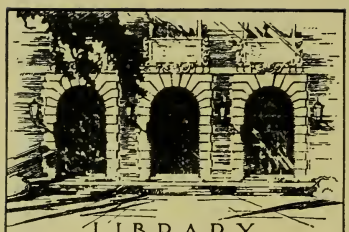
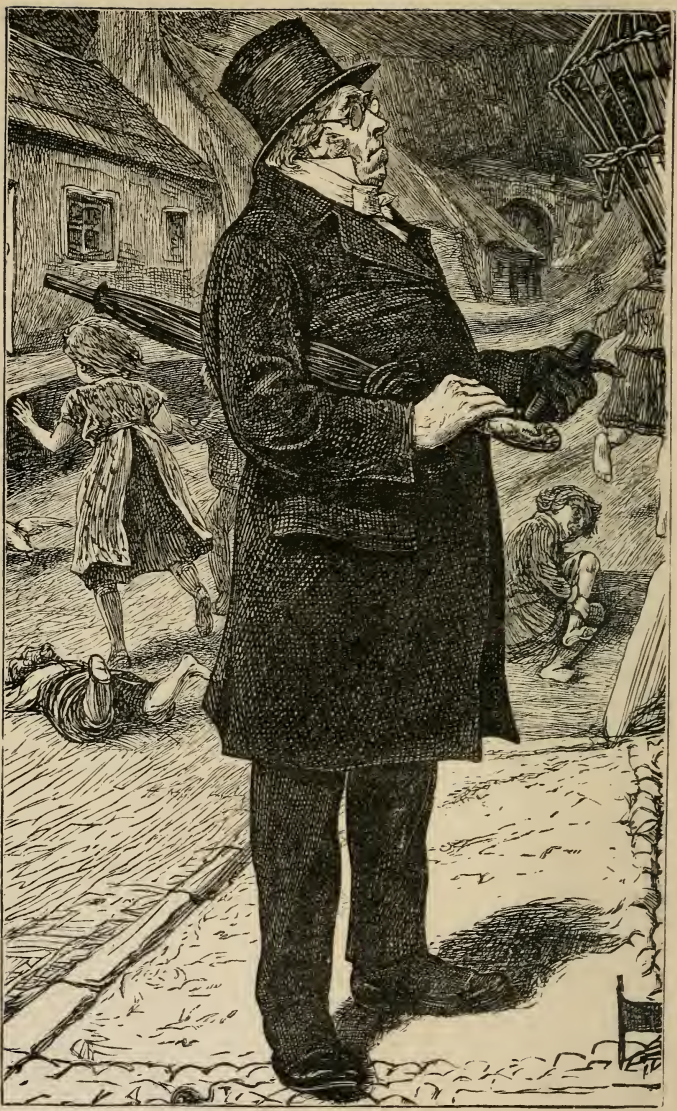
The Starling



THE STARLING

VOL. I.

LONDON :
R. CLAY, SON, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS,
BREAD STREET HILL.



Page 52.

THE STARLING

A Scotch Story

By NORMAN MACLEOD, D.D.
ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS

VOL. I.

ALEXANDER STRAHAN, PUBLISHER
56, LUDGATE HILL, LONDON
1867

CONTENTS OF VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

ANTECEDENTS.

"THE man was aince a poacher!" So said, or rather breathed with his hard wheezing breath, Peter Smellie, shopkeeper and elder, into the ears of Robert Menzies, a brother elder, who was possessed of a more humane disposition. They were conversing in great confidence about the important "case" of Sergeant Adam Mercer. What that case was, the reader will learn by and by. The only reply of Robert Menzies was, "Is't possible!" accompanied by a start and a steady gaze at his well-informed brother. "It's a fac' I tell ye," continued Smellie, "but ye'll

keep it to yersel'—keep it to yersel', for it doesna do to injure a brither wi'oot cause; yet it's richt ye should ken what a bad beginning our freen' has had. Pit your thumb on't, however, in the *meantime*—keep it, as the minister says, *in retentis*, which I suppose means, till needed."

Smellie went on his way to attend to some parochial duty, nodding and smiling, and again admonishing his brother to "keep it to himsel'." He seemed unwilling to part with the copyright of such a spicy bit of gossip. Menzies inwardly repeated, "A poacher! wha would have thocht it? At the same time, I see——" But I will not record the harmonies, real or imaginary, which Mr. Menzies so clearly perceived between the early and latter habits of the Sergeant.

And yet the gossiping Smellie, whose nose

had tracked out the history of many people in the parish of Drumsylie, was in this, as in most cases, accurately informed. The Sergeant of whom he spoke had been a poacher some thirty years before, in a district several miles off. The wonder was how Smellie had discovered the fact, or how, if true, it could affect the present character or position of one of the best men in the parish. Yet true it was, and it is as well to confess it, not with the view of excusing it, but only to account for Mercer's having become a soldier, and to show how one who became "meek as a sheathed sword" in his later years, had once been possessed of a very keen and ardent temperament, whose ruling passion was the love of excitement, in the shape of battle with game and keepers. I accidentally heard the whole story, which, on account of other

circumstances in the Sergeant's later history, interested me more than I fear it may my readers.

Mercer did not care for money, nor seek to make a trade of the unlawful pleasure of shooting without a licence. Nor in the district in which he lived was the offence then looked upon in a light so very disreputable as it is now; neither was it pursued by the same disreputable class. The sport itself was what Mercer loved, for its own sake, and it had become to him quite a passion. For two or three years he had frequently transgressed, but he was at last caught on the early dawn of a summer's morning by John Spence, the game-keeper of Lord Bennock. John had often received reports from the under keeper and watchers, of some unknown and mysterious poacher who had hitherto eluded

every attempt to seize him. Though rather too old for very active service, Spence resolved to concentrate all his experience—for, like many a thoroughbred keeper, he had himself been a poacher in his youth—to discover and secure the transgressor; but how he did so it would take pages to tell. Adam never suspected John of troubling himself about such details as that of watching poachers, and John never suspected that Adam was the poacher. The keeper, we may add, was cousin-german to Mercer's mother. The capture itself was not difficult; for John having lain in wait, suddenly confronted Adam, who, scorning the idea of flying, much more of struggling with his old cousin, quietly accosted him with, "Weel, John, ye hae catched me at last."

"Adam Mercer!" exclaimed the keeper, with a look of horror. "It canna be you! It's no' possible!"

"It's just me, John, and no mistak'," said Adam, quietly throwing himself down on the heather, and twisting a bit about his finger. "For better or waur, I'm in yer power; but had I been a ne'er-do-weel, like Willy Steel, or Tam McGrath, I'd hae blackened my face and whammel'd ye ower and pit your head in a wallee afore ye could cheep as loud as a stane-chucker; but when I saw wha ye war, I gied in."

"I wad raither than a five-pun-note I had never seen yer face! Keep us! what's to be dune! What wull yer mither say? and his Lordship? Na, what wull onybody say wi' a spark o' decency when they hear——"

"Dinna fash yer thoomb, John; tak' me and send me to the jail."

"The jail! What gude will that do to you or me, laddie? I'm clean donnered about the business. Let me sit down aside ye; keep laigh, in case the keepers see ye, and tell me by what misshanter ye ever took to this wicked business, and under *my* nose, as if *I* couldna fin' ye oot!"

"Sport, sport!" was Mercer's reply. "Ye ken, John, I'm a shoemaker, and it's a dull trade, and squeezing the clams against the wame is ill for digestion; and when that fails, ane's speerits fail, and the warld gets black and dowie; and whan things gang wrang wi' me, I canna flee to drink: but I think o' the moors that I kent sae weel when my faither was a keeper to Murray o' Cultrain. Ye mind my faither? was he no' a han' at a gun!"

"He was that—the verra best," said John.

"Aweel," continued Adam, "when doon in the mouth, I ponder ower the braw days o' health and life I had when carrying his bag, and getting a shot noos and thans as a reward; and it's a truth I tell ye, that the *whirr kick-ic-ic* o' a covey o' groose aye pits my bluid in a tingle. It's a sort o' madness that I canna accoont for; but I think I'm no responsible for't. Paitricks are maist as bad, though turnips and stubble are no' to be compared wi' the heather, nor walkin' amang them like the far-aff braes, the win'y taps o' the hills, or the lown glens. Mony a time I hae promised to drap the gun and stick to the last, but when I'm no' weel and wauken and see the sun glintin', and think o' the wide bleak muirs, and the fresh caller air o' the hill, wi' the scent o' the braes an' the bog

myrtle, and thae whirrin' craturs—man, I canna help it! I spring up and grasp the gun, and I'm aff!"

The reformed poacher and keeper listened with a poorly-concealed smile, and said, "Nae doot, nae doot, Adam, it's a' natural—I'm no' denying that; it's a glorious business; in fac', it's jist pairt o' every man that has a steady han' and a guid e'e and a feeling heart. Ay, ay. But, Adam, were ye no' frichtened?"

"For what?"

"For the keepers!"

"The keepers! Eh, John, that's half the sport! The thocht o' dodgin' keepers, jinkin' them roon' hills, and doon glens, and lyin' amang the muir-hags, and nickin' a brace or twa, and then fleein' like mad doon ae brae and up anither; and keekin' here, and creepin' there,

and cowerin' alang a fail dyke, and scuddin' thro' the wood—that's mair than half the life o't, John! I'm no sure if I could shoot the birds if they were a' in my ain kail-yard, and my ain property, and if I paid for them!"

"But war ye no' feared for me that kent ye?" asked John.

"Na!" replied Adam, "I was mair feared for yer auld cousin, my mither, gif she kent what I was aboot, for she's unco' prood o' you. But I didna think ye ever luiked efter poachers yersel? Noo I hae telt ye a' aboot it."

"I' faith," said John, taking a snuff and handing the box to Adam, "it's human natur'! But, ye ken, human natur's wicked, desperately wicked! and afore I was a keeper my natur' was fully as wicked as yours,—fully, Adam, if no waur. But I hae repented—ever sin' I was made keeper;

and I wadna like to hinder your repentance. Na, na. We mauna be ower prood! Sae I'll—— Wait a bit, man, be canny till I see if ony o' the lads are in sicht;" and John peeped over a knoll, and cautiously looked around in every direction until satisfied that he was alone. "—I'll no' mention this job," he continued, "if ye'll promise me, Adam, never to try this wark again; for it's no' respectable; and, warst o' a', it's no' safe, and ye wad get me into a habble as weel as yersel'. Sae promise me, like a guid cousin, as I may ca' ye,—and bluid is thicker than water, ye ken,—and then just creep doon the burn, and alang the plantin', and ower the wa', till ye get intil the peat road, and be aff like stoor afore the win'; but I canna wi' conscience let ye tak the birds wi' ye."

Adam thought a little, and said, "Ye're a gude

sowl, John, and I'll no' betray ye." After a while he added, gravely, "But I maun kill something. It's no' in my heart as wickedness; but my fingers maun draw a trigger." After a pause, he continued, "Gie's yer hand, John; ye hae been a frien' to me, and I'll be a man o' honour to you. I'll never poach mair, but I'll 'list and be a sodger! Till I send hame money,—and it'ill no' be lang,—be kind tae my mither, and I'll never forget it."

"A sodger!" exclaimed John.

But Adam, after seizing John by the hand and saying, "Fareweel for a year and a day," suddenly started off down the glen, leaving two brace of grouse, with his gun, at John's feet; as much as to say, Tell my lord how you caught the wicked poacher, and how he fled the country.

Spence told indeed how he had caught a

poacher who had escaped, but never gave his name, nor ever hinted that Adam was the man.

It was thus Adam Mercer poached and enlisted.

One evening I was at the house of a magistrate with whom I was acquainted, when a man named Andrew Dick called to get my friend's signature to his pension paper, in the absence of the parish minister. Dick had been through the whole Peninsular campaign, and had retired as a corporal. I am fond of old soldiers, and never fail when an opportunity offers to have a talk with them about "the wars." On the evening in question, my friend Findlay, the magistrate, happened to say in a bluff kindly way, "Don't spend your pension in drink."

Dick replied, saluting him, "It's very hard, sir, that after fighting the battles of our country, we should be looked upon as worthless, by gentlemen like you."

"No, no, Dick, I never said you were worthless," was the reply.

"Please yer honour," said Dick, "ye did not *say* it, but I consider any man who spends his money in drink *is* worthless; and, what is mair, a fool; and, worse than all, is no Christian. He has no recovery in him, no supports to fall back on, but is in full retreat, as we would say, from common decency."

"But you know," said my friend, looking kindly on Dick, "the bravest soldiers, and none were braver than those who served in the Peninsula, often exceeded fearfully—shamefully; and were a disgrace to humanity."

"Well," replied Dick, "it's no' easy to make evil good, and I won't try to do so; but yet ye forget our difficulties and temptations. Consider only, sir, that there we were, not in bed for months and months; marching at all hours; ill-fed, ill-clothed, and uncertain of life—which I assure your honour makes men indifferent to it; and we had often to get our mess as we best could,—sometimes a tough steak out of a dead horse or mule, for when the beast was skinned it was difficult to make oot its kind; and after toiling and moiling, up and down, here and there and everywhere, summer and winter, when at last we took a town with blood and wounds, and when a cask of wine or spirits fell in the way of the troops, I don't believe that you, sir, or the justices of the peace, or, with reverence be it spoken, the ministers

themselves, would have said 'No,' to a drop. You'll excuse me, sir; I'm perhaps too free with you."

"I didn't mean to lecture you, or to blame you, Dick, for I know the army is not the place for Christians."

"Begging your honour's pardon, sir," said Dick, "the best Christians I ever knowed were in the army—men who would do their dooty to their king, their country, and their God."

"You have known such?" I asked, breaking into the conversation, to turn it aside from what threatened to be a dispute.

"I have, sir! There's ane Adam Mercer, in this very parish, an elder of the Church—I'm a Dissenter mysel', on principle, for I consider——"

"Go on, Dick, about Mercer; never mind your Church principles."

"Well, sir, as I was saying—though, mind you, I'm not ashamed of being a Dissenter, and, I houp, a Christian too—Adam was our sergeant; and a worthier man never shouldered a bayonet. He was nae great speaker, and was quiet as his gun when piled; but when he shot, he shot! that did he, short and pithy, a crack, and right into the argument. He was weel respeckit, for he was just and mercifu'—never bothered the men, and never picked oot fauts, but covered them; never preached, but could gie an advice in two or three words that gripped firm aboot the heart, and took the breath frae ye. He was extraordinar' brave! If there was any work to do by ordinar', up to leading a forlorn hope, Adam was sure to be on't; and them that kent him even better than I did then, said that he never got courage frae brandy, but, as they

assured me, though ye'll maybe no' believe it, his preparation was a prayer! I canna tell hoo they fan' this oot, for Adam was unco quiet; but they say a drummer catched him on his knees afore he mounted the ladder wi' Cansh at the siege o' Badajoz, and that Adam telt him no' to say a word aboot it, but yet to tak' his advice and aye to seek God's help mair than man's."

This narrative interested me much, so that I remembered its facts, and connected them with what I afterwards heard about Adam Mercer many years ago, when on a visit to Drumsylie.

CHAPTER II.

THE ELDER AND HIS STARLING.

WHEN Adam Mercer returned from the wars, more than half a century ago, he settled in the village of Drumsylie, situated in a county bordering on the Highlands, and about twenty miles from the scene of his poaching habits, of which he had long ago repented. His hot young blood had been cooled down by hard service, and his vehement temperament subdued by military discipline; but there remained an admirable mixture in him of deepest feeling, regulated by habitual self-restraint, and expressed in a manner outwardly calm but not cold, un-

demonstrative but not unkind. His whole bearing was that of a man accustomed at once to command and to obey. Corporal Dick had not formed a wrong estimate of his Christianity. The lessons taught by his mother, whom he fondly loved, and whom he had in her widowhood supported to the utmost of his means from pay and prize-money, and her example of a simple, cheerful, and true life, had sunk deeper than he knew into his heart, and, taking root, had sprung up amidst the stormy scenes of war, bringing forth the fruits of stern self-denial and moral courage tempered by strong social affections.

Adam had resumed his old trade of shoemaker. He occupied a small cottage, which, with the aid of a poor old woman in the neighbourhood, who for an hour morning and evening

did the work of a servant, he kept with singular neatness. His little parlour was ornamented with several memorials of the war—a sword or two picked up on memorable battle-fields; a French cuirass from Waterloo, with a gaudy print of Wellington, and one also of the meeting with Blucher at La Belle Alliance.

The Sergeant attended the parish church as regularly as he used to do parade. Any one could have set his watch by the regularity of his movements on Sunday mornings. At the same minute on each succeeding day of holy rest and worship, the tall, erect figure, with well-braced shoulders, might be seen stepping out of the cottage door—where he stood erect for a moment to survey the weather—dressed in the same suit of black trousers, brown surtout, buff waistcoat, black stock, white cotton gloves, with

a yellow cane under his arm—everything so neat and clean, from the polished boots to the polished hat, from the well-brushed grey whiskers to the well-arranged locks that met in a peak over his high forehead and soldierlike face. And once within the church there was no more sedate or attentive listener.

There were few week-days, and no Sunday evenings on which the Sergeant did not pay a visit to some neighbour confined to bed from sickness, or suffering from distress of some kind. He manifested rare tact—made up of common-sense and genuine benevolence—on such occasions. His strong sympathies put him instantly *en rapport* with those whom he visited, enabling him at once to meet them on some common ground. Yet in whatever way the Sergeant began his intercourse, whether by listening pa-

tiently—and what a comfort such listening silence is!—to the history of the sickness or the sorrow which had induced him to enter the house, or by telling some of his own adventures, or by reading aloud the newspaper—he in the end managed with perfect naturalness to convey truths of weightiest import, and fraught with enduring good and comfort—all backed up by a humanity, an unselfishness, and a gentlemanlike respect for others, which made him a most welcome guest. The humble were made glad, and the proud were subdued—they knew not how, nor probably did the Sergeant himself, for he but felt aright and acted as he felt, rather than endeavoured to devise a plan as to *how* he should speak or act in order to produce a definite result. He numbered many true friends; but it was not possible for him to avoid being secretly disliked

by those with whom, from their character, he would not associate, or whom he tacitly rebuked by his own orderly life and good manners.

Two events, in no way connected, but both of some consequence to the Sergeant, turned the current of his life after he had resided a few years in Drumsylie. One was, that by the unanimous choice of the congregation, to whom the power was committed by the minister and his Kirk Session, Mercer was elected to the office of elder in the parish.* This was a most un-

* Every congregation in the Church of Scotland is governed by a court, recognised by civil law, composed of the minister, who acts as "Moderator," and has only a casting vote, and elders ordained to the office, which is for life. This court determines, subject to appeal to higher courts, who are to receive the Sacrament, and all cases of Church discipline. No lawyer is allowed to plead in it. Its freedom from civil consequences is secured by law. In many cases it also takes charge of the poor. The eldership has been an unspeakable blessing to Scotland.

expected compliment, and one which the Sergeant for a time declined; indeed, he accepted it only after many arguments addressed to his sense of duty, and enforced by pressing personal reasons brought to bear on his kind heart by his minister, Mr. Porteous.

The other event, of equal—may we not safely say of greater importance to him?—was his marriage! We need not tell the reader how this came about; or unfold all the subtle magic ways by which a woman worthy to be loved loosed the cords that had hitherto tied up the Sergeant's heart; or how she tapped the deep well of his affections into which the purest drops had for years been falling, until it gushed out with a freshness, fulness, and strength, which are, perhaps, oftenest to be found in an old heart, when it is touched by one whom

it dares to love, as that old heart of Adam Mercer's must do if it loved at all.

Katie Mitchell was out of her teens when Adam, in a happy moment of his life, met her in the house of her widowed mother, who had been confined to a bed of feebleness and pain for years, and whom she had tended with a patience, cheerfulness, and unwearied goodness which makes many a humble and unknown home a very Eden of beauty and peace. Her father had been a leading member of a very strict Presbyterian body, called the "Old Light," in which he shone with a brightness which no Church on earth could of itself either kindle or extinguish, and which, when it passed out of the earthly dwelling, left a subdued glory behind it which never passed away. "Faither" was always an authority with Katie and her mother, his ways a constant

teaching, and his words were to them as echoes from the Rock of Ages.

