An Esculapius of the North. Being the random reminiscences of a general practitioner / [David Lechmere Anderson].

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AN ESCULAPIUS OF THE NORTH

Being the Random Reminiscences of a General Practitioner

BY

D. LECHMERE ANDERSON.

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ESCULAPIUS OF THE NORTH.

CHAPTER I.

MY JOURNEY NORTH—DRAWINGS FROM LIFE—A FEW OF THE CHARACTERS ARE INTRODUCED TO THE READER.

EIGHT months ago ruin and misery loomed large before me: now happiness and fortune seem about to become my partners in life. Troubled then with a violent cough, which kept me frequently awake for half the night, I consulted Sir James Williamson, the leading specialist on chest disease.

"No," he said, after knocking—sometimes gently, sometimes with harder raps—upon my chest in all directions, and finally ending his examination by listening to my breathing, "No, I will not say there is absolute disease of the lungs, but I will be candid with you. I am afraid

you have a decided tendency to tubercular disease; in my opinion it will be necessary for you to live out of London in some milder and less harassing climate; before settling down I should recommend a year in South Africa, or a couple of sea voyages to Australia. Come and see me when you come back."

A happy prospect for me! At that time I was cashier in the head office of the London, Waterloo, and Victoria Bank, and in less than three months I was to be married to Amy Young, the sweetest girl in Derbyshire. What was to be done? I must resign my situation—and, putting aside all question of health, with my situation gone the idea of marriage was out of the question. I had practically nothing but my salary, and, although from it I had been able to save a little, it was only within the past few months that I had been appointed to a higher post with a consequent considerable rise in salary.

The evening after coming home from Williamson's I prepared to "face the music." My letter of resignation to the managers of the Bank did not cost me much trouble. I had worked hard for them; through a financial panic I had toiled all day, and often more than half of the night, wearing out my strength in the struggle. The Bank officials had heartily recognised this fact, and it was to my efforts at that time that my promotion to the important post I held was due. It was late before my letter to Amy was finished, and when it was done I found all the rest of the household had gone to bed, so my letters had to lie until morning.

The night was the worst I had yet had; cough after cough racked my chest, my breathing was painfully

laboured, I could neither sit nor lie, hopeless and dispirited I tossed about—would daylight never come—but towards four o'clock sleep at last came.

Being on the sick list, I took breakfast in bed. When the tray was brought in, the morning letters came with it.

"You have had a bad night, Mr Bryce," said my landlady. "I'd have known it from your face, even if I had not heard you coughing all the night. I thought of coming in to see if you would like a fire."

Yes, but she had not come. A fire—I'd have welcomed anything to break the awful loneliness of those long hours. I shuddered already at the idea of such another night; but what was the use of grumbling to her, I thought when she was gone. Poor thing, she does her best; but, ah! a letter from my old friend, Dr Brodie of Inveresk. How I should like to see the fine old man again before I leave—for I had made up my mind to follow Williamson's advice, so far as Africa was concerned; I might get a bank appointment there. I expect the doctor has been having another adventure with a grilse.

Dr Brodie, I may mention, was a medical man—general practitioner he called himself—in the north east of Scotland. I had met him when on my holidays two years before. The little river Gerry, which flows near Inveresk, is celebrated for its salmon fishing, and licences are comparatively cheap. Hearing from a friend of the pleasant country town, I had found my way there, and at the riverside made the acquaintance of Dr Brodie. The acquaintance ripened into friendship, and whenever an extra large fish fell to his rod, or anything equally stirring happened in my life, letters passed between us.

Opening the letter I read—

CONSULTING HOURS,
9 to 10
6 to 8

INVERESK,
ABERDEENSHIRE, N.B.
Sept. 1st, 1894.

Dear Bryce,

I hear that you are not feeling well, and that you are actually away from duty, nursing yourself in lodgings. At this season of the year I should not imagine London would be particularly conducive to your quick recovery. Why not try Inveresk? You know how well it suited you.

There are two salmon and a grilse in the Black Pot, wearily waiting to be taken with a "Silver Doctor" or a "Jock Scott." Why disappoint them? I unfortunately am far too busy for fishing, but if you are able I'll steal an afternoon somehow to go with you. If, as I am afraid, fishing seems too much for you, come all the same; you can have a rubber in the evening, and a glass of Glenlivet to sleep on. My wife joins with me in bidding you come. If you do, you will confer a real kindness on

Your old friend,
ROBERT BRODIE, M.D., G.P.

