"I said? I never said anything about it —I'll hae nae hand in't."

"Very goot, we'll let her go as soon as you gie me the siller."

"I'll gie ye the siller"—(quickly)—"and ye'll better do as ye think best wi' her."

"Aye, I'll thocht that. I was wanting a wife this lang while, and she'll do."

The Laird produced the paper from his pocket which he had previously asked Carrach to put his mark to without a witness, but which he had on this occasion desired to have duly witnessed, with the idea that the formality would impress the Highlander the more deeply with its importance, and so terrify him from any attempt to brave its power. He had also brought with him a pen, a small ink-bottle, and a book to serve as desk.

He uncovered his lantern; Carrach made his mark with the stolid indifference of his

character. The Laird asked Jeanie if she would sign, and by a movement of her head she eagerly consented: first, with the idea that her hands loosened that would be one step gained toward freedom, and second, with the hope that, whatever was about to happen to her now, she might be able to get back and obtain possession of that document, which would be the strongest proof she could adduce of the truth of her narrative of the strange events of this night.

But Carrach only released her right hand, and laying the paper on the seat before her, he rested his hands on her shoulders ready to frustrate any movement she might make.

She signed, he secured her hand again, and held the paper up. The Laird placed a small canvas bag in the boat, and the skipper gave him the receipt.

“They’ll be all right,” he said, touching the bag with his foot, and his eyes glistening at the clink of it.

“Aye, a hundred gowden pieces”—(mournfully).

“If they’re no, I’ll come back for the rest —Pe-tam.’

“If ye ever come within sight o’ me again,” cried the Laird, with all the petty venom of his nature finding vent, “I’ll gie ye ower to the hangman as sure as I’m living this minute. Whether it harms mysel’ or no, I swear to ye I’ll do’t.”

Carrach laughed hoarsely, pushed off the boat, ran into the water up to the knees after it, and then jumped in, taking the oars and pulling out from the shore with long vigorous strokes.

He did not utter a word to the helpless woman, who lay at the stern, or show by any sign that he was conscious of her presence.

END OF VOL. II.

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