The marriage took place after the death of Katie's mother, and soon after Adam had been ordained to the eldership.

A boy was born to the worthy couple, and named Charles, after the Sergeant's father.

It was a sight to banish bachelorship from the world, to watch the joy of the Sergeant with Charlie, from the day he experienced the new and indescribable feelings of being a father, until the flaxen-haired blue-eyed boy was able to *toddle* to his waiting arms, and then be mounted on his shoulders, while he stepped round the room to the tune of the old familiar regimental march, performed by him with half whistle half trumpet tones, which vainly expressed the roll of the band that crashed harmoniously in memory's

ear. Katie "didna let on" her motherly pride and delight at the spectacle, which never became stale or commonplace.

Adam had a weakness for pets. Dare we call such tastes a weakness, and not rather a minor part of his religion, which included within its wide embrace a love of domestic animals, in which he saw, in their willing dependence on himself, a reflection of more than they could know, or himself even fully understand? At the time we write, a starling was his special friend. It had been caught and tamed for his boy Charlie. Adam had taught the creature with greatest care to speak with precision. Its first, and most important lesson, was, "I'm Charlie's bairn." And one can picture the delight with which the child heard this innocent confession, as the bird put his head askance, looked at him with his round full eye,

and in clear accents acknowledged his parentage; "I'm Charlie's bairn!" The boy fully appreciated his feathered confidant, and soon began to look upon him as essential to his daily enjoyment. The Sergeant had also taught the starling to repeat the words, "A man's a man for a' that," and to whistle a bar or two of the ditty, "Wha'll be king but Charlie."

Katie had more than once confessed that she "wasna unco' fond o' this kind o' diversion." She pronounced it to be "neither natural nor canny," and had often remonstrated with the Sergeant for what she called his "idle, foolish, and even profane" painstaking in teaching the bird. But one night, when the Sergeant announced that the education of the starling was complete, she became more vehement than usual on this assumed perversion of the will of Provi-

dence. "Nothing," said the Sergeant, "can be more beautiful than his 'A man's a man for a' that.'"

"The mair's the pity, Adam!" said Katie. "It's wrang—clean wrang—I tell ye; and ye'll live tae rue't. What right has *he* to speak? cock him up wi' his impudence! There's mony a bairn aulder than him canna speak sae weel. It's no' a safe business, I can tell you, Adam."

"Gi' ower, gi' ower, woman," said the Sergeant; "the cratur' has its ain gifts, as we hae oors, and I'm thankfu' for them. It does me mair gude than ye ken whan I tak' the boy on my lap, and see hoo his e'e blinks, and his bit feet gang, and hoo he laughs when he hears the bird say, 'I'm Charlie's bairn.' And whan I'm cuttin', and stitchin', and hammerin', at the window, and dreamin' o' auld langsyne, and fechtin' my battles ower again, and when I think

o' that awfu' time that I hae seen wi' brave comrades noo lying in some neuk in Spain; and when I hear the roar o' the big guns, and the splutterin' crackle o' the wee anes, and see the crood o' red coats, and the flashin' o' bagnets, and the awfu' hell—excuse me—o' the fecht, I tell you it's like a sermon to me when the cratur' says, 'A man's a man for a' that!'" The Sergeant would say this, standing up, and erect, with one foot forward as if at the first step of the scaling ladder. "Mind ye, Katie, that it's no' every man that's 'a man for a' that;' but mair than ye wad believe are a set o' fushionless, water-gruel, useless cloots, cauld sooans, when it comes to the real bit—the grip atween life and death! O ye wad wunner, woman, hoo mony men when on parade, or when singin' sangs aboot the war, are gran' hands, but wha lie flat as scones on

the grass when they see the cauld iron! Gie me the man that does his duty, whether he meets man or deevil—that's the man for me in war or peace; and that's the reason I teached the bird thae words. It's a testimony for auld freends that I focht wi', and that I'll never forget—no never! Dinna be sair, gudewife, on the puir bird."

—"Eh, Katie," he added, one night, when the bird had retired to roost, "just look at the cratur'! Is'na he beautifu'? There he sits on his *bawk* as roon' as a clew, wi' his bit head under his wing, dreamin' aboot the wuds maybe—or aboot wee Charlie—or aiblins aboot naething. But he is God's ain bird, wonderfu' and fearfully made."

Still Katie, feeling that "a principle"—as she, *à la mode*, called her opinion—was involved in the bird's linguistic habits, would still maintain

her cause with the same arguments, put in a variety of forms. "Na, na, Adam!" she would persistingly affirm, "I *will* say that for a sensible man an' an elder o' the kirk, ye're ower muckle ta'en up wi' that cratur'. I'll stick to't, that it's no' fair, no' richt, but a mockery o' man. I'm sure faither wadna hae pitten up wi't!"

"Dinna be flyting on the wee thing wi' its speckled breast and bonnie e'e. Charlie's bairn, ye ken—mind that!"

"I'm no flyting on him, for it's you, no' him, that's wrang. Mony a time when I spak' to you mysel', ye were as deaf as a door nail to *me*, and could hear naething in the house but that wee neb o' his fechting awa' wi' its lesson. Na, ye needna glower at me, and look sae astonished, for I'm perfect serious."

"Ye're speaking perfect nonsense, gudewife,

let me assure you; and I *am* astonished at ye," replied Adam, resuming his work on the bench.

"I'm no sic' a thing, Adam, as spakin' nonsense," retorted his wife, sitting down with her seam beside him. "I ken mair aboot they jabbering birds maybe than yersel'. For I'll never forget an awfu' job wi' ane o' them that made a stramash atween Mr. Carruthers, our Auld Licht minister, and Willy Jamieson the Customer Weaver. The minister happened to be veesitin' in Willy's house, and exhortin' him and some neebours that had gaithered to hear. Weel, what hae ye o't, but ane o' they parrots, or Kickcuckkoo birds—or whatever ye ca' them —had been brocht hame by Willy's brither's son—him that was in the Indies—and didna this cratur' cry oot 'Stap yer blethers!' just

ahint the minister, wha gied sic a loup, and thocht it a cunning device o' Satan!"

"Gudewife, gudewife!" struck in the Sergeant, as he turned to her with a laugh. "O dinna blether yoursel', for ye never did it afore. They micht hae hung the birdcage oot while the minister was in. But what had the puir bird to do wi' Satan or religion? Wae's me for the religion that could be hurt by a bird's cracks! The cratur' didna ken what it was saying."

"Didna ken what it was saying!" exclaimed Katie, with evident amazement. "I tell ye, I've see'd it mony a time, and heard it, too; and it was a hantle sensibler than maist bairns ten times its size. I was watchin' it that day when it disturbed Mr. Carruthers, and I see'd it looking roon', and winkin' its een, and scartin' its head lang afore it spak; and it tried its

tongue—and black it was, as ye micht expek, and dry as ben leather—three or four times afore it got a soond oot ; and tho' a' the forenoon it had never spak a word, yet when the minister began, its tongue was lowsed, and it yoked on him wi' its gowk's sang, 'Stap yer blethers, stap yer blethers!' It was maist awfu' tae hear't! I maun alloo, hooever, that it cam' frae a heathen land, and wasna therefore sae muckle to be blamed. But I couldna mak' the same excuse for *your* bird, Adam!"

A loud laugh from Adam proved at once to Katie that she had neither offended nor convinced him by her arguments.

But all real or imaginary differences between the Sergeant and his wife about the starling, ended with the death of their boy. What that was to them both, parents only who have lost

a child—an only child—can tell. It "cut up," as they say, the Sergeant terribly. Katie seemed suddenly to become old. She kept all her boy's clothes in a press, and it was her wont for a time to open it as if for worship, every night, and to "get her greet out." The Sergeant never looked into it. Once, when his wife awoke at night and found him weeping bitterly, he told his first and only fib; for he said that he had an excruciating headache. A headache! He would no more have wept for a headache of his own than he would for one endured by his old foe, Napoleon.

This great bereavement made the starling a painful but almost a holy remembrancer of the child. "I'm Charlie's bairn!" was a death-knell in the house. When repeated no comment was made. It was generally heard in silence; but

one day, Adam and his wife were sitting at the fireside taking their meal in a sad mood, and the starling, perhaps under the influence of hunger, or, who knows, from an uneasy instinctive sense of the absence of the child, began to repeat rapidly the sentence, "I'm Charlie's bairn!" The Sergeant rose and went to its cage with some food, and said, with as much earnestness as if the bird had understood him, "Ay, ye're jist *his* bairn, and ye'll be *my* bairn tae as lang as ye live!"

"A man's a man for a' that!" quoth the bird.

"Sometimes no'," murmured the Sergeant.

CHAPTER III.

THE STARLING A DISTURBER OF THE PEACE.

IT was a beautiful Sunday morning in spring. The dew was glittering on every blade of grass; the trees were bursting into buds for coming leaves, or into flower for coming fruit; the birds were "busy in the wood" building their nests, and singing jubilate; the streams were flashing to the sea; the clouds, moisture laden, were moving across the blue heavens, guided by the winds; and signs of life, activity, and joy filled the earth and sky.

The Sergeant hung out Charlie in his cage to enjoy the air and sunlight. He had not of

late been so lively as usual; his confession as to his parentage was more hesitating; and when giving his testimony as to a man being a man, or as to the exclusive right of Charlie to be king, he often paused as if in doubt. All his utterances were accompanied by a spasmodic chirp and jerk, evidencing a great indifference to humanity. A glimpse of nature might possibly recover him. And so it did; for he had not been long outside until he began to spread his wings and tail feathers to the warm sun, and to pour out more confessions and testimonies than had been heard for weeks.

Charlie soon gathered round him a crowd of young children with rosy faces and tattered garments who had clattered down from lanes and garrets to listen to his performances. Every face in the group became a picture of wonder

and delight, as intelligible sounds were heard coming from a hard bill; and any one of the crowd would have sold all he had on earth—not a great sacrifice after all, perhaps a penny—to possess such a bird. "D'ye hear it, Archy?" a boy would say, lifting up his little brother on his shoulder, to be near the cage. Another would repeat the words uttered by the distinguished speaker, and direct attention to them. Then, when all were hushed into silent and eager expectancy awaiting the next oracular statement, and the starling repeated "I'm Charlie's bairn!" and whistled "Wha'll be king but Charlie!" a shout of joyous merriment followed, with sundry imitations of the bird's peculiar guttural and rather rude pronunciation. "It's a witch, I'll wager!" one boy exclaimed. "Dinna say that," replied another, "for wee Charlie's

dead." Yet it would be difficult to trace any logical contradiction between the supposed and the real fact.

This audience about the cage was disturbed by the sudden and unexpected appearance from round the corner, of a rather portly man, dressed in black clothes; his head erect; his face intensely grave; an umbrella, handle foremost, under his right arm; his left arm swinging like a pendulum; a pair of black spats covering broad flat feet, that advanced with the regular beat of slow music, and seemed to impress the pavement with their weight. This was the Rev. Daniel Porteous, the parish minister.

No sooner did he see the crowd of children at the elder's door than he paused for a moment, as if he had unexpectedly come across the execution of a criminal; and no sooner did the

children see him, than with a terrified shout of "There's the minister!" they ran off as if they had seen a wild beast, leaving one or two of the younger ones sprawling and bawling on the road, their natural protectors being far too intent on saving their own lives, to think of those of their nearest relatives.

The sudden dispersion of these lambs by the shepherd soon attracted the attention of their parents; and accordingly several half-clad, slatternly women rushed from their respective "closes." Flying to the rescue of their children, they carried some and dragged others to their several corners within the dark caves. But while rescuing their wicked cubs, they religiously beat them, and manifested their zeal by many stripes, and not a few admonitions:—"Tak' that —and that—and that—ye bad—bad—wicked wean!

Hoo daur ye! I'll gie ye yer pay! I'll mak ye! I'se warrant ye!" &c. &c. These were some of the motherly teachings to the terrified babes; while cries of "Archie!" "Peter!" "Jamie!" with threatening shakes of the fist, and commands to come home "immeditly," were addressed to the elder ones, who had run off to a safe distance. One tall woman, whose dusty brown hair escaped from beneath a cap black enough to give one the impression that she had been humbling herself in sackcloth and ashes, proved the strength of her convictions by complaining very vehemently to Mr. Porteous of the Sergeant for having thrown such a temptation as the starling in the way of her children, whom she loved so tenderly and wished to bring up so piously. All the time she held a child firmly by the hand, who attempted to hide its face and tears from the

minister. Her zeal we must assume was very real, since her boy had clattered off from the cage on shoes made by the Sergeant, which his mother had never paid for, nor was likely to do now, for conscience sake, on account of this bad conduct of the shoemaker. We do not affirm that Mrs. Dalrymple never *liquidated* her debts, but she did so after her own fashion.

It was edifying to hear other mothers declare their belief that their children had been at the morning Sabbath School, and express their wonder and anger at discovering for the first time their absence from it; more especially as this—the only day, of course, on which it had occurred—should be the day that the minister accidentally passed to church along their street!

The minister listened to the story of their good intentions, and of the ill doings of his elder with an uneasy look, but promised speedy redress.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REV. DANIEL PORTEOUS.

MR. PORTEOUS had been minister of the parish for upwards of thirty years. Previously he had been tutor in the family of a small laird who had political interest in those old times, and through whose influence with the patron of the parish, he had obtained the living of Drumsylie. He was a man of unimpeachable character. No one could charge him with any act throughout his whole life inconsistent with the "walk and conversation" becoming his profession. He performed all the duties of his office with the regularity of a well-adjusted, well-oiled machine. He

visited the sick, and spoke the right words to the afflicted, the widow, and the orphan, very much in the same calm, regular, and orderly manner in which he addressed the Presbytery or wrote out a minute of Kirk Session. Never did a man possess a larger or better-assorted collection of what he called "principles" in the carefully-locked cabinet of his brain, applicable at any moment to any given ecclesiastical or theological question which was likely to come before him. He made no distinction between "principles" and his own mere opinions. The *dixit* of truth and the *dixit* of Porteous were looked upon by him as one. He had never been accused of error on any point, however trivial, except on one occasion when, in the Presbytery, a learned clerk of great authority interrupted a speech of his by suggesting that their respected

friend was speaking heresy. Mr. Porteous exclaimed, to the satisfaction of all, "I was not aware of it, Moderator! but if such is the opinion of the Presbytery, I have no hesitation in instantly withdrawing my unfortunate and unintentional assertion." His mind ever after was a round, compact ball of logically spun theological worsted, wound up, and "made up." The glacier, clear, cold, and stern, descends into the valley full of human habitations, corn-fields, and vineyards, with flowers and fruit-trees on every side; and though its surface melts occasionally, it remains the glacier still. So it had hitherto been with him. He preached the truth—truth which is the world's life and which stirs the angels—but too often as a telegraphic wire transmits the most momentous intelligence: and he grasped it as a sparrow grasps the wire by which the message is con-

veyed. The parish looked up to him, obeyed him, feared him, and so respected him that they were hardly conscious of not quite loving him. Nor was he conscious of this blank in their feelings; for feelings and tender affections were in his estimation generally dangerous and always weak commodities,—a species of womanly sentimentalism, and apt sometimes to be rebellious against his "principles," as the stream will sometimes overflow the rocky sides that hem it in and direct its course. It would be wrong to deny that he possessed his own "fair humanities." He had friends who sympathised with him; and followers who thankfully accepted him as a safe light to guide them, as one stronger than themselves to lean on, and as one whose word was law to them. To all such he could be bland and courteous; and in their society he would

even relax, and indulge in such anecdotes and laughter as bordered on genuine hilarity. As to what was deepest and truest in the man we know not, but we believe there was real good beneath the wood, hay, and stubble of formalism and pedantry. There was doubtless a kernel within the hard shell, if only the shell could be cracked. Might not this be done? We shall see.

It was this worthy man who, after visiting a sick parishioner, suddenly came round the corner of the street in which the Sergeant lived. He was, as we said, on his way to church, and the bell had not yet begun to ring for morning worship. Before entering the Sergeant's house (to do which, after the scene he had witnessed, was recognised by him to be an important duty), he went up to the cage to make himself acquainted with all the facts of the case, so as

to proceed with it regularly. He accordingly put on his spectacles and looked at the bird, and the bird, without any spectacles, returned the inquiring gaze with most wonderful composure. Walking sideways along his perch, until near the minister, he peered at him full in the face, and confessed that he was Charlie's bairn. Then, after a preliminary *kic* and *kirr*, as if clearing his throat, he whistled two bars of the air, "Wha'll be king but Charlie!" and, concluding with his aphorism, "A man's a man for a' that!" he whetted his beak and retired to feed in the presence of the Church dignitary.

"I could not have believed it!" exclaimed the minister, as he walked into the Sergeant's house, with a countenance by no means indicating the sway of amiable feelings.

CHAPTER V.

THE SERGEANT AND HIS STARLING IN TROUBLE.

THE Sergeant and his wife, after having joined, as was their wont, in private morning worship, had retired, to prepare for church, to their bedroom in the back part of the cottage, and the door was shut. Not until a loud knock was twice repeated on the kitchen-table, did the Sergeant emerge in his shirt-sleeves to reply to the unexpected summons. His surprise was great as he exclaimed, "Mr. Porteous! can it be you? Beg pardon, sir, if I have kept you waiting; please be seated. No bad news, I hope?"

Mr. Porteous, with a cold nod, and remaining

where he stood, pointed with his umbrella to the cage hanging outside the window, and asked the Sergeant if that was his bird?

"It is, sir," replied the Sergeant, more puzzled than ever; "it is a favourite starling of mine, and I hung it out this morning to enjoy the air, because——"

"You need not proceed, Mr. Mercer," interrupted the minister; "it is enough for me to know from yourself that you acknowledge that bird as yours, and that *you* hung it there."

"There is no doubt about that, sir; and what then? I really am puzzled to know why you ask," said the Sergeant.

"I won't leave you long in doubt upon that point," continued the minister, more stern and calm if possible than before, "nor on some others which it involves."

Katie, at this crisis of the conversation, joined them in her black silk gown. She entered the kitchen with a familiar smile and respectful curtsey, and approached the minister, who, barely noticing her, resumed his subject. Katie, somewhat bewildered, sat down in the large chair beside the fire, watching the scene with curious perplexity.

"Are you aware, Mr. Mercer, of what has just happened?" inquired the minister.

"I do not take you up, sir," replied the Sergeant.

"Well, then, as I approached your house a crowd of children were gathered round that cage, laughing and singing, with evident enjoyment, and disturbing the neighbourhood by their riotous proceedings, thus giving pain and grief to their parents, who have complained loudly to me of

the injury done to their most sacred feelings and associations by *you*——please, please, don't interrupt me, Mr. Mercer; I have a duty to perform, and shall finish presently."

The Sergeant bowed, folded his arms, and stood erect. Katie covered her face with her hands, and exclaimed "Tuts, tuts, I'm real sorry—tuts."

"I went up to the cage," said Mr. Porteous, continuing his narrative, "and narrowly inspected the bird. To my—what shall I call it? astonishment? or shame and confusion?—I heard it utter such distinct and articulate sounds as convinced me beyond all possibility of doubt—yet you smile, sir, at my statement!—that——"

"Tuts, Adam, it's dreadfu'!" ejaculated Katie.

"That the bird," continued the minister, "*must* have been either taught by you, or with your approval: and having so instructed this creature,

you hang it out on this, the Sabbath morning, to whistle and to speak, in order to insult—yes, sir, I use the word advisedly——"

"Never, sir!" said the Sergeant, with a calm and firm voice; "never, sir, did I intentionally insult mortal man."

"I have nothing to do with your intentions, but with *facts;* and the fact is, you did insult, sir, every feeling the most sacred, besides injuring the religious habits of the young. *You* did this, an elder—*my* elder, this day, to the great scandal of religion."

The Sergeant never moved, but stood before his minister as he would have done before his general, calm, in the habit of respectful obedience to those having authority. Poor Katie acted as a sort of *chorus* at the fireside.