P.S.—Wire when to expect you.

My heart bounded at the proposal. I would try Inveresk; and, rising with an alacrity and agility to which I had long been a stranger, I dashed off a wire: "Leaving to-night," and rang the bell for Mrs Jones to send it to the post office.

Mrs Jones evidently thought my brain was gone when I told her I was starting for Scotland by the evening mail.

"I don't believe you will ever get there, sir," she cheerfully remarked, "and Aberdeen—where is it?"

"Oh somewhere about the North Pole," I said, "I'll write and tell you if I meet Nansen."

"Nan's son," she said primly, "I do not know a girl of that name."

Not stopping to explain, I hurried her off on her errand.

My letters of the previous evening were joyfully posted —in the grate, where a bright fire was burning—and I soon found myself writing others in their place. To Amy I wrote quite hopefully about my health, the Cape I never mentioned; from the Bank Managers I requested a further extension of leave.

Eight o'clock found me at King's Cross, well muffled up with a host of rugs and wraps of all descriptions, seated in a first class carriage. Soon we were off, "En route for Inveresk," I cried, as I closed the window.

With a half melancholy smile I noticed that among my paraphernalia I had brought my rods, basket, and fishing book. Well, I would not be able to use them, but there would be no harm in having a look to see that my flies and casts were all in order. I had not looked at them for quite twelve months. I wondered if I had put those Devon minnows in the minnow case. Yes, there they were, and there was the same cast with which I hooked that mighty salmon in the meadow stream; how the beggar did run, after I once got him to move. I remember that I thought at first I was foul of a stone or weed, the dull heavy strain at my line was so totally unsuggestive of anything but inert matter at the end of it. But when he did move: gracious! how my back and arms ached, and how my heart thumped as I gazed at my first salmon lying gasping on the bank. He turned the scales at twenty pounds.

And there were the Silver Doctors, Jock Scotts, March Browns, Cameron Stanbys, Durham Rangers—all of them, hosts of them. No ardent stamp collector could have

gazed at his one penny or two penny post office Mauritius, or 13 cents British Guiana, with the same feelings of delight that I experienced, as I went over the pages of the book.

Visions of huge fish, rapaciously seizing enormous flies passed before my eyes. Yes, see there was the Doctor in the very act of gaffing a salmon. Steady now, Doctor. By jove you've missed! In the excitement of the moment the book fell from my knees. Picking it up and strapping it before repacking it in my basket, I realised that my cough had not troubled me, that I was actually drowsy; nay, that I must have been sleeping, for here we were at York.

I always was a good railway traveller—the whirr and birr of the wheels, the slight excitement of rapid transit suited me—so that when I changed carriages at Aberdeen for Inveresk, I already thought I felt better than I had done for months.

An hour or so later and I had arrived. Of my meeting with Dr and Mrs Brodie I need say nothing—it was kindness itself, warm and hearty. Dr Brodie said little about my health, beyond asking a few slight questions about my cough—when it bothered me, if I had been losing flesh, and so on; but Mrs Brodie I frequently caught casting commiserating glances in my direction. After making me eat a hearty breakfast, they almost compelled me to take a few hours rest. I slept as if I had had a sleeping draught, the air was so pure and strong.

Dr Brodie I did not see again until six o'clock, when the chief meal of the day, a sort of combined dinner, tea, and supper, was taken—a meal they called high tea. As the

doctor's consulting hours were from six to eight, he was, even at this meal, frequently interrupted, and it was not until eight o'clock that he invited me to come to his surgery for a glass, a smoke, and a chat.

"Before doing anything else," he said, "I must first see what is wrong. You are under my care, and I am responsible for your health to a certain young lady in Derby; so off with your things, Bryce, and let me see how the lungs are."

He examined me very carefully, once or twice going back with his stethoscope to a part of my chest which seemed to have a particular interest for him—Williamson I remembered gave it the same attention. At last he seemed satisfied, although not until he had given it an extra rap or two.

"Nothing much wrong, Doctor?" I anxiously inquired.

"H'm, nothing far wrong—run down, over work. Prescription—fresh air, early hours, Fellows' Syrup, and Inveresk. What doctor did you see in London?"

I told him whom I had consulted.

"Sir James Williamson—and what did he say?"