"I never thocht it would come to this," she

exclaimed, twisting her fingers. "Oh! it's a pity! Sirs a day! Waes me! Sic a day as I have lived to see! Speak, Adam!" at length she said, as if to relieve her misery.

The silence of Adam so far helped the minister as to give him time to breathe, and to think. He believed that he had made an impression on the Sergeant, and that it was possible things might not be so bad as they had looked. He hoped and wished to put them right, and desired to avoid any serious quarrel with Mercer, whom he really respected as one of his best elders, and as one who had never given him any trouble or uneasiness, far less opposition. Adam, on the other hand, had been so suddenly and unexpectedly attacked, that he hardly knew for a moment what to say or do. Once or twice the old ardent temperament made him feel something

at his throat, such as used to be there when the order to charge was given, or the command to form square and prepare to receive cavalry. But the habits of "drill" and the power of passive endurance came to his aid, along with a higher principle. He remained silent.

When the steam had roared off, and the ecclesiastical boiler of Mr. Porteous was relieved from extreme pressure, he began to simmer, and to be more quiet about the safety valve. Sitting down, and so giving evidence of his being at once fatigued and mollified, he resumed his discourse. "Sergeant"—he had hitherto addressed him as Mr. Mercer—"Sergeant, you know my respect for you. I will say that a better man, a more attentive hearer, a more decided and consistent Churchman, and a more faithful elder, I have not in my parish——"

Adam bowed.

"Be also seated," said the minister.

"Thank you, sir," said Adam, "I would rather stand."

"I will after all give you credit for not intending to do this evil which I complain of; I withdraw the appearance even of making any such charge," said Mr. Porteous, as if asking a question.

After a brief silence, the Sergeant said, "You have given me great pain, Mr. Porteous."

"How so, Adam?"—still more softened.

"It is great pain, sir, to have one's character doubted," replied Adam.

"But have I not cause?" inquired the minister.

"You are of course the best judge, Mr. Porteous; but I frankly own to you that the possibility of there being any harm in teaching a bird never occurred to me."

"Oh, Adam!" exclaimed Katie, "I ken it was aye *your* mind that, but it wasna mine, although at last——"

"Let me alone, Katie, just now," quietly remarked Adam.

"What of the scandal? what of the scandal?" struck in the minister. "I have no time to discuss details this morning; the bells have begun."

"Well, then," said the Sergeant, "I was not aware of the disturbance in the street which you have described; I never, certainly, could have intended *that*. I was, at the time, in the bedroom, and never knew of it. Believe me when I say't, that no man lives who would feel mair pain than I would in being the occasion of ever leading any one to break the Lord's day by word or deed, more especially the young; and the young aboot our doors are amang the warst. And as

to my showing disrespect to you, sir!—that never could be my intention."

"I believe you, Adam, I believe you; but——"

"Ay, weel ye may," chimed in Katie, now weeping as she saw some hope of peace; "for he's awfu' taen up wi' guid, is Adam, though I say it."

"Oh, Katie; dinna, woman, fash yersel' wi' me," interpolated Adam.

"Though I say't that shouldna say't," continued Katie, "I'm sure he has the greatest respec' for you, sir. He'll do onything to please you that's possible, and to mak' amends for this great misfortun'."

"Of that I have no doubt—no doubt whatever, Mrs. Mercer," said Mr. Porteous, kindly; "and I wished, in order that he should do so, to be faithful to him, as he well knows I never will

sacrifice my principles to any man, be he who he may—never!"

"There is no difficulty, I am happy to say," the minister resumed, after a moment's pause, "in settling the whole of this most unpleasant business. Indeed I promised to the neighbours, who were very naturally offended, that it should never occur again; and as you acted, Adam, from ignorance—and we must not blame an old soldier *too* much," the minister added with a patronising smile,—"all parties will be satisfied by a very small sacrifice indeed—almost too small, considering the scandal. Just let the bird be forthwith destroyed—that is all."

Adam started.

"In any case," the minister went on to say, without noticing the Sergeant's look, "this should be done, because being an elder, and, as such, a man with grave and solemn responsibilities,

you will I am sure see the propriety of at once acquiescing in my proposal, so as to avoid the temptation of your being occupied by trifles and frivolities — contemptible trifles, not to give a harsher name to all that the bird's habits indicate. But when, in addition to this consideration, these habits, Adam, have, as a fact, occasioned serious scandal, no doubt can remain in any well-constituted mind as to the *necessity* of the course I have suggested."

"Destroy Charlie—I mean, the starling?" inquired the Sergeant, stroking his chin, and looking down at the minister with a smile in which there was more of sorrow and doubt than of any other emotion. "Do you mean, Mr. Porteous, that I should kill him?"

"I don't mean that, necessarily, *you* should do it, though *you* ought to do it as the offender.

But I certainly mean that it should be destroyed in any way, or by any person you please, as, if not the best possible, yet the easiest amends which can be made for what has caused such injury to morals and religion, and for what has annoyed myself more than I can tell. Remember, also, that the credit of the eldership is involved with my own."

"Are you serious, Mr. Porteous?" asked the Sergeant.

"Serious! Serious!—Your minister!—on Sabbath morning!—in a grave matter of this kind!—to ask if I am serious! Mr. Mercer, you are forgetting yourself."

"I ask pardon," replied the Sergeant, "if I have said anything disrespectful; but I really did not take in how the killing of my pet starling could mend matters, for which I say again, that

I am really vexed, and ax yer pardon. What has happened has been quite unintentional on my part, I do assure you, sir."

"The death of the bird," said the minister, "I admit, in one sense, is a mere trifle—a trifle to *you:* but it is not so to *me*, who am the guardian of religion in the parish, and as such have pledged my word to your neighbours that this, which I have called a great scandal, shall never happen again. The least that you can do, therefore, I humbly think, as a proof of your regret at having been even the innocent cause of acknowledged evil; as a satisfaction to your neighbours, and a security against a like evil occurring again; and as that which is due to yourself as an office-bearer, to the parish, and, I must add, to *me* as your pastor, and *my* sense of what is right; and, finally, in order to avoid a triumph

to Dissent on the one hand, and to infidelity on the other,—it is, I say, beyond all question your clear duty to remove the *cause* of the offence, by your destroying that paltry insignificant bird. I must say, Mr. Mercer, that I feel not a little surprised that your own sense of what is right does not compel you at once to acquiesce in my very moderate demand—so moderate, indeed, that I am almost ashamed to make it."

No response from the Sergeant.

"Many men, let me tell you," continued Mr. Porteous, "would have summoned you to the Kirk Session, and rebuked you for your whole conduct, actual and implied, in this case, and, if you had been contumacious, would then have libelled and deposed you!" The minister was warming as he proceeded. "I have no time," he added, rising, "to say more on this painful matter.

But I ask you now, after all I have stated, and before we part, to promise me this favour—no, I won't put it on the ground of a personal favour, but on *principle*—promise me to do this—not to-day of course, but on a week-day, say to-morrow—to destroy the bird,—and I shall say no more about it. Excuse my warmth, Adam, as I may be doing you the injustice of assuming that you do not see the gravity of your own position or of mine." And Mr. Porteous stretched out his hand to the Sergeant.

"I have no doubt, sir," said the Sergeant, calmly, "that you mean to do what seems to you to be right, and what you believe to be your duty. But——" and there was a pause, "but I will not deceive you, nor promise to do what I feel I can never perform. *I* must also do *my* duty, and I daurna do what seems to me to be wrang, cruel,

and unnecessar.' I canna' kill the bird. It is simply impossible! Do pardon me, sir. Dinna think me disrespectful or prood. At this moment I am neither, but verra vexed to have had ony disturbance wi' my minister. Yet——"

"Yet what, Mr. Mercer?"

"Weel, Mr. Porteous, I dinna wish to detain you; but as far as I can see my duty, or understand my feelings——"

"Feelings! forsooth!" exclaimed Mr. Porteous.

"Or understand my feelings," continued Adam, "I canna—come what may, let me oot with it—I *will not* kill the bird!"

Mr. Porteous rose and said, in a cold, dry voice, "If such is your deliverance, so be it. I have done my duty. On you, and you only, the responsibility must now rest of what appears to me to be *contumacious* conduct—an offence, if

possible, worse than the original one. You sin with light and knowledge—and it is, therefore, heinous by reason of several aggravations. I must wish you good-morning. This matter cannot rest here. But whatever consequences may follow, you, and you alone, I repeat, are to blame—*my* conscience is free. You will hear more of this most unfortunate business, Sergeant Mercer." And Mr. Porteous, with a stiff bow, walked out of the house.

Adam made a movement towards the door, as if to speak once more to Mr. Porteous, muttering to himself, "He canna be in earnest!—The thing's impossible!—It canna be!" But the minister was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STARLING ON HIS TRIAL.

ADAM was left alone with his wife. His only remark as he sat down opposite to her was: "Mr. Porteous has forgot himsel', and was too quick;" adding, "nevertheless it is our duty to gang to the kirk."

"Kirk!" exclaimed Katie, walking about in an excited manner, "that's a' ower! Kirk! pity me! hoo can you or me gang to the kirk? Hoo can we be glowered at and made a speculation o', and be the sang o' the parish? The kirk! waes me; that's a' by! I never, never thocht it wad come to this wi' me or you, Adam! I think

it wad hae kilt my faither. It's an awfu' chasteesement."

"For what?" quietly asked the Sergeant.

"Ye needna speer—ye ken weel eneuch it's for that bird. I aye telt ye that ye were ower fond o't, and noo!—I'm real sorry for ye, Adam. It's for *you*, for *you*, and no' for mysel', I'm sorry. Sirs me, what a misfortun'!"

"What are ye sae sorry for?" meekly inquired Adam.

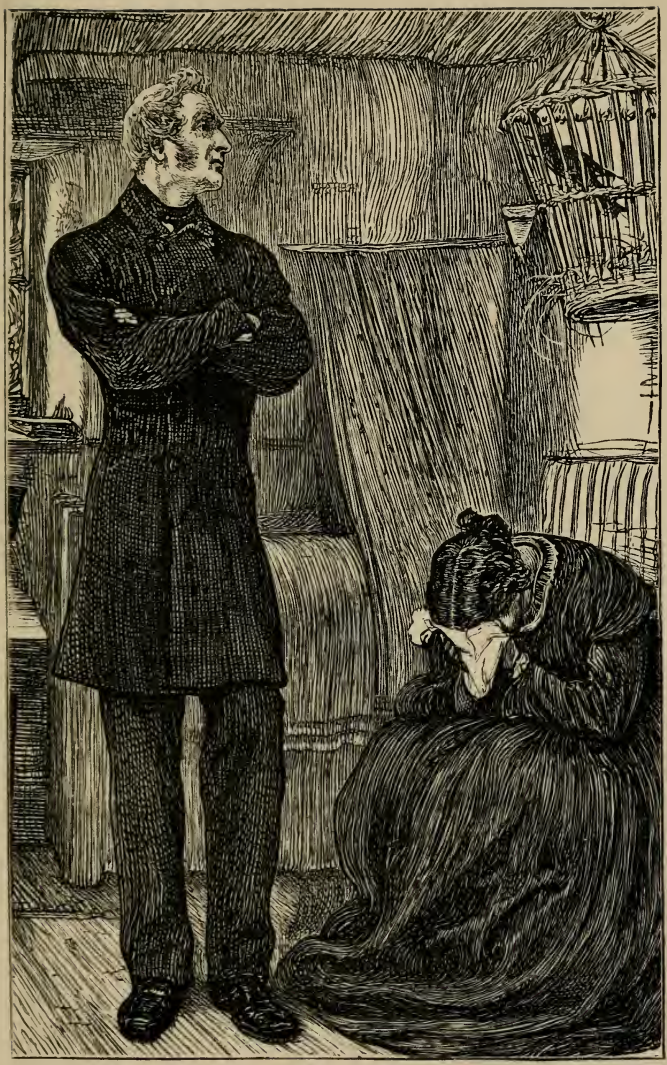
"For everything!" replied Katie, groaning; "for the stramash amang the weans; for the clish-clash o' the neeboors; for you and me helping to break the Sabbath; for the minister being sae angry, and that nae doubt, for he kens best, for gude reasons; and, aboon a', for you, Adam, my bonnie man, an elder o' the kirk, brocht into a' this habble for naething better than a

bit bird!" And Katie threw herself into the chair, covering her face with her hands.

The Sergeant said nothing, but rose and went outside to bring in the cage. There were signs of considerable excitement in the immediate neighbourhood. The long visit of the minister in such circumstances could mean only a conflict with Adam, which would be full of interest to those miserable gossips, who never thought of attending church except on rare occasions, and who were glad of something to occupy their idle time on Sunday morning. Sundry heads were thrust from upper windows, directing their gaze to the Sergeant's house. Some of the boys reclined on the grass at a little distance, thus occupying a safe position, and commanding an excellent retreat should they be pursued by parson or parents. The cage was the centre of attraction to all.

The Sergeant at a glance saw how the enemy lay, but without appearing to pay any attention to the besiegers, he retired with the cage into the house and fixed it in its accustomed place over his boy's empty cot. When the cage was adjusted, the starling scratched the back of his head, as if something annoyed him; he then cleaned his bill on each side of the perch, as if present duties must be attended to; after this he hopped down and began to describe figures with his open bill on the sanded floor of the cage, as if for innocent recreation. Being refreshed by these varied exercises, he concluded by repeating his confession and testimony with a precision and vigour never surpassed.

Katie still occupied the arm-chair, blowing her nose with her Sunday pocket-handkerchief. The Sergeant sat down beside her.



"It's time to gang to the kirk, gudewife," he remarked, although, from the bells having stopped ringing, and from the agitated state of his wife's feelings, he more than suspected that, for the first time during many years, he would be obliged to absent himself from morning worship—a fact which would form another subject of conversation for his watchful and thoughtful neighbours.

"Hoo can we gang to the kirk, Adam, wi' this on our conscience?" muttered Katie.

"I hae naething on *my* conscience, Katie, to disturb it," said her husband; "and I'm sorry if onything I hae done should disturb yours. What can I do to lighten 't?"

Katie was silent.

"If ye mean," said the Sergeant, "that the bird should be killed, by a' means let it be done. I'll do onything to please *you*, though Mr. Porteous

has, in my opinion, nae richt whatever to insist on my doin't to please *him;* for *he* kens naething aboot the cratur. But if you, that kens as weel as me a' the bird has been to us baith, but speak the word, the deed will be allooed by me. I'll never say no."

"Do yer duty, Adam!" said his wife.

"That is, my duty to *you*, mind, for I owe it to nane else I ken o'. But that duty shall be done—so ye've my full leave and leeberty tae kill the bird. Here he is! Tak' him oot o' the cage, and finish him. I'll no interfere, nor even look on, cost what it may." And the Sergeant took down the cage, and held it near his wife. But she said nothing, and did nothing.

"I'm Charlie's bairn!" exclaimed the starling.

"Dinna tell me, Adam, tae kill the bird! It's no' me, but you, should do sic wark. Ye're a

man and a sodger, and it was you teached him, and got us into this trouble."

"Sae be't!" said the Sergeant. "I've done mair bluidy jobs in my day, and needna fear tae spill, for the sake o' peace, the wee drap bluid o' the puir hairmless thing. What way wad ye like it kilt?"

"Ye should ken best yersel', gudeman; killin' is no woman's wark," said Katie, in a low voice, as she turned her head away and looked at the wall.

"Aweel then, since ye leave it to me," replied Adam, "I'll gie him a sodger's death. It's the maist honourable, and the bit mannie deserves a' honour frae our hands, for he has done his duty pleasantly, in fair and foul, in simmer and winter, to us baith, and tae——Never heed—I'll shoot him at dawn o' day, afore he begins whistlin' for his breakfast; and he'll be buried decently.

You and Mr. Porteous will no' be bothered wi' him lang. Sae as that's settled and determined, we may gang to the kirk wi' a guid conscience."

Adam rose, as if to enter his bedroom.

"What's your hurry, Adam?" asked Katie, in a half-peevish tone of voice. "Sit doon and let a body speak."

The Sergeant resumed his seat.

"I'm jist thinking," said Katie, "that ye'll maybe no' get onybody to gie ye a gun for sic a cruel job; and if ye did, the noise sae early in the morning wad frichten folk, and mak' an awfu' clash amang neeboors, and luik dreadfu' daft in an elder."

"Jock Hall has a gun I could get. But noo that I think o't, Jock himsel' will do the job, for he's fit for onything, and up tae everything except what's guid. I'll send him Charlie and

the cage in the morning, afore ye rise; sae keep your mind easy," said the Sergeant, carelessly.

"I wadna trust Charlie into Jock Hall's power —the cruel ne'er-do-weel that he is! Na, na; whatever has to be done maun be done decently by yersel', gudeman," protested Katie.

"Ye said, gudewife, to Mr. Porteous," replied Adam, "that ye kent I wad do onything to please him and to gie satisfaction for this misfortun', as ye ca'ed it; and sin' you and him agree that the bird is to be kilt, I suppose I maun kill him to please ye baith; I see but ae way left o' finishing him."

"What way is that?" asked Katie.

"To thraw his bit neck."

"Doonricht cruelty," suggested Katie, "to thraw the neck o' a wee thing like that! Fie on ye, gudeman! Ye're no like yersel' the day."

"It's the *only* way left, unless we burn him; so I'll no' argue mair about it. There's nae use o' pittin' 't aff ony langer; the better day, the better deed. Sae here goes! It will be a' ower wi' him in a minute; and syne ye'll get peace—"

The Sergeant rose and placed the cage on a table near the window where the bird was accustomed to be fed. Charlie, in expectation of receiving food, was in a high state of excitement, and seemed anxious to please his master by repeating all his lessons as rapidly and correctly as possible. The Sergeant rolled up his white shirt-sleeves, to keep them from being soiled by the work in which he was about to be engaged. Being thus prepared, he opened the door of the cage, thrust in his hand, and seized the bird, saying, "Bid fareweel to yer mistress, my wee Charlie."

Katie sprang from her chair, and with a loud voice commanded the Sergeant to "haud his han' and let the bird alane!"

"What's wrang?" asked the Sergeant, as he shut the door of the cage and went towards his wife, who again sank back in her chair, and covered her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief.

"Oh, Adam!" she said, "I'm a waik, waik woman. My nerves are a' gane; my head and heart are baith sair. A kind o' glamour, a temptation has come ower me, and I dinna ken what's richt or what's wrang. I wuss I may be forgie'n if I'm wrang, for the heart I ken is deceitfu' aboon a' things and desperately wicked:—but, richt or wrang, neither by you nor by ony ither body can I let that bird be kilt! I canna thole't! for I just thocht e'enoo that I seed

plainly afore me our ain wee bairn that's awa'—an' oh Adam!——"

Katie burst into a fit of weeping, and could say no more. The Sergeant hung up the cage in its old place; then going to his wife, he gently clapped her shoulder, and bending over her whispered in her ear, "Dinna ye fear, Katie, aboot Charlie's bairn!"

Katie clasped her hands round his neck and drew his grey head to her cheek, patting it fondly.

"Dry yer een, wifie," said Adam, "and feed the cratur, and syne we'll gang to the kirk in the afternoon." He then retired to the bedroom, shut the door, and left Katie alone with her starling and her conscience—both at peace, and both whistling, each after its own fashion.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SERGEANT ON HIS TRIAL.

THE Sergeant went to church in the afternoon, but he went alone. Katie was unable to accompany him. "She didna like," she said. But this excuse being not quite satisfactory to her conscience, she had recourse to that accommodating malady which comes to the rescue of universal Christendom when in perplexity —a headache. In her case it really existed as a fact, for she suffered from a genuine pain which she had not sufficient knowledge or fashion to call "nervous," but which, more than likely, really came under that designation. Her symptoms, as

decribed by herself, were that "her head was bizzin' and bummin' like a bees' skep."

As the Sergeant marched to church, with his accustomed regular pace and modest look, he could, without seeming to remark it, observe an interest taken in his short journey never manifested before. An extra number of faces filled the windows near his house, and looked at him with half smile, half sneer.

There was nothing in the sermon of Mr. Porteous which indicated any wish to "preach to the times,"—a temptation which is often too strong for preachers to resist who have nothing else ready or more interesting to preach about. Many in a congregation who may be deaf and blind to the Gospel, are wide-awake and attentive to gossip, from the pulpit. The good man delivered himself of an excellent sermon, which, as usual, was

sound in doctrine and excellent in arrangement, with suitable introduction, "heads of discourse," and practical conclusion. His hearers, as a whole, were not of a character likely either to blame or praise the teaching, far less to be materially influenced by it. They were far too respectable and well-informed for that. They had "done the right thing" in coming to church as usual, and were satisfied. There was one remark often made in the minister's praise, that he was singularly exact in preaching forty-five minutes, and in dismissing the congregation at the hour and a half.

But there were evident signs of life in the announcement which he made at the end of this day's service. He "*particularly* requested a meeting of Kirk Session in the vestry after the benediction, and expressed a hope that *all* the elders would, if possible, attend."

Adam Mercer snuffed the battle from afar; but as it was his "duty" to obey the summons, he obeyed accordingly.

The Kirk Session, in spite of defects which attend all human institutions, including the House of Lords, with its Bench of Bishops, is one of the most useful courts in Scotland, and has contributed immensely in very many ways to improve the moral and physical condition of the people. Its members, as a rule, are the strength and comfort of the minister, and it is, generally speaking, his own fault if they are not. In the parish of Drumsylie the Session consisted of seven elders, with the Minister as "Moderator." These elders represented very fairly, on the whole, the sentiments of the congregation and parish on most questions which could come before them.

As all meetings of Kirk Session are held in

private, reporters and lawyers being alike excluded, we shall not pretend to give any account of what passed at this one. The parish rumours were to the effect that the "Moderator," after having given a narrative of the occurrences of the morning, explained how many most important principles were involved in the case as it now stood—principles affecting the duty and powers of Kirk Sessions; the social economy of the parish; the liberties and influence of the Church, and the cause of Christian truth; and concluded by suggesting the appointment of two members, Mr. Smellie and Mr. Menzies, to "deal" with Mr. Mercer, and to report to the next meeting of Session. This led to a sharp discussion, in which Mr. Gordon, a proprietor in the neighbourhood, protested against any matter which "he presumed to characterise as trifling and unworthy of their grave attention,"

being brought before them at all. He also appealed the whole case to the next meeting of Presbytery which unfortunately was not to take place for two months.

The Sergeant, strange to say, lost his temper when, having declared "upon his honour as a soldier" that he meant no harm, and could therefore make no apology, he was called to order by the Moderator for using such a word as "honour" in a Church court. Thinking his honour itself called in question, Adam abruptly left the meeting. Mr. Gordon, it was alleged, had been seen returning home, at one moment laughing, and the next evidently crying because of these proceedings; and more than one of the elders, it was rumoured, were disposed to join him, but were afraid of offending Mr. Porteous—a fear not unfrequently experienced in the case of many of

his parishioners. The minister, it may be remarked, was fond of quoting the text, "*first* pure, *then* peaceable." But he never seemed to have attained the "first" in theory, if one might judge from his neglect of the second in practice.

It was after this meeting of Session that Mr. Smellie remarked to Mr. Menzies, as we have already recorded, that "the man was aince a poacher!" a fact which, by the way, he had communicated to Mr. Porteous also for the sake of "edification." Mr. Smellie bore a grudge towards the Sergeant, who had somehow unwittingly ruffled his vanity or excited his jealousy. He was smooth as a cat; and, like a cat, could purr, fawn, see in the dark, glide noiselessly, or make a sudden spring on his prey. The Sergeant, from certain circumstances which shall be hereafter noticed, understood his character as few in the parish

did. Mr. Menzies was a different, and therefore better man, his only fault being that he believed in Smellie.

The Sergeant was later than usual in returning home. It was impossible to conceal from the inquiring and suspicious look of his wife that something was out of joint, to the extent at least of making it allowable and natural on her part to ask, "What's wrang noo, Adam?"

"Nothing particular, except wi' my honour," was the Sergeant's cool reply.

"Yer honour! What's wrang wi' that?"

"The minister," said the Sergeant, "doots it, and he tells me that it was wrang to speak aboot it."

On this, Katie, who did not quite comprehend his meaning, begged to know what had taken place. "What did they say? What did they

do? Wha spak'?" And she poured out a number of questions which could not speedily be answered. We hope it will not diminish the reader's interest in this excellent woman if we admit that for a moment she, too, became the slave of gossip. We deny that this prostration of the heart and head to a mean idol is peculiar to woman—this craving for small personal talk, this love of knowledge regarding one's neighbours in those points especially which are not to their credit, or which at least are naturally desired by them to be kept secret from the world. Weak, idle, and especially vain men are as great traffickers as women in this dissocial intercourse. Like small insects they use their small stings for annoyance, and are flattered when they make strong men wince.

Katie's fit was but momentary, and in the whole circumstances of the case excusable.

The Sergeant told her of his pass at arms, and ended with an indignant protest about his honour.

"What do they mak'," partly asserted, partly inquired Katie, "o' 'Honour to whom honour?' and 'Honour all men?'—and 'Honour the king?' —and 'Honour faither and mither?'—what *I* did a' my life! I'll maintain the word is Scriptoral!"

But the Sergeant, not being critical or controversial, did not wish to contend with his wife on the connexion which, as she supposed, existed between the word honour, and his word of honour. His mind was becoming perplexed and filled with painful thoughts. This antagonism into which he had been driven with those whom he had hitherto respected and followed with unhesitating confidence, was growing rapidly into a form and shape which was beyond his experience—alien to his quiet and unobtrusive dis-

position, and contrary to his whole purpose of life. He sat down by the fireside, and went over all the events of the day. He questioned himself as to what he had said or done to give offence to mortal man. He recalled the history of his relationship to the starling, to see, if possible, any wrong-doing in it. He reviewed the scene in the Kirk Session; and his conclusion, on the one hand, was a stone blindness as to the existence of any guilt on his part, and on the other, a strong suspicion that his minister *could* not do him a wrong—*could* not be so displeased upon unjust, ignorant, or unrighteous grounds, and that consequently there was a something—though what it was he could neither discover nor guess—which Mr. Porteous had misunderstood and had been misled by. He went over and over again, the several items of this long account of debit and

credit without being able to charge aught against himself, except possibly his concealment from his minister of the reason why the starling was so much beloved, and also the fact perhaps of his having taken offence, without adequate cause, at the meeting of Session. The result of all these complex cogitations between himself and the red embers in the grate, was a resolution to go that evening to the Manse, and by a frank explanation put an end to all misunderstanding. In his pure heart the minister was reflected as a man of righteousness, love, and peace. He almost became annoyed with the poor starling, especially as it seemed to enjoy perfect ease and comfort on its perch, where it had settled for the night.

By-and-by he proceeded to call upon the minister, but did not confide the secret to Katie.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONFERENCE IN THE MANSE.

THE manse inhabited by Mr. Porteous, like most of its parochial companions at that time—for much improvement in this as in other buildings has taken place since those days—was not beautiful, either in itself or in its surroundings. Its three upper windows stared day and night on a blank hill, whose stupid outline concealed the setting, and never welcomed the rising sun. The two lower windows looked into a round plot of tawdry shrubs, surrounded by a neglected boxwood border which defended them from the path leading from the small green

gate to the door ; while twenty yards beyond were a few formal ugly-looking trees that darkened the house, and separated it from the arable land of the glebe. No blame to the minister for his manse or its belongings ! On 200*l.* per annum, he could not keep a gardener, or afford any expensive ornaments. And for the same reason he had never married, although his theory as to "feelings" may have possibly hindered him from taking this humanising step. And who knows what effect the small living and the bachelor life may have had on his "principles !" His sister lived with him. To many a manse in Scotland the minister's sister has been a very angel in the house, a noble monument of devoted service and of self-sacrificing love—only surpassed by that paragon of excellence, if excellent at all, the minister's wife.

But with all charity, Miss Porteous—Thomasina she was called by her father, after his brother in the West Indies, from whom money was expected, but who had left her nothing—was not in any way attractive, and never gave one the impression of self-sacrifice. She evidently felt her position to be a high one. Being next to the Bishop she evidently considered herself an Archdeacon, Dean, or other responsible ecclesiastical personage. She was not ugly, for no woman is or can be that; but yet she was not beautiful. Being about fifty, as was guessed by the most charitable, her looks were not what they once were, nor did they hold out any hope of being improved, like wine, by age. Her hair was rufous, and the little curls which clustered around her forehead suggested, to those who knew her intimately, the idea of screws for worming their way into

characters, family secrets, and similar private matters. She was, unfortunately, the minister's newspaper, his remembrancer, his spiritual detective and confidential informant as to all that belonged to the parish and its passing history.

Miss Thomasina Porteous, in the absence of the servant, who was "on leave" for a day or two, opened the door to the Sergeant. Mr. Porteous was in his study, popularly so called,—a small room, with a book-press at one end, and a table in the centre, with a desk on it, a volume of "Matthew Henry's Commentary," "Cruden's Concordance," an "Edinburgh Almanac," and a few "Reports." Beside the table, and near the fire, was an arm-chair, in which the minister sat reading a volume of sermons. No sooner was the Sergeant announced than Mr. Porteous rose, looked over his spectacles, hesitated, and at last

shook hands, as if with an icicle, or in conformity with Act of Parliament. Then, motioning Mr. Mercer to a seat, he begged to inquire to what he owed this call, accompanying the question with a hint to Thomasina to leave the room. The Sergeant's first feeling was that he had made a great mistake, and he wished he had never left the army.

"Well, Mr. Mercer?" inquired the minister, as he sat opposite to the Sergeant.

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir," replied the Sergeant, "but I wished to say that I think I was too hot and hasty this afternoon in the Session."

"Pray don't apologise to *me*, Mr. Mercer," said the minister. "Whatever you have to say on that point, had better be said publicly before the Kirk Session. Anything else?"

The Sergeant wavered, as military historians

would say, before this threatened opposition, as if suddenly met by a square of bristling bayonets.

"Well, then," he at last said, "I wish to tell you frankly, and in as few words as possible, what no human being kens but my wife. I never blame ignorance, and I'm no gaun to blame yours, Mr. Porteous, but——"

"*My* ignorance!" exclaimed the minister. It's come to a pretty pass indeed, if *you* are to blame it, or remove it! Ignorance of what, pray?"

"Your ignorance, Mr. Porteous," continued the Sergeant, "on a point which I should have made known to you, and for which I alone and not you are in faut."

The minister seemed relieved by this admission.

The Sergeant forthwith told the story of the starling as the playmate of his child, the history

of whose sickness and death was already known to Mr. Porteous; and having concluded, he said, "That's the reason, sir, why I couldna kill the bird. I wadna tell this to ony man but to yersel', for its no' my fashion tae sen' the drum aboot the toon for pity or for sympathy; but I wish *you*, sir, to ken what's fac, for yer ain guidance and the guidance o' the Session."

"I remember your boy well," remarked Mr. Porteous, handing his snuff-box in a very kindly way to his visitor.

The Sergeant nodded. "Ye did *your* duty, minister, to us on that occasion, or I wadna have come here the nicht. I kent ye wad like onything Charlie was fond o'."

"I quite understand your feelings, Sergeant, and sympathise with them."

The Sergeant smiled, and nodded, and said,

"I hope ye do, sir; I was sure ye would. I'm thankfu' I cam', and sae will Katie be." The burden was lifting off his heart.

"But," said Mr. Porteous, after a pause and a long snuff, "I must be faithful with you, Adam; '*First* pure, *then* peaceable,' you know."

"And I hope, sir," said Adam, "'easy to be entreated.'"

"*That*," replied Mr. Porteous, "depends on circumstances. Let us, therefore, look at the whole aspects of the case. There is to be considered, for example, your original delinquency, mistake, or call it by what name you please; then there is to be taken into account my full explanation, given ministerially in your own house, of the principles which guided my conduct and ought to guide yours; then there is also the matter of the Kirk Session—the fact

that they have taken it up, which adds to its difficulty — a difficulty, however, let me say, Mr. Mercer, which has not been occasioned by me. Now, review all these—especially that with which you have personally most to do — the *origo mali*, so to speak—the fact that a bird endeared to you by very touching associations was, let me admit it, accidentally, and unintentionally,—let this also be granted for the sake of argument,—made by you the occasion of scandal. We are agreed on this point at least?"

"It was on that point," interrupted the Sergeant, "I thought you doubted my honour."

"No!" said Mr. Porteous, "I only declared that 'honour' was a worldly, not a Christian phrase, and unfit therefore for a Church court."

The Sergeant was nonplussed. Thinking his ignorance sinful, he bowed, and said no more.

"I am glad you acquiesce so far," continued Mr. Porteous. "But further:—carefully observe," and he leant forward, with finger and thumb describing an argumentative enclosure out of which Adam could not escape—"observe that the visible, because notorious, *fact* of scandal demands some reparation by a fact equally visible and notorious; you see? What kind of reparation I demanded, I have already told you. I smile at its amount, in spite of all you have said, and said so well, in explaining your difficulties in not at once making it; nay, I sympathise with your kindly, though, permit me to say, your weak *feeling*, Adam. But, is feeling principle? Here Mr. Porteous paused with a complacent smile to witness the telling effect of his suggestive question. "Were our Covenanting forefathers," he went on to say, "guided by feeling

in giving their testimony for *truth* by the sacrifice of their very lives? Were the martyrs of the early Church guided by *feeling?* But I will not insult an elder of mine by any such arguments, as if he were either ignorant of them, or insensible to their importance. Let me just add," concluded the minister, in a low, emphatic, and solemn voice, laying one hand on Adam's knee, "what would your dear boy *now* think—supposing him to be saved—if he knew that his father was willing to lose, or even to weaken his influence for good in the parish—to run the risk of being suspended, as you now do, from the honourable position of an elder—and all for what?" asked the minister, throwing himself back in his chair, and spreading out his hands—"all for what! a toy, a plaything, a bird! and because of your *feeling*—think of it,

Adam—your *feeling!* All must yield but you; neighbours must yield; Session must yield; and I must yield!—no sacrifice or satisfaction will you make, not even of this bird; and all because *your* feelings, forsooth, would suffer! *That's* your position, Adam. I say it advisedly. And finally, as I also hinted to you, what would the Dissenters say if we were less pure in our discipline than themselves? Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Askelon—the Philistines would rejoice! Take any view of the case you please, it is bad—very bad." And the minister struck his thigh, turned round in his chair, and looked at the roof of the room.

Adam at that moment felt as if he was the worst man in the parish, and given over to the power of evil.

"I dinna understan't," he said, bending down his head, and scratching his whisker.

"I thought you did not, Adam—I thought you did not," said Mr. Porteous, turning towards him again; "but I am glad if you are beginning to see it at last. Once you get a hold of a principle, all becomes clear."

"It's a sharp principle, minister; it's no' easy seen. It has a fine edge, but cuts deep—desperate deep," remarked Adam, in an undertone.

"That is the case with most principles, Adam," replied Mr. Porteous. "They have a fine edge, but one which, nevertheless, separates between a lie and truth, light and darkness. But if you have it—hold it fast."

The minister's principles seemed unanswerable; Adam's sense of right unassailable. Like two opposing armies of apparently equal strength

they stood, armed, face to face, and a battle was unavoidable. Could both be right, and capable of reconciliation? Could right principle and right feeling, or logical deductions from sound principles, ever be really opposed to the strongest instincts of the heart, the moral convictions of a true and loving nature? A confused medley of questions in casuistry tortured Adam's simple conscience, until they became like a tangled thread, the more knotted the more he tried to disentangle the meshes.

The Sergeant rose to depart, saying, "I have a small Sabbath class which meets in my house, and I must not be too late for it; besides there's nae use o' my waiting here langer: I have said my say, and can say nae mair."

"You will return to your class with more satisfaction," said Mr. Porteous, "after this con-

versation. But, to prevent all misunderstanding or informality, you will of course be waited upon by your brethren; and when they understand, as I do, that you will cheerfully comply with our request, and when they report the same, no more will be said of the matter unless Mr. Gordon foolishly brings it up. And if—let me suggest, though I do not insist—if, next Sunday, you should hang the cage where it was this morning when it gave rise to such scandal, but without the bird in it, the neighbours would, I am sure, feel gratified, as I myself would, by such an unmistakeable sign of your good-will to all parties."

The Sergeant had once or twice made an effort to "put in a word," but at last thought it best to hear the minister to the end. Then, drawing himself up as if on parade, he said, "I

fear you have ta'en me up wrang, Mr. Porteous. My silence wasna consent. Had my auld Colonel—ane o' the best and kindest o' men—ordered me to march up to a battery, I wad hae done't, though I should hae been blawn the next moment up to the moon; but if he had ordered me, for example, tae strike a bairn, or even tae kill my bird, I wad hae refused, though I had been shot the next minute for't. There are things I canna do, and winna do, for mortal man, as long as God gies me my heart: and this is ane o' them—I'll never kill 'Charlie's bairn.' That's my last word—and ye can do as you and the Session please."

The minister stood aghast with astonishment. The Sergeant saluted him soldier-fashion, and walked out of the room, followed by Mr. Porteous to the front door. As he passed out, the

minister said, "Had you shot fewer birds, sir, in your youth, you might have escaped the consequences of refusing to shoot this one now. 'Be sure your sin will find you out,'" he added, in a louder voice, as he shut the door with extra force, and with a grim smile upon his face.

Smellie had informed him that forenoon of Mercer's poaching days.

"Capital!" exclaimed Miss Thomasina, as she followed him into the study out of a dark corner in the lobby near the door, where she had been ensconsed, listening to the whole conversation "Let his proud spirit take that! I wonder you had such patience with the upsetting, petted fellow. Him and his bird, forsooth, to be disturbing the peace of the parish!"

"Leave him to me," quietly replied Mr. Porteous, "I'll work him."

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLIE'S COT ONCE MORE OCCUPIED.

AS the Sergeant returned home the sun set, and the whole western sky became full of glory, with golden islands sleeping on a sea in which it might seem a thousand rainbows had been dissolved ; while the holy calm of the Sabbath eve was disturbed only by the "streams unheard by day," and by the last notes of the strong blackbird and thrush,—for all the other birds, wearied with singing since daybreak, had gone to sleep. The beauty of the landscape, a very gospel of "glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and goodwill to men," did not,

however, lift the dull weight off Adam's heart. He felt as if he had no right to share the universal calm.

"Be sure your sin will find you out!" So his minister had said. Perhaps it was true. He had sinned in his early poaching days; but he thought he had repented, and become a different man. Was it indeed so? or was he now suffering for past misconduct, and yet too blind to see the dealings of a righteous God with him? It is twilight with Adam as well as with the world!

He expected to meet his small evening class of about a dozen poor neglected children who assembled every Sunday evening in his house, and which, all alone, and without saying anything about it, he had taught for some years, after his own simple and earnest fashion. He was longing to meet them. It would give him some-

thing to do—something to occupy his disturbed mind—a positive good about which there was no possible doubt; and it would also prevent Katie from seeking information that would be painful for him to give and for her to receive.

To his astonishment he found one girl only in attendance. This was Mary Semple, or "Wee Mary," as she was generally called; a fatherless and motherless orphan, without a known relation on earth, and who was boarded by the Session, as being the only poor-law guardians in the parish, with a widow in the immediate neighbourhood, to whom two shillings weekly were paid for her. Adam and his wife had taken a great fancy to Mary. She was nervous and timid from constitutional temperament, which was aggravated by her poor upbringing as an infant, and by the unkind usage, to say the least of it,

she often received from Mrs. Craigie, with whom she lived. Adam had more than once expostulated with the Kirk Session for boarding Mary with this woman; but as Mrs. Craigie was patronised by Mr. Smellie, and as no direct charge against her could be "substantiated on sufficient evidence," such as Mr. Smellie demanded, Mary was not removed. But she often crept into the Sergeant's house to warm herself and get a "piece" with Charlie; for she was so meek, so kind, so playful, as to have been always welcomed as a fit companion for the boy. This was, perhaps, the secret of the attachment of Adam and his wife to her after their boy's death.