I told him what the specialist had said.

"H'm, yes, Williamson. A good man Williamson, very; we were at Edinburgh together. As a student he pronounced every case he saw to be tubercular—a regular fad with him. And so he is the head man in the subject now?"

"Yes, he is considered a very high authority indeed on lung disease."

"Well, if he maintains the same opinion still, he will have plenty of patients with the malady, and make plenty of cures," and Dr Brodie laughed heartily, "but he must

have modified them to some extent, for he only said you had a tendency to the disease."

"'A decided tendency.'"

"Tut, tut, we all have a very decided tendency that way when a cold has settled for more than a week or so. Carry out my orders faithfully, and you will be back at your work in six weeks, and married in twelve. I'll stake my reputation upon my words."

Radiant with joy, I could have hugged him with delight; it was not so much what he said, as his manner of saying it that carried conviction. I threw Williamson overboard as a humbug of the purest water.

"But Doctor," I exclaimed, "I cannot stay six weeks with you at Inveresk. You'll be sick of me in half the time."

"Can't you," he said, with a smile; "then go to South Africa and die. Now, lad, no more about it—the case is closed."

That settled the matter once for all. The prospect he offered had certain and distinct attractions for me, which the South African scheme did not possess.

"How are Robert and Elsie, Doctor?" I asked, after settling in an arm chair.

"Robert is at Edinburgh, studying for his degree; he is doing well and likes the work."

"Then doctoring runs in the blood?"

"It seems so. Robert has always had a taste that way. Elsie is with him, keeping house and studying painting at the Academy. Little Mary you have already seen; her mother puts her to bed each night at this time and generally spends an hour with her, so I always put in the hour here, and finish up the day's work with a smoke."

"Mary is a bonnie girl; I was surprised that she remembered me. How many years are there between her and Robert?"

"Robert is seventeen, and Mary nearly nine. We lost two bairns between those two, you know; but—do you still smoke?" said Brodie, changing the subject, as he took his pipe from the mantlepiece.

"Yes," I said producing my meerschaum from its case.

"Then try this mixture: you will find it excellent."

"And how is Inveresk, Doctor?" I said, as I lay back lazily in the large roomy arm chair, and watched the fragrant smoke ascending. "Not many changes, I expect?"

"Well, not a great many. I suppose the most important one is in the place itself."

"Yes, I noticed as we drove down from the station that quite a row of buildings have been added; it is a good sign of your prosperity."

"There are more going up too. Old Windyyetts took off a feu last week, and Northy has a son home from Africa; he has made his pile, he says, and he thinks he will settle in the old place. He has had enough of Kruger anyhow."

"'Old Windyyetts'! he did not look so very ancient. I would not have taken him for more than fifty when I was here two years ago. I did not think you would have called that old."

"That is Windys you mean; it is his father I refer to."

"His father, indeed! you surely don't mean that. I suppose I need not ask if Windys' grandfather is living, Doctor."

"No," Brodie chuckled; "but it is not so very long since he died—some nine or ten years ago; he was killed when

over ninety while training a colt. Got the rope drawn round his neck somehow, or I daresay he would have been with us yet."

"Good gracious! Does any one ever die a natural death here, Brodie? I wonder how you make a living; and yet you do look fairly comfortable."

"Oh, a living dog is worth more than a dead lion any day; and you see even the strongest must have toothache now and then."

"But that can't pay you much. What do you charge for drawing teeth if I may ask? I have an interest in the question, for I think I have got one giving way, and if your charges are strictly moderate I'll let you have a shot at it."

"No, thank you, Bryce; since Smith began practice here as a dentist, I have practically handed all my teeth cases over to him; not on account of his opposition, but 'live and let live,' you know. Smith is a very good fellow, an able dentist, and a patient of mine; and as he is married, with a young, rising family, there is not much loss in the receipts after all. It is only occasionally when patients absolutely insist, from former recollections of my skill, that I once more handle the forceps. Not that all patients are particularly fond of having a tooth drawn easily."

"Oh, come, Doctor, I can't stand that; as one of your clients might say, please draw it mild."

"It is a fact though. I remember removing one from the lower jaw of a farm servant at Auchterless; the man was huge and the tooth big in proportion. It came out easily, however; and after the one time sufferer received

the offender, wrapped it up in a scrap of paper, and carefully deposited it in the corner of a waistcoat pocket for luck, he casually inquired how much there was to pay. Now the lowest fee I charge for surgery work is two and six.