But where were the other children of the class? Mrs. Mercer could not conjecture. Could Mary? She hung her head, looked at her fingers, and

"couldna say," but yet seemed to have something to say, until at last she confessed saying: "Mrs. Craigie flyted on me for wantin' to come to the Sabbath-nicht skule, and said she wad gie me a thrashing if I left the house when she gaed to the evenin' sermon; but I ran awa' to the class, and I'm feared to gang hame."

"What for are ye feared, Mary?" asked the Sergeant.

"Jist because——" replied Mary, with her head down.

"Because o' what, bairn?" persistently asked the Sergeant.

"Because o' the bird," said Mary, driven to a corner. And being further urged, she went on to tell in her own way how "a' the weans had been ordered by their folk no' to come to the class, as——"

But Mary hung down her head again, and was silent.

"As what, Mary?"

"As——" And she wept as if her heart would break.

"As what, Mary?"

"As the Sergeant was an awfu' bad man," she added, in her sobs.

"Don't cry, Mary—be calm," said Adam.

"But I've com'd, as I kent it was a lee," the child said, looking up to Adam's face.

Mary had faith! But if the Sergeant had any doubt as to Mary's story, it was soon dispelled by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Craigie, demanding the child in a very decided tone of voice, and without making any apology for the sudden intrusion, or offering any explanation. "Did I no' tell ye to bide at hame, ye guid-for-

nothing lassie? Come awa' wi' me this minute!" she said, advancing to take hold of Mary. Mary sprang to the Sergeant and hid herself behind his back.

"Not so hasty, Mrs. Craigie," said the Sergeant, protecting her; "not so hasty, if you please. What's wrong?"

"Dinna let her tak' me! Oh, dinna let her tak' me!" cried Mary, from behind the Sergeant, and holding fast by his coat-tails. "She struck me black and blue; look at my arm," she continued, and she showed him her little thin arm, coloured by Mrs. Craigie."

"Ye leein' cuttie!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie, "I'll mak' ye that ye'll no clipe fibs on me!" shaking her clenched fist at the unseen Mary. Then, looking the Sergeant in the face, with arms a-kimbo, she said, "I'll mak' you answer for this, ye hypo-

crite! that hae tried, as I ken, mony a time to beguile Mary frae me. But I hae freens, ay, hae I, freens that wull see justice dune to me, and to *you* too—that wull they, faix! Black and blue! She fell running frae your ain wicked bird, whan ye were corrupting the young on this verra Sabbath morning. And I said to Mr. Smellie at the kirk-door in the afternoon, when the Session was by, 'Mr. Smellie,' says I, 'ye gied me a bairn to keep,' says I, 'and to be brocht up in the fear o' religion,' says I; 'but it's ill to do that,' says I, 'beside yon Sergeant,' says I. I did that, that did I; and Mr. Smellie telt me he wad see justice dune me, and dune you, and that ye war afore the Session, and I'm thankfu' to a kind Providence that's what *I never was.* Gie me my bairn, I say!" and she made another pounce at Mary,

followed by another cry from the child for protection.

Katie had retired to the bedroom and shut the door.

The Sergeant said, "I'll keep Mary. Gang hame, Mrs. Craigie. I'll answer to the Session for you. Nae mair scauldin' here." And he pressed forward with outstretched arms, gently compelling Mrs. Craigie to retreat towards the door, until she finally vanished with exclamations, and protestations, and vows of vengeance, which need not be here repeated.

"Sirs me!" ejaculated Katie, as she came out of her retreat; "that's awfu'!"

"Dinna be frichtened, my wee woman," said the Sergeant, as he led Mary to the fire-side. 'Warm yer bit feet, and get yer supper, and I'll gie ye a lesson afore ye gang to yer bed."

Mary blew her nose, dried her eyes, and did as she was bid.

The Sergeant motioned to his wife to come to the bedroom. He shut the door, and said, "I'll never pairt wi' Mary, come what may. My heart tells me this. Get Charlie's bed ready for her; she'll lie there, and be our bairn. God has sent her."

"I was thinking that mysel'," said Katie; "I aye liked the wee thing, and sae did Charlie."

The Sergeant's lesson was a very simple one, as, indeed, most of his were. He took the child on his knee, and putting on his spectacles, made her read one or two simple verses of Scripture. This night he selected, from some inner connexion, the verse from the Sermon on the Mount:—"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your

heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

And he said, "Mary, dear, did you come and hear my bird whistle?"

"Oo, ay," replied Mary. "It was real bonnie; and I thocht a' the time o' wee Charlie."

"But why did ye run awa' and mak' a noise on the Sabbath morning? Ye shouldna hae been sporting on the Lord's day."

"I was frichtened for the minister," replied Mary.

"Why were ye frichtened for the good man?"

"I dinna ken," said Mary; "but the boys ran, and I ran, and Archy Walker fell ower me and hurted me. I wasna meaning ony ill;" and Mary threatened to give way again.

"Whisht, Mary," said the Sergeant. "I wasna blaming you; but ye ken I didna hang Charlie's

bird oot to harm you, or mak' sport, but only because he wasna weel."

"What was wrang wi' him?" asked Mary. "There's an awfu' heap o' measles gaun aboot."

"Not that," said the Sergeant, smiling; "but it was to mak' him weel, no' to mak' you play, that I pit him oot. But ye see God kens aboot the bird, and it was Him that made him, and that feeds him; and see hoo he sleeps ower your new bed,—for that's whaur Charlie used to sleep; and ye'll sleep there, dear, and bide wi' me; and God, that takes care o' the wee birds, will tak' care o' you."

Mary said nothing, but turned her face and hid it in the Sergeant's bosom, next his heart; and he was more than ever persuaded that his heart was not wrong in wishing the orphan to lie there.

"Mary," the Sergeant whispered to her after a while, "ye maun aye ca' me faither."

Mary lay closer to his heart.

Katie, who had been sitting in the same arm-chair which she had occupied in the morning, heard her husband's words, and rising, bent over the child, and added, "And, Mary, ye maun aye ca' me mither."

The starling, who was asleep, suddenly awoke, as if startled, shook himself, elevated his yellow bill above the round ball of feathers, turned his head and looked at the group with his full bright eye, and although too drowsy to say "I'm Charlie's bairn," he evidently remembered the relationship, and would have expressed it too—partly from jealousy, partly from love—had he not been again overpowered by sleep.

"We'll hae worship," said the Sergeant, as

he put Mary down, and placed her in a little chair which had never been occupied since his boy died. After reading the Scriptures — the portion chosen was the 23rd Psalm—the Sergeant prayed, Mary concluding at his request by repeating the Lord's Prayer aloud. They then retired to rest—Charlie's cot once more occupied ; and the quiet stars never shone on a more peaceful home.

CHAPTER X.

THE SERGEANT ALONE WITH HIS STARLING.

MR. SMELLIE called upon the Sergeant next forenoon. His manner was cold and formal, as that of one who had power, if not right, on his side, and whose pride was flattered by the conviction that his real or supposed opponent was in the wrong. His reception was equally cold, for although Adam had respect for his minister, and also for Mr. Menzies, he had, as we have already said, none whatever for Mr. Smellie.

"Mr. Mercer," said Smellie, "I have called on you, in order first of all to correct a grave

error you have committed in regard to Mary Semple, the child boarded by the Kirk Session with Mrs. Craigie."

"I'm not aware, Mr. Smellie," replied the Sergeant, "that *you* are the Kirk Session, or have any richt whatsomever to correct my error, as ye ca't, in this matter."

Smellie smiled sarcastically, and added, "In a friendly way at least, Mr. Mercer. You, of course, ken that the whole expense of the bairn must be borne by yersel', for I don't believe that the Session will pay one farthing to you—not a farthing!—as you have ta'en her from Mrs. Craigie on your ain responsibility."

"I ken a' that; and I ken also that I mean to keep her frae Mrs. Craigie, unless the Session and the law hinder me, and compel me to gie her up; which is no' likely; but if they do, on them

be the curse of injuring the orphan. Understan' then that I mean to keep her at my ain expense, even should the Session offer to pay for her. Anything else, Mr. Smellie?"

"Weel then, Mr. Mercer," said Smellie, "see til't, see til't; for there will be determined opposition to you."

"I have had worse in my day, Mr. Smellie," drily replied the Sergeant, "and I'm no' feared. In the meantime Mary remains here, and I'm determined she 'll never return to Mrs. Craigie—that's settled. An' if the Session kent the woman as I do, and maybe as ye do, they wad be thankfu', as I am, that Mary is wi' me and no' wi' her. Onything mair to complain o' in what ye ca' a freendly way?"

"Oh, naething, naething!" said Mr. Smellie, with pent-up annoyance, "except that the committee

which the Session appointed—that's me and Mr. Menzies—to deal with you about this scandal—a most unpleasant business—mean to ca' upo' you this evening at six, if that hour will suit."

"As weel, or as ill, as ony other hour, Mr. Smellie," replied Adam, "for I dinna mean to be dealt wi', either by you or by Mr. Menzies."

"No' to be dealt with, Mr. Mercer! Do ye mean to say that ye won't even receive the committee?" he asked with amazement.

"That's jist exactly what I mean, Mr. Smellie!" replied Adam, "I don't mean to receive your committee, that's plain, and you may tak' a minute o't. If ye wish to ken why, ye had better speer at Mr. Porteous. But ye needna trouble yoursel' wi' me. What I have said I'll stan' to like a man; what I have promised I'll perform like a Christian; and what I canna

do, I winna do! If ye need mair explanation, this maybe will suffice:—that I'll no' kill my bird for you nor for the Session, nor yet for the minister, nor for the hail parish; and that ye may as well try to kill me wi' blank cartridge, as try yer han' in persuading me to kill the starling. Sae, Mr. Smellie, as far as that business is concerned, ye may gang hame, and no wat yer shoon to come my gait ony mair."

"Sae be't, sae be't!" replied Smellie, with a cackle of a laugh, as much as to say, "I have him!" He then bowed and departed, walking silently like a cat along the street, but not purring. Yet he seemed to be feeling for something with the long hairs which projected from his whiskers like bristles.

Poor Adam! Now began such a week in his history as he never had experienced before. Oh!

it was cold, dark, and dreary! He had to drink the cup of loneliness in the midst of his fellow men—the bitterest cup which can be tasted by any one who loves his brother. But all his suffering was kept within his own heart, and found "no relief in word, or sigh, or tear."

What a sinner he had become in the opinion of many of the respectable inhabitants of Drumsylie! What a double distilled spirit of evil!—far over proof, for no *proofs* are ever applied to such evil spirits. Drumsylie was all agog about him. He was as interesting as a shipwreck to a seaport town; as a great swindle to a stock exchange; or as a murder to a quiet neighbourhood! What had he done? What had he been guilty of? Some said, or at least heard that some one else had said, that he had insulted the minister and the Kirk Session; others, that he had secretly

supported himself as a poacher; others, that he had been heard to declare, that rather than kill the bird, he would, out of mere spite and obstinacy, give up the eldership, the Church, ay, even Christianity itself; others, that he had stolen a child from Mrs. Craigie, whom, though a woman, he, a soldier, had threatened to strike in his own house. He was a terror even to evil doers!

Most marvellous is this birth and upbringing of lies! Who lays the first egg? How does it multiply so rapidly? And how singular is the development of each of the many eggs—through all the stages of evil thoughts, suspicious hints, wondering *if's* and *maybe's*, perversions, exaggerations, fibs, white lies—until it is fully hatched into out-and-out lies repeated with diligence, malice, and hate! We can give no account of

this social phenomenon except the old one, of the devil being first the parent of the whole family, and his then distributing and boarding out each to trustworthy friends to be hatched and trained up in the way it should go in order to please him, its parent.

In Drumsylie, as in other towns, there were some who so indulged the self-pleasing habit of confessing and mourning over the sins and shortcomings of their neighbours, that they had little time or inclination to confess their own. Some of these confessors might be heard during this week in Adam's history lamenting:—"Oh! it's a dreadfu' place this! Eh! it's eneuch to keep ane sleepless to think o't! Whan a man like Adam Mercer, wi' a' his knowledge and profession, becomes a scoffer, and despises ordinances, and," &c. &c.

But it would be unjust to Drumsylie and the Sergeant to affirm that this state of public feeling had not very many marked exceptions. Some, chiefly among the poor, truly loved him, and sympathised with him, and openly confessed this. Many protested, in private at least, against his treatment. But such is, alas! the moral cowardice, or maybe the thoughtlessness only, of even good men, that few expressed to Adam himself their goodwill towards him, or their confidence in his righteousness. It is indeed remarkable, in a free country of brave men, how very many there are who, before taking any decided part in questions which distract communities, small or great, attentively consider on which side the hangman is, or seems likely to be. The executioner's cord seen in the possession of this or that party has a wonderful influence on the number of its ad-

herents. As far as appearances went, this sign of authority and power was supposed for the time being to be in the possession of the Rev. Daniel Porteous. And so the cautious and prudent consoled themselves by saying: "It is not our business," or "Least said soonest mended," or "Why quarrel with the minister?" or "Why displease my aunt, or my uncle, who are so bigoted and narrow?" or "Mr. Porteous and the majority of Session may be wrong, but that is their affair, not ours." Such were some of the characteristic sayings of the men who were doubtful as to the side which possessed Calcraft and his cord of office.

Mr. Smellie had communicated Adam Mercer's resolution to Mr. Menzies, and this had deterred him from attempting to follow in the track of expostulation with Adam, which it was evident

would lead to nothing. Smellie had failed—who could succeed? Mr. Menzies ought to have *tried*. Some success by one good man in dealing with another good man, is certain.

The Session met on the next Sunday after Adam's quarrel with his minister, or rather of his minister with him. The court was, as usual, "constituted by prayer." But whether the spirit of prayer constitutes the spirit of every meeting opened by it, may, without offence, be questioned. It is unnecessary to condense the debates—for debates there were at this meeting. Adam, with a soldier's gentlemanly feeling, did not attend, lest it might be supposed that he wished to influence the court. Smellie, in spite of some opposing murmurs of dissent, ascribed his absence to "contumacious pride," and the minister did not contradict him.

Mr. Porteous addressed the court. He asked whether it was possible for them to stop proceedings in the case of Mr. Mercer without stultifying themselves? Had they not taken the very mildest and most judicious course, and considered both what was due to themselves and also to their erring brother? Yet they had not only failed to obtain the slightest concession from him, but he had gone so far as even to refuse to receive or confer with their own committee! The case was no doubt most distressing to them all, but, as far as he could see, it would bring well-merited ridicule on all Church discipline if they dropped it at this stage. To appoint another deputation would be disrespectful to the dignity of the court; and as for himself, he had done all he could since their last meeting to bring about an amicable settlement: for, on the previous Sab-

bath evening, he had had a private interview in the manse with Mr. Mercer, which had terminated, he grieved to say, in a most unsatisfactory manner.

Such was the general tenour of the minister's harangue. It was in vain that Mr. Gordon, backed by William Simpson, farmer, of Greenfield, and Andrew Grainger, watchmaker, argued against the minister—the latter declaring that the Session were putting back the hands of the clock, and falling behind time.

But all in vain! Adam, by the casting vote of the Moderator, was "suspended" from the eldership; that is, deprived for a time of his official position. Mr. Gordon and the two elders who supported him, vehemently protested against what they called the "tyrannical proceeding of the majority." Most fortunately for the cause of

justice, the Rev. Daniel was not a bishop who could rule his parish presbyters as his own "principles," whims, or — pardon the irreverent insinuation—his indigestion, might dictate. There was a higher court, and there was the law of the land, higher than the court, to curb the minister's will, or as he always called it when in a passion — his conscience. The sentence of the Session might be, as was confidently anticipated, reversed by the Presbytery, though the district was notoriously narrow and prejudiced, and some of the clergy fancied that moving straws showed how the winds of heaven blew, when they were only stirred by their own breath.

When Adam returned on that Sunday afternoon from church, he fortunately did not know, though he more than suspected, what the decision

of the Kirk Session had been. He knew certainly that his case must not only have come before the court, but must also, from its nature, have caused such a division of opinion as would make his position as an elder one of remark, of suspicion, and, to him, of personal pain. It was a temporary comfort, however, that he had no certain bad news to communicate to Katie, and that he could say, as he did with truth, "It wasna for me to be present, or to interfere. They have done their duty nae doot, an' I have done mine as far as I could."

When his humble Sunday meal was over, and before sunset, Adam went to visit one or two of the sick, infirm, or bedridden, who were on his list to attend to as an elder. Not until he was on his way to their homes did he realise the fact that, for the present at least, he was pro-

bably no longer an elder. But as he never had formed the habit of visiting the sick as a mere official, but had made his office only a better means, given him in God's providence, for gratifying his benevolent and Christian feelings, he went, as he was wont to do, with a peaceful spirit and loving heart. The poor and suffering whom he visited received him with their usual kindness and gratitude. They *felt* that Adam could not be a bad or false man; that in him was love—love in its meekness, calmness, self-possession, sympathy, and forgiveness of others. They could not, perhaps, explain the grounds of their perfect and unreserved confidence in him, yet they could not—it was impossible—entertain any doubts of his Christian character which could hinder their hearts from feeling what they in many cases expressed with their lips, that "A

real guid man is Adam Mercer! It's me that should say't, for he has been aye kind and guid to me. I'm no saying wha's richt or wrang; I ken this only, that I'll stan' by Adam! I wish we had mair like him!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD SOLDIER AND HIS YOUNG PUPIL ON SUNDAY EVENING.

ON his return home after these visits, he placed Mary on Charlie's chair, beside himself, resolving, although the other members of the class were still absent, that he would nevertheless teach Mary as their representative, as well as for her own sake. There had come into his possession one of those small books of guidance and instruction which many intellectual people—so called by men, but probably not so recognised by the angels, who minister even to children—affect to despise, just as they would despise any "still small voice" when compared

with the loud storm, the brilliant fire, and the powerful, rock-moving earthquake. This book was but a number of texts, wisely arranged by a bedridden Christian, for each day of the year, with one of special and deeper import for its Sabbaths. The text for this Lord's Day was—"They who know Thy name will put their trust in Thee;" and Adam said to Mary, when she had repeated it as the lesson for the day, "Do ye understan' what is meant, my dearie, by trusting God?"

"I'm no' sure," she replied.

"But ye surely ken what it wad be to trust *me*, Mary?" continued the Sergeant.

Mary looked up and smiled. She made no reply, but was evidently puzzled by an attempt she was unconsciously making to understand the possibility of want of trust in the Sergeant. So,

finding no response, he again asked, "Wad ye trust *me*, my wee woman?"

Mary seemed vexed, and said, "What wrang hae I dune? Ye telt me aye to ca' you faither; I canna help; sae ye maunna be angry, for I hae nae faither but you."

"Richt! verra richt!" said the Sergeant; "but, Mary dear, wad ye trust God as weel as me?"

"No!" said Mary, very decidedly.

"What for no'?" asked the Sergeant, kindly.

"I'm awfu' frichtened for him," said Mary.

"Why are ye frichtened for *Him?*" asked Adam.

Mary seemed to be counting the buttons on his coat.

"Tell me, bairn!" he continued.

"Because," said Mary, sorrowfully, yet encouraged by his tone, "Mrs. Craigie aye telt me

He wad sen' me to the bad place; and when I got my fit burned she said that I wad be a' burnt thegither some day, as I was a bad lassie; and I'm sure I wasna' doing her ony ill to mak' her say that."

"God will never," remarked the Sergeant, reverently, "send ye to the bad place, unless ye gang yersel'."

"I'll never do that!" exclaimed Mary.

"I hope no', my lassie," said Adam, "for I wish you no' to be bad, but to be good; and to trust God is the way to be good. Noo tell me, Mary, why wad ye trust me?"

"Because—jist because," said Mary, looking up to his face, "ye're faither."

"Weel dune, Mary!" continued the Sergeant. "Noo tell me what's the beginning o' the Lord's Prayer?"

"Our Faither which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy——"

"That'll do, Mary," interrupted Adam. "But can ye tell me noo wha's yer Faither as weel as me?"

After a pause Mary said, as if she had made a discovery, "Our Faither in heaven!"

"That's a clever woman! *Faither!* that's God's *Name.* And noo that ye ken his Name, ye maun trust Him fair mair than me: for He lo'es ye mair than I can do, and is aye wi' ye; and never will forsake ye, and can aye help ye; and He has said that when faither and mither forsake you, He will tak' ye up. That will He, my lassie!"

"But," said Mary, "my mither and faither, they tell me, dee'd wi' fever, but didna forsake me."

"That's true; but I mean, my bairn," said

Adam, "that ye can never be an orphan lassie wi' God as yer Faither."

"But," said Mary, "for a' that, ye maun aye be my faither as weel. Oh! dinna sen' me back to Mrs. Craigie."

"Dinna fear, Mary," replied Adam; "but maybe I maun hae to leave you. God may tak' me awa', and tak' yer mither there awa' too; and then when ye're alane in the world, ye maun trust God."

"I'll no' trust Him," replied Mary; "if you and mither dees, I'll dee tae, and gang wi' ye." And she fairly broke down, and clung to him as if he was about to leave her.

The Sergeant took Mary on his knee. "Be cheerie, Mary—be cheerie!" he said. "If ye kent God, ye wad aye be cheerie, my lassie. Mrs. Craigie has frichted ye."

"Ay, awfu'!" said Mary.

The Sergeant felt as if Mary had not quite learned her lesson, and he continued:—"D'ye mind what I telt ye ae nicht aboot mithers bringing their bairns to Christ?—and hoo some folk that didna ken Him were for keeping them awa'?—and hoo Jesus was angry at them?—and hoo the bairns gaed till Him——"

"And did they no' squeel wi' fricht?" asked Mary.

"Did ye squeel, Mary," asked the Sergeant, with a smile, "when I took ye into *my* arms?"

"No. What for should I?" replied Mary.

"Aweel, my lassie," argued Adam, "why do ye think that bairns like yersel' should be frichted to trust that same Jesus wha was Himsel' a bairn and kens a bairn's heart? He wad be unco' sorry, Mary, if ye didna trust Him, when He dee'd, as

ye ken, on the cross to save you and me and ilka body, and aye thinks aboot us and prays for us."

Mary sighed, and crept closer to the Sergeant.

Adam, taking her little hand in his, said, "Mind what I tell ye, my bairn. Learn ye to speak aye to God and tell Him yer heart in yer ain prayer, and never gang ony road He wadna like; and stick till Him as ye wad to me if we were gaun ower the muir thegither at nicht, or through a burn in a spate; and never, Mary, in the hour o' distress think that He doesna care for you or has forgotten you. For nae doot whan ye grow up to be big ye'll hae mony a distress, like ither folk, ye dinna ken aboot yet."

Mary turned her face to his bosom as if to sleep, but never was she less inclined to sleep.

The Sergeant added with a sigh, "Think, my

wee dearie, on what I tell you noo, after I'm dead and gane."

Katie, seated on the opposite side of the fire, had been reading Boston's "Crook in the Lot." She seemed not to have heard a word of her husband's lesson; but her ears drank in the whole of it. The Sergeant had evidently forgotten her presence, so quiet was she, and so absorbed was he with Mary, who was to him a new life—his own child restored. But as Katie caught his last words, she put down her book, and looking almost in anger at her husband—could she have felt jealous of Mary?—said, "Tuts, Adam! what's the use o pitting me and Mary aboot wi' discoorsin' in that way! It's really no' fair. I declare ane wad think that Andra Wilkie, the bederal, was diggin' yer grave! What pits deein' in yer head e'enoo? An' you an auld sodger! Be cheerie yersel', man!"

"I daursay ye're richt, gudewife," said Adam, with a smile, and rather a sheepish look, as if he had been caught playing the woman with an unmanly expression of his feelings and dim forebodings. "Gie Mary her piece," he added, "and sen' her to her bed. She has dune unco weel." He passed into the bed-room, closing the door while Katie was putting Mary to rest.

It was a peaceful night. He sat down near the small window of her bedroom, from which was a pleasant peep of trees, their underwood now hid in darkness, but their higher branches, with every leafy twig, mingling with the blue of the starry sky, partially illumined by a new moon. He had felt during these last days an increasing dulness of spirits. But this evening he had been comforting himself while comforting Mary; and remembering the lesson he had given her, he said to himself,

"Blessed are all they who put their trust in Thee." And somehow there came into his mind pictures of the old war—times in which, amidst the trampling of armed men and words of command, the sudden rush to the charge or up the scaling-ladder, the roar and cries of combat, the volcano of shot and shell bursting and filling the heavens with flame and smoke and deadly missile, he had trusted God, and felt calm at his heart, like a child in the arms of a loving parent. These pictures flashed on him but for a second, yet they were sufficient to remind him of what God had ever been to him, and to strengthen his faith in what He would ever be.

CHAPTER XII.

ADAM MERCER, SERGEANT, BUT NOT ELDER.

NEXT morning the announcement of the Sergeant's suspension from the eldership was conveyed to him by an official document from Mr. Mackintosh, the Session clerk and parish schoolmaster;—a good, discreet man, who did his duty faithfully, loyally voted always with the minister from an earnest belief that it was right to do so, and who made it his endeavour as a member of society to meddle with nobody, in the good hope that nobody would meddle with him. Every man can find his own place in this wide world.

Katie heard the news, but, strange to say,

was not so disconcerted as Adam anticipated. In proportion as difficulties gathered round her husband, she became more resolute, and more disposed to fight for him. She was like many women on their first voyage, who in calm weather are afraid of a slight breeze and the uneasy motion of the ship, yet who, when actual danger threatens, rise up in the power and dignity of their nature, and become the bravest of the brave—their very feeling and fancy, which shrank from danger while it was unseen, coming to their aid as angels of hope when danger alone is visible.

"Aweel, aweel," remarked Katie; "it's their ain loss, Adam, no' yours; ye hae naething to charge yersel' wi'."

But she would sometimes relapse into a meditative mood, as the more painful side of the

case revealed itself. "Ay noo—ay—and they hae suspended ye?—that's hanged ye, as I suppose, like a dog or cat! Bonnie-like Session! —my word!—and for what? Because ye wadna kill the bird! Teuch! It micht pit a body daft tae think o't!" And so on.

But this did little good to Adam, who felt his character, his honour, at stake. Things were daily getting worse to bear. The news had spread over the town, "Adam Mercer has been rebuked and suspended by the Kirk Session!" From that moment he became a marked man. Old customers fell away from him; not that any openly declared that they would not employ him as a shoemaker merely because the minister and Kirk Session were opposed to him: —Oh, no! Not a hint was given of that, or anything approaching to it; but, somehow, new

shoes seemed to have gone out of fashion in Drumsylie.

The cold unfeeling snowball increased as it rolled along the street in which Adam lived, until it blocked up his door, so that he could hardly get out. If he did go, it was to be subjected to constant annoyance. The boys and girls of the lowest class in his neighbourhood, influenced by all they heard discussed and asserted in their respective homes, where *reserve* was not the characteristic of the inmates, were wont to gather round his window, and to peer into the interior with an eager gaze, as if anxious to discover some fitting fuel to enlighten their domestic hearths at night. It was as impossible to seize them as to catch a flock of sparrows settled down upon a seed plot in a garden. When the Sergeant therefore ventured to go abroad

the nickname of "The Starling" was shouted after him by the boys, who adopted all the various modes of concealing their ringleaders which evidence such singular dexterity and cunning. The result was that Adam was compelled, as we have said, to keep within doors. He thus began to feel as if he was alone in the world. Every one seemed changed. Those on whom he had hitherto relied failed him. He or the world was worse than he had ever imagined either to be, and it was little comfort to him to know which of the two was wrong.

The Sergeant, however, enjoyed much inward peace though little happiness. For how different is peace from happiness! Happiness is the result of harmony between our wants as creatures and the world without: peace is the harmony between us as spiritual beings and the

Father of our spirits. The one is as changeable as the objects or circumstances on which it for the moment relies; the other is as unchangeable as the God on whom it eternally rests. We may thus possess at once real happiness and real peace; yet either may exist without the other. Nay more, happiness may be destroyed by God in order that the higher blessing of peace may be possessed; but never will He take away peace to give happiness! Happiness without peace is temporal, but peace along with happiness is eternal.

Adam, as we have said, enjoyed little happiness in the conflict in which he was engaged, but he was kept in "perfect peace."

When another Sunday came round, the old sense of duty induced him to go, as usual, to church. His absence might be supposed

to indicate that he feared the face of man, because fearing the face of God. Katie accompanied him. Her courage rose to the occasion. Let not the reader who, moving in a larger sphere of life, has learned to measure his annoyances by a larger standard, smile at these simple souls, or think it an exaggeration thus to picture their burden as having been so heavy.

Adam and Katie walked along the street, knowing all the time that they did so under the gaze of the cold and criticising eyes of some who were disposed to say to them, "Stand back, I am holier than thou!" Yet more persons than they themselves were aware of felt towards them kindness, pity, and respect, mingled with very opposite feelings to those of the minister and the members of Kirk Session who had made so much ado about so small

an affair. Others forgot the sympathy due to a suffering, good man, apart from its immediate cause. Many of his worthy friends said afterwards that they "did not think of it!" Alas! this *not* thinking is often the worst form of thought.

Adam and Katie passed Smellie, as he stood at "the plate," without the slightest recognition on either side. They occupied their accustomed seat, but sat alone. Those who ordinarily filled the pew suffered from cold or conscience, and so were either absent or seated elsewhere. One may guess what sort of sermon Mr. Porteous preached from the text, "Beware of evil doers." The personal reference to the Sergeant was like a theme pervading his overture; or as an idea not so much directly expressed as indirectly insinuated from first to last. The argument

was a huge soap-bubble of what he called "principle" blown from his pipe until he could blow no longer, and which when fully developed he contemplated with admiration as if it were a glorious globe of thought that must necessarily be heavenly because reflecting to his eyes the colours of the rainbow. His picture of the danger of the times in which he lived was very vivid, and his hopes of any improvement very small. The history of society seemed but a record of degeneracy since the first century of the Christian era. But whoever proved a traitor, he himself, he said, would still earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints; and *his* trumpet, at least, should never give an uncertain sound; and *he* would hold fast the form of sound words:—and so on he went until his forty-five minutes were ended.

That the preacher was perfectly sincere, no one could doubt. He was no coward, or make-believe, but was thoroughly convinced. He would at any time have given up his "all" for his "principles," and given his body even to be burned for them without fear — yet possibly "without charity."

We do not condemn Mr. Porteous's "principles." They were, most of them, what might be called Christian truisms, which no one believing in the supreme authority of the Bible, far less any parish minister, could dispute. But the practical application of his principles by the minister on certain occasions, as on this one, might be questioned. He might also have considered whether there were not many other Bible and Christian principles of wider import and deeper spiritual meaning, than those he contended for, and gave

such prominence to, not excluding but including his special favourites, which he required to know before he could really understand or truly apply those even which he so tenaciously held and so frequently expounded. Half truths are untruths. A man who always tried to stand on his head might be as well without one.

Adam accepted the heavy fire from the pulpit with calm submission. He knew that very many in the congregation while listening to the minister were looking at himself; but, knowing also how much depends in every battle on the steadiness and self-possession of the non-commissioned officers, he looked the enemy in the face and never winced. Katie seemed inspired by his example—so far, at least, that she neither fled nor fainted, and though not daring to gaze on the foe, she braved his charge as if kneeling in

the rear rank, with a calm countenance, but with eyes cast down to the ground.

Poor Katie! What would Waterloo have been to her in comparison with that day's mental battle in the kirk! The one was an honourable conflict; but this was reckoned by those whom she respected as one of dishonour. In the one was danger of wounds and of death—but in this were deeper wounds, and danger possibly beyond the grave! How often did the form of her old "faither" come before her—though she thought it strange that he did not seem to frown. But she never communicated her fears or feelings to her husband. "He has eneuch to carry wi'oot me," she said.

As they left the church more than one person took an opportunity of addressing the Sergeant, and, to the credit of all, not one uttered an

unkindly word. Some shook him warmly by the hand but said nothing. Others added, "God bless ye! Dinna heed, Mr. Mercer. It'll come a' richt yet." Mr. Gordon and one or two of the elders were marked in their kindness. It would not have conduced to the comfort of the minister, though it might have made him doubt how far his people really sympathised with him or his "principles," had he heard some of the remarks made after the sermon by the more intelligent and independent of his congregation. But his ignorance was to him a kind of bliss; and whatever tended or threatened to disturb his self-satisfaction would have been recognised by him as folly, not wisdom.

Adam could not shut his ears, but he could hold his tongue; and he did so.

The worthy couple walked home in silence,

and arm-in-arm too! for the first time probably in their lives. Mary, whom we forgot to mention, followed them in new shoes, a new bonnet, a new shawl, with her Bible wrapped up in a clean pocket-handkerchief. As they entered their home, the starling received them with quite a flutter of excitement. Shaking his feathers, hopping violently about his cage, or thrusting his bill, as if for a kiss, between the bars, he welcomed Mary, as she approached him with some food, and made the room ring with various declarations as to his being Charlie's bairn, his hopes of being yet a king, and his belief in genuine manhood.

"I think," quoth the Sergeant, "he is ane o' the happiest and maist contented bit craturs in the parish."

Mary, as if feeling that it was right to say

something good on Sunday, archly put in, "I mind what ye telt me aboot the bird."

"What was't, my bairn?" asked Adam.

"It was aboot the fowls—I dinna mind a' the verse, but a bit o't was, 'Are not ye better than the fowls?'"

"Thank ye for the comfort, Mary dear," said Adam, gravely.

From some common instinct of their hearts, Mr. Porteous' sermon was not spoken of. Was it because Mary was present? or only because Katie was so anxious to see the cheese well toasted for their tea? or because——yet why go on conjecturing! But at evening worship, which closed the day, Adam as usual, prayed for his minister, and for God's blessing on the preached word; and he prayed to be delivered from evil-doing, and from fretting at evil-doers, and to be

enabled to put his trust in God and do good. Katie on rising from her knees did what she never did before, kissed her husband, saying, "God bless you, my best o' men!"

"Gae awa,' gae awa'!" said the Sergeant; "ye want to gaur me greet like yersel', do ye? But na, lass, I'm ower auld a sodger for that!" With all his boasting, however, he was very nearly betrayed into the weakness which he professed to despise. But he seemed greatly pleased with his good wife's kindness, and he added, "Bless you, my braw leddy, a' the same. And," in a whisper, "ye needna let on to Mary that I'm fashed. It micht vex the lassie."

CHAPTER XIII.

JOCK HALL, THE NE'ER-DO-WEEL.

WE must go back for a few days in our story. During the lonely week which we have but very partially and inadequately described—for how few would believe that a man with a good conscience and good sense could suffer so much in such circumstances!—the Sergeant received a visit from Jock Hall, who has been already mentioned, and whom Katie described as "a ne'er-do-weel."

Katie's estimate of Jock's character was that of Drumsylie. Most parishes, indeed, have their quota of weaklings in intellect and weaklings in

morals. Jock belonged to the latter class. He was a thin, sallow-faced man, of a nervous temperament, and with lank black hair, and sharp piercing unrestful eyes. He might be aged thirty, although he looked liker forty. His jacket was made of fustian, which might have been clean some years before; his corduroy trousers had ragged endings, beneath which were revealed old boots and worn-out stockings; while a tattered bonnet covered his capacious head—a head that, phrenologically, was of a superior type. How Hall lived no one knew, nor cared to know. His lodging, when under a roof, varied with the means at his disposal for paying rent. If any unknown householder in the unknown recesses of the small towns which Jock visited, permitted him to sleep gratis on the floor near the fire, it was a secret known and appreciated by himself only.

Jock had never presumed to enter so aristocratic a house as Adam's. But now that public report had brought the Sergeant down somewhat nearer to his own level, and that he had a pair of boots to mend, without having any credit with even the most drunken cobbler in Drumsylie, Jock thought that, under the whole circumstances of the case, moral and commercial, he might visit the Sergeant without any offence. He did so, to the astonishment of Adam, and much more to that of his wife. "What do *ye* want wi' Mr. Mercer?" was her question, as she opened the door to Jock's knock.

"Business!" was his short and decided reply. When he entered the small but cleanly kitchen, his only remark was, "Like a new preen!" Looking round with a half-vacant, half-curious gaze, he fixed his eyes on the Sergeant for a

moment, then walking up to the starling's cage, he muttered, "Deevils!"

This brief exclamation arrested the attention of Adam, who asked, "What do ye mean, my man? D'ye ken what ye're saying?"

"Fine!" replied Jock. "Deevils! again say I!"

The Sergeant rose, tapped him on the shoulder, and pointed to the door.

"I understan'," said Jock; "ye wad hae me gang oot. Ye're no' the first that has sent Jock Hall that gait! Maist folk like to see his back a hantle better than his face. But I'm no' gaun oot at present, Sergeant. That stirlin' o' yours 'll no' let me. I'm fond o' birds—in fac, they're the only leevin' things I care for. I never liked canaries, they're ower genteel and ower particklar aboot bein' coodled, to please a tramp like me that never was in that way mysel'. But our ain birds—

that's maavies, linties, and laverocks, or even gooldies, that can stan' a' wathers, and sing for a' folk, specially for them that's obleeged to lie oot in wuds, or on the heather—them's the singers for Jock Hall! But I'm no weel acquaint wi' thae stirlin's. I'm telt that yours is no canny, an' that it speaks like an auld-farrant bairn. Eh?" And Jock turned to the cage from which his attention had for a moment been diverted; and while the Sergeant was earnestly studying his strange guest, the guest was as earnestly studying the strange bird. The starling was singularly still, and seemed to sympathize with his master in his study of Hall. He then leaped up to his perch, turned his back to Jock, shook his feathers, turned round and again looked at his visitor with a steady gaze.

"That's a fearsome bird!" said Hall, without

moving "As sure as I'm leevin, I see'd his ee gettin' bigger and bigger, till it was like a saxpence as it glowered at me—I was frichtened it kent a' things I was doing or thinking aboot!"

"Let the bird alane!" said the Sergeant, "and here to the window if ye hae ony business wi' me, Hall."

Jock obeyed; but twice, between the cage and the window, he looked over his shoulder at the starling, as if he was afraid of him.

"What do ye want wi' me?" inquired the Sergeant.

"Hoo lang," asked Hall, in a low voice, "hae ye had that bird? Hoo auld is he? Whaur did ye get him? What does he say when——"

"Never heed the bird," interrupted the Sergeant: "he's doin' ye nae ill."

"I'm no' sae sure but he *could* do't if he took

a thraw at me," said Jock; "I'll wager he has seen me afore, an' kens me—for he's no canny."

"Nonsense!" said Adam.

"If it's nonsense," replied Jock, "what way has he brocht you into this habble? What for do ye loe him sae weel? Why wad ye gie up, as I hear ye wad, yer verra saul and body for this world and the neist, for the sake o' the bird? What way do they say he's a witch?"

"Haud yer tongue, Hall," said the Sergeant, "and speak aboot yer ain business, no' mine."

"*My* business!" exclaimed Jock; "at yer service, Mr. Mercer, at yer service!"

"Oot wi't, then, and be done wi't," said Adam.

"It's my business, then," said Hall, "to come here an' abuse a' thae deevils,—Porteous, Smellie, and the lave—that abused that bird! that's my business—the chief part o't," continued Hall, in

rather an excited manner; "an' the bird kens that, I'm certain,—just see hoo he's glowerin' at me! I'se warrant he has watched me in the woods, afore he was catched; an' if he *is* a witch, and kens aboot me, then——"

"Haud yer tongue, Hall, this moment," said the Sergeant, with a loud voice of command, "or I'll pit ye oot like a doug! If ye hae a message to deliver, say it and be aff."