"'Half a croon,' the man exclaimed, 'why Dr Robb' (my predecessor in the practice), 'aince pu'd me twice roun' the room for twa shillin'; and this ane maun hae been shaughly, or it couldna hae come oot sae slippert. I thocht ye'd hae daen it for naething.'"

"Your Scotch is Greek, Doctor, but I think I can guess your meaning; he was not what I would have called a grateful patient by any means."

"No; the fee doubtless sounded rather high to him. According to old Invereskians, the right price for drawing a tooth is one shilling paid cash; and the harder you have to work for the siller, putting their feelings aside, the more value do they feel they have had for their money. One poor woman (strangely enough she also came from Auchterless), the wife of one of Auchters' ploughmen—the husband probably earned about sixteen shillings weekly—came to me to have some teeth extracted. There were a lot of bad ones, and as she had been a victim to 'newralagy' I advised her to have the mouth cleared of them. So I extracted seven, and an odd remaining stump. She was pleased to have them out and proceeded to pay me for my trouble. 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,' she counted, tabling a shilling to each numeral, 'an' here's a saxpence for the little ane.' A look of complete bewilderment came over her face when I selected two shillings and the saxpence as my fee. I have the latter yet; see

here it is," and Brodie held up his chain, "there was a hole in it, so I kept it for luck."

"She certainly was a much more pleasant patient than the man you told me of. I can hardly believe his story true."

"Oh, it is true enough."

"Well, tastes differ, as the up to date youngster remarked to his mother when she said the castor oil was nice; but how is Auchters, Doctor? still the same old chap? I expect he has forgotten me."

"You won't see much change in him; Auchters is just the same; and as for his forgetting you—Auchters never forgets a friend, and you and he were chums."

"He has not married yet?"

"No, and never will; but Toddles is about to take a wife. You remember Toddles, Bryce, he is a little younger than you are."

"No, he was away when I was here."

"You will like Tod. You will meet him at the whist club; by the way, it is held here this week."

"The club is still in existence then. I will be glad to make Toddlehall's acquaintance. I heard a good deal of him two years ago; everyone seemed to have a good word to say in his favour."

"Tod is very popular, and so are all the Menzies."

"I think I must have met one of his sisters, by the bye—an extremely pretty girl with a singularly sweet, almost sad expression—Menzies was, I think, the name."

"That is Alice, the eldest girl. She lost her sweetheart—a sad affair."

"Yes, that is the girl I met; I heard some rumours of her story. Now tell me about the others, Doctor — Robert Duncan, Crumlie, Roberts, Pitters—all the rest."

"They are all well, but you will see them in a day or two. Robert Duncan I half expected in to-night, but he said he might wait until you had had a rest. Perhaps it is as well he did not come, for I am going to pack you off to bed; you are looking somewhat tired. Early to bed and late to rise will have to be your motto for a week or so."

"My room is next to yours," he said, as he showed me to my cosy bedroom, in which a glorious fire was burning; "so if you want anything, be sure to knock. I see Effie has put a gong beside the bed. I am a light sleeper and it is no trouble for me to rise. I hope the night bell won't disturb you; if it rings you will know what it is. You are sure you have got everything you want."

"Yes, thank you," I said, a lump rising in my throat at the thought of all his kindness; and I tried to thank him, but his hand was already at the door.

"Good night then, Bryce," he said, "if I hear you coughing much I'll come and see you."

"Good night, Doctor," I replied, but Brodie was already gone.

It became our usual custom to adjourn to the surgery —'my den' Dr Brodie called it—after the consulting hours were over, for an evening pipe and chat. Sometimes Mrs Brodie came in for a minute or two, or one or other of the Doctor's friends dropped in; but as a rule we were alone. I was not strong enough at first to speak much, so the good old doctor used to chat away, telling me hosts of anecdotes of fishing, college life, and other adventures;

but he said little or nothing about his own professional life. Like the majority of people, and especially invalids, medical subjects possessed a fascination for me, so I set myself to draw the doctor on these matters. It was not difficult to do—his whole soul was in his work. Once he got started on a subject, anecdote after anecdote fell from his lips.

"I suppose you felt pretty heartbroken, Bryce, when Williamson ordered you abroad?" he said one evening.