Jock was suddenly quiet, as if arrested by some strong power. Then in a more natural tone of voice he said, "It's no' worth the while o' an auld sodger to kick a man like me. But let sleepin' dougs lie! Dougs hae teeth, and their bite is bad when mad—when mad!" Then, after a pause, he went on, in a laughing mood, "But I *hae* business, important business wi' ye, Sergeant; an' afore we proceed to consider it,

ye'll tak' a snuff? It pits brains into a bodie's head;" and Jock produced a small tin snuff-box, and opening the lid he looked into it with an expression of anxiety. "There's twa, I'm sure,—twa snuffs; an' I consider a man is no' poor wha has ae snuff for himsel' and anither for a neebor. Sae tak' a snuff!" and he handed the box to the Sergeant, as he himself leant back in his chair, crossed one leg over another, and pointing to his boots said, "That's some business, since ye insist on it! I want to gie ye a job, Mr. Mercer, for I hear ye're idle." Then turning up the soles of his wretched boots, which looked like a kind of leather vegetable about to rot into earth mould, he said, "They'll be ill to patch, or to fit new soles on, but I ken ye're a gude tradesman. Try."

Adam only smiled.

"Ye'll be like the lave," Jock continued, "ower prood to work for a man like me. I wadna wunner if ye're no sure o' payment. Sae maybe it's as weel to tell ye, that as far as I ken, ye'll never get a bawbee frae me! For Jock Hall is a braw customer to them that'll ser' him—though, faix, there's no mony o' that kind noo!—but he's a bad payer. In fac, he has clean forgot hoo to pay an accoont."

Sorrow softens the hearts of good men; and if it is in any degree occasioned by unjust treatment, it prompts charitable sympathies towards others who are condemned as wicked by society without a fair hearing ever having been afforded them. When the streams of their affection have been frozen by the cold reception given where a warm welcome was anticipated, it is a relief to let them flow into other and dried-up cisterns

where, in despair, from a long drought, such blessings were never expected, and are joyfully appreciated.

So Adam felt kindly towards Jock, though he only said, "I'll men' your boots for that fine pinch o' snuff, and they'll cost ye nae mair, except guid-will, and that's cheap."

Jock Hall looked rather perplexed, and cleared out his box with his long finger, pressing his last snuff vehemently into his nostril. Then resuming, as if with difficulty, his careless manner, he said, "Hae the boots ready by Friday nicht, as I maun fish the East Muir water on Saturday."

"Ye may depend on them, Jock! And noo, as yer business is done, ye may gang." The Sergeant did not wish him to resume his wild talk, as he had threatened to do.

Jock crossed his arms, and gazed on the Sergeant as if he would look him through. Then grasping his own throat, and looking wildly, he said: "It's come! it's come! The evil speerit is chokin' me! He is here like a cannon ball! I maun speak, or my head will rive! I maun curse Porteous, and the kirk, and religion, and elders, and Sabbath days, and a' thing guid!" and his eyes flashed fire!

The Sergeant could not make him out, as they say. He was disposed to think him insane, though he had never heard Jock's name associated with anything save recklessness of character. He therefore did nothing but return the gaze of the excited man. Katie, unwilling to sit in the same room with him, had retired to her bedroom. Mary sat at the fireside with her book in evident alarm.

"I hate them!" repeated Jock, almost grinding his teeth.

"What do ye mean, Jock?" asked Adam, quietly but firmly. "Do you want to quarrel wi' me?"

"I mean," said Jock, bending towards the Sergeant, "that noo the fingers o' religion are grippin' *yer* windpipe and chokin' ye, as the evil speerit is grippin' and chokin' me—that noo ye hae ministers an' elders o' religion kicking ye in the glaur, lauchin at ye, bizzin at ye as a blackguard—that noo when e'en Luckie Craigie an' Smellie ca' ye bad, as a' folks hae ca'ed me a' my days—I thocht," he continued, with a sarcastic grin, "that ye wad like ane waur than yersel' to speak wi' ye, and, if ye liked, to curse wi' ye! Aha, lad! I'm ready! Say the word, and Jock Hall's yer man. I ha'e poower noo in me for ony deevilry. Begin!"

The Sergeant experienced what is called in Scotland a *grew*—the sort of shiver one feels in a nightmare—as if a real demoniac was in his presence. Fascinated as by a serpent, he said, "Say awa', Jock, for I dinna understan' ye."

On this Jock became apparently more composed. But when with a suppressed vehemence he was again beginning to speak, it struck the Sergeant to interrupt the current of his passionate thoughts, on the plea that he wished to hear Mary her lesson. His object was, not only to calm Jock, but also to get the child out of the room.

"Mary," he said, after having assured her there was no cause of fear, and placing her between his knees, "wha should we trust?"

"God!" replied Mary.

"Why?" asked the Sergeant.

"Because His name is Love, and He is our Faither."

"Richt, Mary; and we ought a' to love our Faither, for He loves us, and to love our neebour as ourselves. Gang awa' ben to your mither noo. Ye hae done weel."

When the door of the bedroom was shut, Jock Hall said, "That's Luckie Craigie's lassie? Fine woman, Luckie! Kindly bodie! A gude hoose is hers to sen' a puir orphan to. Ha! ha! ha! Keep us a'!—it's a warld this, far ower guid for me! But Luckie is like the lave, and Smellie, to do him justice, as he has mony a time done tae me, is no waur than Luckie:

'When hungry gledds are screichin',
An' huntin' for their meat,
If they grip a bonnie birdie,
What needs the birdie greet?"

An' ye're to pay yersel' for the lassie, Smellie

says; an' ye're to teach her! A fine lesson yon! Ha! ha! ha! Jock Hall lauchs at baith o' ye!"

The Sergeant was getting angry. Hall seemed now to be rather a free-and-easy blackguard, although there was a weird gleam in his eye which Adam did not understand; and in spite of his self-respect, he felt a desire to hear more from Jock. So he only remarked, looking steadily at him, "Jock! tak' care what ye say — tak' care!"

"Oo ay," said Hall. "I'm lang eneuch in the warld to ken *that* advice! But what care I for the advice o' you or ony man? It was for me, nae doot, ye intended that lesson? I'm as gleg as a fish rising to a flee! The lassock said we should love our faither! Hoo daur you or ony man say that tae me?" Then, leaning for-

ward with staring eyes and clenched fist, he said, "I hated my faither! I hated my mither! They hated me. My faither was a Gospel man; he gaed to the kirk on Sabbath—wha but him!—and he drank when he could get it the rest o' the week; an' he threshed my mither and us time aboot—me warst o' a', as I was the youngest. I focht mony a laddie for lauchin' at him and for ca'in him names when he was fou, and mony a bluidy nose I got; but he threshed me the mair. My mither, tae, gaed to the kirk, and begged claes for me and my brithers and sisters frae guid folk, and said that my faither wasna weel and couldna work. Oh, mony a lee I telt for them baith! And she drank, as weel, and focht wi' my faither and us time aboot. And syne they selt a' their claes and a' their blankets, and left us wi' toom stomachs and toom hearts, cowerin' aboot a toom

grate wi' cauld cinders. I never was at skule, but was cuffed and kickit like a doug; and my wee brithers and sisters a' dee'd—I dinna ken hoo: but they were starved and threshed, puir things! But they were waik, and I was strang. Sae I leeved—waes me! I leeved! I hae sat oot in the plantin' mony a nicht greetin' for my brither Jamie, for he had a sair cough and dwined awa', naked and starved. He aye gied me his bit bread that he stealt or beggit"—and Jock cleared his throat and wiped his forehead with a scrap of a ragged handkerchief. "But my faither and mither dee'd, thank God! I hate them noo, and they hated me—they hated me, they did"—and he fell into a sort of dream. His vehemence sank into a whisper; and he spoke as one in sleep—"An' a' folks hate me—hate me. An' what for no'? I hate *them!*—God forgive me! Na, na! I'll no'

say *that.* There's nae God! But I believe in the Deevil—that I do, firmly."

Jock sank back in his chair, as if very wearied, and closed his eyes, his chest heaving. Then opening his eyes, he said in a low tone, "The bird kens that! Wha' telt him?" and his eyes were again closed.

"Jock, my man," said the Sergeant, perplexed, yet kindly, "*I* dinna hate ye."

But Jock went on as in a dream. "I hae led an awfu' life o't! I hae starved and stealt; I hae poached and robbed; I hae cursed and drank; I hae 'listed and deserted; I hae lain oot on muirs and in mosses. I'm Jock Hall! a'body kens me, and a' hate me as I do them! And what guid did yer ministers and elders, yer Sabbath days and yer preachings, do for me? Curse them a', I say! what's Jock Hall's saul

worth! It's no' worth the burnin'! What care I?

'Cock-a-Bendy's lying sick,
Guess what'll mend him?
Hang the blackguard by the throat,
And that'll soon end him!'"

"Be quiet, my puir fellow," said the Sergeant, "and listen to me. *I* never harmed you, Jock; I couldna harm you! I never wull harm you. I'll feed ye noo; I'll gie ye shoon; I'll stan' yer frien'."

Jock looked up, and in a calm tone said, "My head is spinnin' and my heart is sick! I havena eaten a bit since yesterday. Dinna flyte on me e'enoo, I'm no mysel'; wait a wee, Mr. Mercer, and then ye can abuse me, or kick me." With still greater calm he added in a few seconds, and looking round like one waking up more and more into life, "I hae been dreaming

or raving! Man, Mercer, I think I tak' fits sometimes—especially when I'm lang wi'oot meat. What was I saying e'enoo?"

"Naething particular," said Adam, wishing not to rouse him, but to feed him; "never heed, Jock. But bide a wee, I'll gie ye a nice cup of tea and a smoke after it, and we'll hae a crack, and ye'll comfort me in yer ain way, and I'll comfort you in mine."

Jock, like a man worn out with some great exertion, sat with his head bent down between his hands—the veins of his forehead swollen. The Sergeant, after some private explanation with Katie, got tea and wholesome food ready for Jock; and that he might take it in peace, Adam said that he had to give Mary another lesson in the bed-room.

Hall was thus left alone with his food, of

which he ate sparingly. When Adam again entered the kitchen, Jock was calm. The Sergeant soon engaged him in conversation after his own method, beginning by telling some of his soldier stories, and then bit by bit unfolding the Gospel of Peace to the poor man, and seeking to drop a few loving words from his own softened heart to soften the heart of the Prodigal.

The only remark Jock made was, "I wish I'd been in a battle, and been shot, or dee'd wi' oor Jamie! But what for did I tell *you* a' this? I never spak' this way to mortal man! It's that bird, I tell ye. What's wrang wi't?"

"Naething!" replied the Sergeant; "it's a' nonsense ye're talking. I'll let ye see the cratur, to convince ye that he is jist as natural and nice as a mavis or laverock."

"Stop!" said Jock, "I dinna like him. He

is ower guid for me! I tell ye I'm a deevil! But bad as I am—and I'll never be better, nor ever do ae haun's turn o' guid in this world—never, never, never!——"

The Sergeant rose and took down the cage, placing it before Hall, saying, "Jist look at his speckled breest, and bonnie ee! Gie him this bit bread yersel', and he'll be cheerie, and mak' us a' cheerie."

Jock took the bread and offered it to Charlie, who, seeing the gift, declared "A man's a man for a' that!" "Guid be aboot us!" said Hall, starting back; "Hear what he says to me! If that's no' a witch, there's nane on yirth! I said I was a deevil, he says I'm a man!"

"And sae ye *are* a man for a' that, and no sic a bad ane as ye think. Cheer up, Jock!" said Adam, extending his hand to him.

Jock took the proffered hand, and said, "I dinna understan' a' this—but—but—I was gaun to say, God bless ye! But it's no' for me to say *that;* for I never was in a decent hoose afore—but only in jails, and amang tramps and ne'er-do-weels like mysel'. I'm no' up tae menners, Sergeant—ye maun excuse me."

Jock rose to depart. Before doing so he looked again round the comfortable clean room—at the nice fire and polished grate—at Charlie's bed with its white curtains—and at the bird, so happy in its cage—then, as if struck by his own ragged clothes and old boots, he exclaimed, "It wasna for me to hae been in a hoose like this." Passing the bed-room door, he waved his hand, saying, "Fareweel, mistress; fareweel, Mary," and turning to the Sergeant, he added, "and as for you, Sergeant——" There he stopped—but

ending with a special farewell to the starling, he went to the door.

"Come back soon and see me," said the Sergeant. "I'll be yer freen', Jock. I hae 'listed ye this day, and I'll mak' a sodger o' ye yet, an' a better ane, I hope, than mysel'."

"Whisht, whisht!" said Jock. "I have mair respec' for ye than to let ye be *my* freen'. But for a' that, mind, I'm no gaun to pay ye for my boots—and ye'll hae them ready 'gin Friday nicht, for Saturday's fishin'—fareweel!

"A' richt, Jock," said Adam.

No sooner had Hall left the house than the Sergeant said to himself, "God have mercy on me! I to be unhappy after that! I wi' Katie and Mary! I wi' mercies temporal and spiritual mair than can be numbered! Waes me! what have I done? Starling, indeed! that's surely no' the

question—but starvation, ignorance, cruelty, hate, despair, hell at our verra doors! God help puir Jock Hall, and may He forgive Adam Mercer!"

Jock got his boots on Friday night, well repaired. He said nothing but "Thank ye," and "Ye'll get naething frae me." But on Saturday evening a fine basket of trout was brought by him to the Sergeant's door. Jock said, "There's beauties! Never saw better trout! splendid day!" But when the Sergeant thanked him, and offered him a sixpence, Jock looked with wonder, saying, "Dinna insult a bodie!"

CHAPTER XIV.

JOCK HALL'S CONSPIRACY.

ON the Sunday, when the Sergeant went to church, as we have already described, Jock Hall was quartered for the day with Mrs. Craigie. To do Smellie justice, he did not probably know how very worthless this woman was, far less did the Kirk Session. She was cunning and plausible enough to deceive both. Her occasional attendance at church was sufficient to keep up appearances. The custom of boarding out pauper children with widows, except when these are not respectable, has on the whole worked well, and is infinitely superior to the workhouse system. Mrs.

Craigie belonged to the exceptional cases. She accommodated any lodger who might turn up.

Jock and Mrs. Craigie were at the window, a second storey one, criticising the passers-by to church, as one has seen the loungers at a club window do the ordinary passers-by on week days. The Sergeant and his wife, with Mary following them, suddenly attracted their attention.

"The auld hypocrite!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie; "there he gangs, as prood as a peacock, haudin' his head up when it should be bowed doon wi' shame to the dust! An' his wife, tae!—eh! what a bannet!—sic a goon! Sirs me! Baith are the waur o' the wear. Ha! ha! ha! And Mary! as I declare, wi' new shoon, a new bannet, and new shawl! The impudent hizzy that she is! It's a' to spite me, for I see'd her keekin' up to the window. But stealt bairns can come to nae guid;

confoond them a'!—though I shouldna say't on the Sabbath day."

Hall stood behind her, and watched the group over her shoulder. "Ye're richt, Luckie," he said, "he *is* an auld hypocrite. But they are a' that—like minister, like man. 'Confoond them,' *ye* say; 'Amen,' *I* say; but what d'ye mean by stealt bairns?"

Ah, Jock, art thou not also a hypocrite!

Mrs. Craigie had left the window, and sat down beside the fire, the church-goers having passed, and the church bell having ceased to ring. Jock then lighted his pipe opposite Mrs. Craigie. "What d'ye mean," he asked again, "by stealt bairns?"

"I mean this," replied she, "that yon auld hypocrite, sodger, and poacher, Adam Mercer, stealt Mary Semple frae me!" and she looked

at Hall with an expression which said, "What do you think of that!" Then having been invited by Hall to tell him all about the theft, she did so, continuing her narrative up to the moment when she was ordered out of the house by Adam; saying now as on that occasion, "But I hae freen's, and I'll pit Smellie to smash him yet! I'll get my revenge oot o' him, the auld bitin' brock that he is. Smellie is my freen', and he has mair power, far, than Adam wi' the minister." So thought Mrs. Craigie.

"Is Smellie yer freen'?" asked Hall, without taking his pipe out of his mouth, "and does *he* hate Adam? and does *he* want Mary back tae you?"

"That does he," replied Mrs. Craigie; "and he wad gie onything to get Mary back tae me."

"Then, my certes, Smellie *has* pooer! nae

doot o' *that*," remarked Hall, with a grim smile; "for he has helpit to pit me mony a time into the jail. Wad it obleege him muckle tae get Mary back frae the Sergeant? Wad he befreen' me if I helped him?" asked Jock confidentially.

"It wad be a real treat till him!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie; "and he wad befreen' ye a' yer life! An', Hall——"

"But," asked Jock, interrupting her, "what did ye say aboot poachin'? Was Adam in that line?"

"Him!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie; "Ise warrant he was—notorious!"

"Hoo d'ye ken?" inquired Jock.

"Smellie telt me! but mind ye, he said I was to keep it quait till he gied me the wink, ye ken;" and Mrs. Craigie gave a knowing wink. She did not know that Smellie had

already *peached.* "For hoo Smellie kent was this, that he had some sort o' business in the place whaur Mercer leeved—that's north in Bennock parish, afore he was a sodger; and Smellie picked up a' the story o' his poachin', for Smellie is awfu' shairp; but he wad never tell't till he could pit it like a gag into the prood mouth o' Adam; and Smellie says he'll pit it in noo, and let Adam crunch his teeth on't," said Mrs. Craigie, gnashing the few she had herself.

Hall manifested a singular inquisitiveness to know as much as possible about those poaching days, and their locality, until at last being satisfied, and having learned that the old keeper of Lord Bennock was still alive, though, as Mrs. Craigie said, "clean superannuat," and that he was, moreover, Adam's cousin, Jock said, "What

an awfu' blackguard Adam maun be! If I had kent what I ken noo, I never wad hae gi'en him my boots to men'."

"Yer boots to men'!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie, with astonishment; "what for did ye do that?"

"He had nae wark."

"Ser' him richt!" said Mrs. Craigie.

"And I patroneesed him," continued Jock.

"Ha! ha! It was far ower guid o' ye, Jock, tae patroneese him," said Mrs. Craigie. "Ye'll no pay him, I houp? But he's sic a greedy failow, that he micht expec' even a puir sowl like you tae pay."

"Me pay him!" said Jock with a laugh, "maybe—when I hae paid the debt o' natur; no till then."

"But, Jock," asked Mrs. Craigie, almost in a whisper, "did *ye* see Mary, the wee slut?"

"I did that," replied Jock, "an' it wad hae broken yer feelin' heart, Luckie, had *ye* seen her!—no lying as a puir orphan paid for by the Session ocht to lie, on a shake-doon, wi' a blanket ower her,—my certes, guid eneuch for the like o' her, and for the bawbees paid for her——"

"Guid?—ower guid!" interpolated Mrs. Craigie.

"But," continued Hall, with a leer, "she was mair like a leddy, wi' a bed till hersel', an' curtains on't; and sitting in a chair wi' stockin's and shoon, afore the fire—learning her lesson, too, and coddled and coodled by Adam and his wife. What say ye to that, Luckie? what say ye to that?"

"Dinna' mak' me daft!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie; "it's eneuch to mak' a bodie swear e'en on the Sabbath day!"

"Swear awa'!" said Hall, "the day maks nae

difference to *me.* Sae ca' awa', woman, if it wull dae ye ony guid, or gie ye ony comfort."

Mrs. Craigie, instead of accepting the advice of her "ne'er-do-weel" lodger, fell into a meditative mood. What could she be thinking about? Her Sabbath thoughts came to this, in their practical results—a proposal to Jock Hall to seize Mary as she was returning from church, and to bring her again under the protection of her dear old motherly friend. She could not, indeed, as yet take her from under the Sergeant's roof by force, but could the Sergeant retake her if by any means she were brought back under *her* roof?

Jock, after some consideration, entertained the proposal, discussed it, and then came to terms. "What wull ye gie me?" he at last asked.

"A glass o' whuskey and a saxpence!" said Mrs. Craigie.

"Ba! ba!" said Jock; "I'm nae bairn, but gleg and canny, like a moudiewart! Saxpence! Ye ken as weel as I do, that if the Shirra—for, losh me! I ken baith him and the law ower weel!—if he heard ye were plottin' an' plannin' to grip a bairn that way on the Sabbath, and paying me for helpin' ye—my word! you and me wad be pit in jail; and though this micht be a comfort tae *me*—lodgings and vittals for naething, ye ken, and a visit to an auld hame—it wadna dae for a Christian woman like you, Luckie! Eh, lass? it wad never dae! What wad the minister and Smellie say? no' to speak o' the Sergeant?—hoo *he* wad craw! Sae unless ye keep it as quait as death, an' gie me half-a-crown, I'll no' pit my han' on the bairn."

"The bargain's made!" said Mrs. Craigie.

"But ye maun wait till I get a shilling mair frae Mrs. D'rymple, as I've nae change."

"Tell her to come ben," said Jock. "Can ye trust her wi' the secret? Ye should get her tae help ye, and tae swear, if it comes tae a trial, that the bairn cam' tae ye o' her ain free consent, mind. I'm ready, for half-a-crown mair, to gie my aith to the same effec'."

"Ye're no far wrang; that's the plan!" said Mrs. Craigie. "I can trust Peggy like steel. An' I'm sure Mary *does* want to come tae me. That's the truth and nae lee. Sae you and Peggy D'rymple may sweer a' that wi' a guid conscience."

"But *my* conscience," said Jock, "is no sae guid as yours or Peggy's, an' it'll be the better o' anither half-crown, in case I hae to sweer, to keep it frae botherin' me. But I'll gie ye credit for the

money, an' ye'll gie me credit for what I awe ye for my meat and lodgin' sin' Monday."

"A' richt, a' richt, Jock; sae be't," replied Mrs. Craigie, as she went to fetch her neighbour, who lived on the same flat.

Mrs. Dalrymple was made a member of the privy council which met in a few minutes in Mrs. Craigie's room, the door being bolted.

"I'm nae hypocrite," confessed Jock. "I scorn to be ane, as ye do; for *ye* dinna preten' to be unco guid, and better than ither folk, like Adam Mercer, or that godly man Smellie. I tell ye, then, I'm up to onything for money or drink. I'll steal, I'll rob, I'll murder, I'll——"

"Whisht, whisht, Jock! Dinna speak that wild way an' frichten folk!—Be canny, man, be canny, or the neebours 'll hear ye," said the prudent Mrs. Craigie, who forthwith explained her plan to

her confidential and trustworthy friend, who highly approved of it as an act of justice to Mrs. Craigie, to Mary, and the Kirk Session. Half-a-crown was to be Mrs. Dalrymple's pay for her valued aid. Hall arranged that the moment the women saw the Sergeant coming from church, they were to give him a sign; and then they—leaving the window, and retiring behind the door—were to be ready to receive Mary and hold her fast when brought to the house. To enable Hall to execute the plot more easily, Mrs. Craigie gave him, at his own suggestion, in order to entice Mary, a few spring flowers she had got the evening before from a neighbour's garden, as a "posey" for the church—which she had not, however, attended, being deprived of the privilege, as she meant to assure Smellie, by illness. Jock had already accepted of a glass of whisky.

But as the exciting moment approached, and as the two women had helped themselves to a cheerer, as they called it, he got a second glass to strengthen his courage. His courage, however, did not seem to fail him, for he once or twice whistled and hummed some song—to the great horror of his good friends; and, strange to say, he also fell into a fit of uncontrollable laughter—at the thought, so he said, of how the old hypocrite and his wife would look when Mary was missed and found to be with Mrs. Craigie! Much hearty sympathy was expressed with his strange humour.

The service in the "auld kirk," as the parish church is called, being over, the congregation were walking home. One or two of its members had already passed the window where sat the eager and expectant conspirators. Jock Hall, with a

bunch of flowers, was ready to run down-stairs, to the close mouth, the moment the appointed signal was given. Very soon the Sergeant and his wife made their appearance a little way off, while Mary—how fortunate for the plotters!—followed at some distance. No sooner were they discovered, than the two women retired from the window, and gave the signal to Hall to "be off!" They then ensconced themselves, as previously arranged, at the back of the door, with eager and palpitating hearts.

Jock sprang out, shutting the door after him, and rattling down-stairs reached the street just as Mary was within a few yards. When she was passing the close, he stepped out, and with a kind voice said, "I hae a message for your faither, Mary dear! Jist speak to me aff the street." Mary no longer associating Hall with

Page 211.

the thought of a wild man, but of one who had been a guest of the Sergeant's, entered the close. Jock Hall gave her the flowers and said:—"Gie this posey to your mither, for the gran' tea she made for me; and gie this half-croon to yer faither for the braw boots he patched for me. Noo run awa', my bonnie lassie, and be guid, and do whatever yer faither and mither bid ye, or Jock Hall wull be angry wi' ye—run!"

Mrs. Craigie, in her excitement and curiosity could not resist the temptation of going again to the window, and no sooner had she seen Mary enter the close than she ran to her retreat behind the door, whispering joyfully to Mrs. Dalrymple, "The wee deevil is catched, and coming!"

In a moment Jock was at the door, and while he firmly held the key outside, he opened it so

far as to let in his head. Then addressing the women, he said in an under-breath, or rather hiss:—"Whisht! dinna speak! I catched her! I gied her the posey for Mrs. Mercer—I gied her the half-croon to pay Mr. Mercer for my boots!—and she's hame!—an' ye'll *never* get her!—You twa limmers are cheated! If ye cheep I'll tell the Shirra. Jock Hall is nae hypocrite! Deil tak' ye baith, and Smellie likewise! I'm aff!" and before a word could be spoken by the astonished conspirators, Jock locked the door upon them, and flinging the key along the passage he sprang down-stairs and fled no one knew whither!

Mary gave the bouquet of flowers to Mrs. Mercer, whose only remark was:—"Wha wad hae thocht it!" and she gave the half-crown to Adam, who said: "I never hae been as thankfu'

for a day's wage! Pit it in the drawer, and keep it for Jock. I'm no feared but wi' God's help I'll mak' a sodger o' him yet! For as Charlie's bairn weel remarks: 'A man's a man for a' that.'"

CHAPTER XV.

JOCK HALL'S JOURNEY.

JOHN SPENCE, who, as we have seen, was connected with the early history of Adam Mercer, had now reached an extreme old age, somewhere between eighty and ninety years. As he himself for a considerable time had stuck to the ambiguous epoch of "aboon fourscore," it was concluded by his friends that his ninth decade had nearly ended. He was hale and hearty, however,—"in possession of all his faculties," as we say—with no complaint but "the rheumatics," which had soldered his joints so as to keep him generally a prisoner in the large chair "ayont

the fire," or compel him to use crutches, when he "hirpled" across the floor. He was able, however, in genial weather, to occupy the bench at his cottage door, there to fondle the young dogs, and to cultivate the acquaintance of the old ones. He had long ago given up all active work, and was a pensioner on his Lordship; but he still tenaciously clung to the title of "Senior Keeper." The vermin even which he had killed, and nailed, as a warning to evil-doers, over the gable-ends and walls of out-houses, had, with the exception of a few fragments of bleached fossils, long since passed away, giving place to later remains.

John was a great favourite with his master; and his advice was asked in all matters connected with the game on the estate of Castle Bennock. His anecdotes and reminiscences of

old sporting days which he had spent with three generations of the family, and with generations of their friends and relations, were inexhaustible. And when the great annual festival of "the 12th" came round, and the Castle was crowded, and the very dogs seemed to snuff the game in the air and became excited, then John's cottage, with its kennels and all its belongings, was a constant scene of attraction to the sportsmen; and there he held a sort of court, with the dignity and gravity of an old Nimrod.

The cottage was beautifully situated in a retired nook at the entrance of a glen, beside a fresh mountain stream, and surrounded by a scattered wood of wild birches, mountain ash, and alder. The first ridge of Benturk rose beyond the tree tops, with an almost perpendicular ascent of loose stones, ribbed by wintry

floods, and dotted by tufts of heather and dots of emerald-green pasture, up to the range of rocks which ramparted the higher peaks, around which in every direction descended and swept far away the endless moorland of hill and glen.

John had long been a widower, and now resided with his eldest son Hugh, whose hair was already mingled with white, like brown heather sprinkled with snow.

Although the distance which separated John Spence from Adam Mercer was only about thirty miles, there had been little intercourse between the cousins. A ridge of hills and a wild district intervened, without any direct communication. The mail-coach which passed through Drumsylie did not come within miles of Castle Bennock. Letters, except on business, were rare between the districts, and were very expensive at that time

to all but M.P.'s, who could frank them for themselves or their friends. And so it was that while John and Adam occasionally heard of each other, and exchanged messages by mutual friends, or even met after intervals of years, they nevertheless lived as in different kingdoms.

It was late on the Tuesday after his flight that Jock Hall, for reasons known only to himself, entered the cottage of John Spence and walked up to the blazing fire, beside which the old keeper was seated alone.

"Wat day, Mr. Spence!" said Jock, as his clothes began to smoke almost as violently as the fire which shone on his wet and tattered garments.

John Spence was evidently astonished by the sudden appearance and blunt familiarity of a total stranger, whose miserable and woe-begone

condition was by no means prepossessing. Keeping his eye fixed on him, John slowly drew a crutch between his knees, as if anxious to be assured of present help.

"Wha the mis-chief are ye?" asked Spence, in an angry voice.

"A freen', Mr. Spence—a freen'!" replied Jock, quietly. "But let me heat mysel' awee—for I hae travelled far through moss and mire, and sleepit last nicht in a roofless biggin, an' a' to see you—and syne I'll gie ye my cracks."

Spence, more puzzled than ever, only gave a growl, and said, slowly and firmly, "A freen' in need is nae doot a freen' indeed, and I suppose ye'll be the freen' in need, and ye tak' me for the freen' indeed, but maybe ye're mistaen!"

Hall remaining longer silent than was agreeable,

Spence at last said impatiently, "Nane o' yer nonsense wi' me! I'll ca' in the keepers. Ye're ane o' thae beggin' ne'er-do-weel tramps that we hae ower mony o'. Gang to the door and cry lood for Hugh. He's up in the plantin'; the guidwife and bairns are doon at the Castle. Be quick, or be aff aboot yer business."

Jock very coolly replied, "My business is wi' you, an' I'm glad I hae gotten ye by yersel' an' naebody near. I'll *no* ca' Hugh, an' I ken *ye* canna do't. Sae I'll jist wait till he comes, and tell ye my business in the meantime. Wi' your leave, Mr. Spence, I'll tak' a seat;" on which he drew a chair to the side of the fire opposite old John, who, partly from fear and partly from a sense of his own weakness, and also from curiosity, said nothing, but watched Hall with a look of childish astonishment, his under lip hang-

ing helplessly down, and his hand firmly grasping the crutch. His only remark was—"My certes, ye're a cool ane! I hae seen the day——" but what he had seen vanished in another growl, ended by a groan.

"Tak' a snuff, Mr. Spence," said Hall, as he rose and offered his tin box to the keeper. "Snuff is meat and music; it's better than a bite o' bread when hungry, and maist as gude as a dram when cauld, and at a' times it is pleasant tae sowl and body. Dinna spare't!".

There was not, as usual, much to spare of the luxury, but Spence refused it on the ground that he had never snuffed, and "didna like to get a habit o't."

"I think," said Jock, "ye might trust yersel' at fourscore for no doing that."

The keeper made no reply, but kept his small grey eyes under his bushy eyebrows fixed on his strange visitor.

When Jock had resumed his seat he said, "Ye'll ken weel, I'se warrant, Mr. Spence, a' the best shootin' grun' aboot Benturk? Ye'll nae doot ken the best bits for fillin' yer bag when the win' is east or wast, north or south? And ye'll ken the Lang Slap? and the Craigdarroch brae? and the short cut by the peat moss, past the Big Stane, and doon by the whins to the Cairntupple muir? And ye'll ken——"

Old Spence could stand this no longer, and he interrupted Jock by exclaiming, "Confoond yer gab and yer impudence! dauring to sit afore me there as if ye were maister and I servant! What do ye mean?"

"I was but axin' a ceevil question, Mr. Spence; and I suppose ye'll no' deny that ye ken thae places?"

"An' what if I do? what if I do?" retorted the keeper.

"Jist this," said Jock, without a movement in the muscles of his countenance, "that I ken them tae for mony a year; and sae baith o' us hae common freens amang the hills."

"What do *ye* ken aboot them?" asked Spence, not more pacified, nor less puzzled.

"Because," said Jock, "I hae shot ower them a' as a poacher—my name is Jock Hall, parish o' Drumsylie—and I hae had the best o' sport on them."

This was too much for the Senior Keeper. With an exclamation that need not be recorded, Spence made an attempt to rise with the help

of his crutches, but was gently laid back in his chair by Jock, who said—

"Muckle ye'll mak o't! as the auld wife said to the guse waumlin' in the glaur. Sit doon—sit doon, Mr. Spence; I'll be as guid to you as Hugh; an' I'll ca' in Hugh ony time ye like: sae be easy. For I wish atween oorsels to tell ye aboot an auld poacher and an auld acquaintance o' yours and mine, Sergeant Adam Mercer; for it's aboot him I've come." This announcement induced John to resume his seat without further trouble, on which Jock said, "Noo, I'll ca' Hugh to ye, gin ye bid me, as ye seem feared for me;" and he motioned as if to go to the door.

"I'm no feared for you nor for mortal man!" replied Spence, asserting his dignity in spite of his fears; "but, my fac! *ye* might be feared

pittin' yer fit into a trap like this! and if Hugh grips ye!——" He left the rest to be inferred.

"Pfuff!" said Jock. "As to that, gudeman, I hae been in every jail roon' aboot! A jail wad be comfort tae me compared wi' the hole I sleepit in the nicht I left Drumsylie, and the road I hae travelled sinsyne! But wull ye no' hear me about Adam Mercer?"

Spence could not comprehend the character he had to deal with, but beginning to think him probably "a natural," he told him to "say awa', as the titlin' remarked tae the gowk."

Jock now gathered all his wits about him, so as to be able to give a long and tolerably lucid history of the events which were then agitating the little world of Drumsylie, and of which the Sergeant was the centre. He parti-

cularly described the part that Mr. Smellie had taken in the affair, and, perhaps, from more than one grudge he bore to the said gentleman, he made him the chief if not the only real enemy of the Sergeant.

The only point which Jock failed to make intelligible to the keeper was his account of the starling. It may have been the confusion of ideas incident to old age when dealing with subjects which do not link themselves to the past; but so it was that there got jumbled up in the keeper's mind such a number of things connected with a bird which was the bairn of the Sergeant's bairn, and whistled songs, and told Jock he was a man, and disturbed the peace of the parish, and broke the Sabbath, and deposed the Sergeant, that he could not solve the mystery for himself, nor could Jock make it

clear. He therefore accepted Spence's confusion as the natural result of a true estimate of the facts of the case, which few but the Kirk Session could understand, and accordingly he declared that "the bird was a kin' o' witch, a maist extraordinar' cratur, that seemed to ken a' things, and unless he was mista'en wad pit a' things richt gin the hinner en'." The keeper declared "his detestation o' a' speaking birds;" and his opinion that "birds were made for shootin', or for ha'ein' their necks thrawn for eatin'—unless when layin' or hatchin'."

But what practical object, it may be asked, had Hall in view in this volunteer mission of his? It was, as he told the keeper, to get him to ask his Lordship, as being the greatest man in the district, to interfere in the matter, and by all possible means to get Smellie, if not

Mr. Porteous, muzzled. "Ye're Adam's coosin, I hear," said Jock, "and the head man wi' his Lordship, and ye hae but tae speak the word and deliver the Sergeant an' his bird frae the grips o' these deevils."

Jock had, however, touched a far sorer point than he was aware of when he described Smellie as the propagator of the early history of the Sergeant as a poacher. This, along with all that had been narrated, so roused the indignation of Spence, who had the warmest regard for the Sergeant, apart from his being his cousin and from the fact of his having connived in some degree at his poaching, that, forgetting for a moment the polluted presence of a confessed poacher like Hall, he told him to call Hugh; adding, however, "What wull he do if he kens what ye are, my man? It's easy to get oot o'

the teeth o' an auld doug like me, wha's a guid bit aboon fourscore. But Hugh!—faix he wad pit baith o' us ower his head! What *wad* he say if he kent a poacher was sitting at his fireside?"

"I didna say, Mr. Spence, that I *am* a poacher, but that I *was* ane; nor did I say that I wad ever be ane again; nor could Hugh or ony ane else pruve mair than has been pruved a'ready against me, and paid for by sowl and body to jails and judges: sae let that flee stick to the wa'!" answered Jock; and having done so, he went to the door, and, with stentorian lungs, called the younger keeper so as to wake up all the dogs with howl and bark as if they had been aware of the poaching habits of the shouter.

As Hugh came to the door, at which Jock

calmly stood, he said to him in a careless tone, like one who had known him all his life: "Yer faither wants ye;" and, entering the kitchen, he resumed his former seat, folding his arms and looking at the fire.

"Wha the sorrow hae ye gotten here, faither, cheek by jowl wi' ye?" asked the tall and powerful keeper, scanning Jock with a most critical eye.

"A freen' o' my cousin's, Adam Mercer," replied old Spence. "But speer ye nae questions, Hugh, and ye'll get nae lees. He has come on business that I'll tell ye aboot. But tak' him ben in the meantime, and gie him some bread and cheese, wi' a drap milk, till his supper's ready. He'll stay here till morning. Mak' a bed ready for him in the laft."

Hugh, in the absence of his wife, obeyed his

father's orders, though not without a rather strong feeling of lessened dignity as a keeper in being thus made the servant of a ragged-looking tramp. While Jock partook of his meal in private, and afterwards went out to smoke his pipe and look about him, old Spence entered into earnest conference with his son Hugh. After giving his rather confused and muddled, yet sufficiently correct, edition of Mercer's story, he concentrated his whole attention and that of his son on the fact that Peter Smellie was the enemy of Adam Mercer, and had been so for some time; that he had joined the minister to persecute him; and, among other things, had also revealed the story of Adam's poaching more than thirty years before, to raise prejudice against his character and that of Spence as a keeper.

"Wha's Smellie? I dinna mind him!" asked Hugh.

"Nae loss, Hugh!—nae loss at a'. I never spak' o't to onybody afore, and ye'll no clipe aboot it, for every dog should hae his chance; and if a man should miss wi' ae barrel, he may nevertheless hit wi' the tither; and I dinna want to fash the man mair than is necessar'. But this same Smellie had a shop here at the clachan aboon twenty years syne, and I got him custom frae the castle; an' didna the rogue——Is the door steekit?" asked the old man in a whisper. Hugh nodded. "An' didna the rogue," continued old John, "forge my name tae a bill for 50*l.*? That did he; and I could hae hanged him! But I never telt on him till this hour, but made him pay the half o't, and I paid the ither half mysel'; and Adam see'd me sae distressed for the

money that he gied me 5*l.* in a present tae help. Naebody kent o't excep' mysel' and Adam, wha was leevin' here at the time, and saw it was a forgery; and I axed him *never* to say a word aboot it, and I'll wager he never did, for a clean-speerited man and honourable is Adam Mercer! Weel, Smellie by my advice left the kintra-side for Drumsylie, and noo he's turning against Adam! Isna that awfu'? Is't no deevilish? Him like a doug pointing at Adam! As weel a moose point at a gled!"

"That's a particular bonnie job indeed," said Hugh. "I wad like to pepper the sneaky chiel wi' snipe-dust for't. But what can be dune noo?"

"Dune! Mair than Smellie wad like, and enouch to mak him lowse his grip o' Adam!" said the old man. "I hae a letter till him

bamboozlin' my head, and I'll maybe grip it in the mornin' and pit it on paper afore breakfast-time! Be ye ready to write it doon as I tell ye, and it'll start Smellie ower his wabs and braid claith, or I'm mista'en!"

Hugh was ordered to meet his father in the morning, to indite the intended epistle.

END OF VOL I.

LONDON:—R. CLAY, SON, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS.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