"Well, it was not particularly cheerful comfort that he gave me. I almost felt inclined to try a cold bath in the Thames. But speaking about being broken hearted, Doctor —that is often written about in novels—have you ever met with a case in real life?"

"Yes," said Brodie, after thinking a little, "I may say I have met with one. Certainly there was no organic mischief to account for the girl's death; she simply pined and died."

"Did she live here, Doctor?" I asked, anxious to hear the particulars.

"Yes; her father is the laird of Armitage—the second largest property in the district. Cromlierieve, Windy-yetts, and Corbhill, are on his land, but he seldom lives here now. A flying visit about the twelfth is all we see of him; they have another place in Yorkshire, and a big house in town."

"Will you tell me the story?" I asked.

"Certainly, if you care to hear it," said Brodie, mixing himself a tumbler as he spoke.

"Bertie Waugh was the most popular young fellow in Yorkshire. First in all the county sports; no one could handle a horse, hold a gun, or throw a cast to equal him; and yet no one more willing to open a gate for an older

son of Nimrod, to give up the warm place in the cover, or to part with his best flies to some brother sportsman. No wonder the men liked him. 'Bertie *is* a good fellow,' they said. Fathers would make him promise to 'be with us on the twelfth,' or 'come to me on the first,' or 'when the pheasant shooting opens, I expect you.' If his seat on a horse was superb, his step in a waltz was perfection, and as, in addition, he was openly acknowledged the best looking, best groomed man in Yorkshire, no wonder that he had a way with women—a way which found an easy road to many a fair maid's heart. 'Herbert Waugh is delightful,' they said. Anxious mothers, unwillingly acknowledging his merits, would hesitate to endorse papa's invitation, as they reflected with a sigh upon his prospects.

"Said Mrs Harper one night to her husband, after the latter had given Waugh a pressing invitation to spend a week with them at Armitage, 'He is only a younger son, and the property is so dreadfully encumbered; really, John, it was not wise of you to ask him; Flora is so young and inexperienced.'

"'He's a very fine fellow; Flo' might do worse,' growled a voice from under the bed-clothes.

"'Now, John, don't be absurd. You know, as well as I do, it would never do. His father can't allow him more than £200 a year at the very outside.'

"'I don't see how that should make me like Bert the less. He would suit me well enough as a son-in-law; but there's no chance of that, as he is sailing for America in November. He told me so this evening, if it's any comfort to you.'

"'Is that really the case, Jack?' Mrs Harper never called her husband Jack unless something pleased her. 'What on earth is taking him there?'

"'He said he was not going to live on his father any more; going out to rough it in the gold fields. I like to see pluck in a man. I wish I was young enough to go with him.'

"'If it is the case, I shall be pleased to see him when he comes,' and Mrs Harper chuckled joyously to herself at the thought that all danger to Flora on that score would be soon over. She had watched the two young people rather anxiously at the last dance or two in town.

"Hours after sleep had closed Mrs Harper's eyes, her daughter's were wide awake but wet with tears—she too had heard the news. 'Oh, Bertie, must you go; must you leave me?' she whispered to herself. Then hope springing to her heart as daylight broke, 'He will come back, he must succeed, he will——come——back.'

. . . . . .

"Bertie was soon as great a favourite in Cariboo as in Yorkshire. The rough life suited him, and he suited the miners, although they did at first somewhat sneeringly dub him 'The Dook' or 'The Earl.' They soon came to respect the young Englishman; the hearty way he handled the shovel or the pick, the manner in which he thrashed Rocky Robb for bullying a Chinaman, won his way to their hearts; and then he was a first-rate cook—no one could make the dough-nuts rise or the plumduff recall Old England like 'The Dook'; the very way the spuds vanished from their steaming jackets was a speaking testimonial to his skill.

"Waugh had but one fault—too great a fondness for practical jokes. Now such jokes are all very well if the other fellow sees where the laugh comes in, only miners hardly seemed suitable subjects to practise on; but it is always the unexpected which happens, and 'The Dook's' jokes were all taken in good part; when opportunity offered they were repaid with compound interest.

"Bob Smart's saloon was a great place at Devil's Gulch. Here, after work was done, the men congregated at night—banker, poker, euchre were largely indulged in, the professional gamblers reaping large gains from the hard-handed miners. But the claims panned rich in those days, and a hundred dollars lost at cards did not seem much to a man who might make thousands next day. Bertie Waugh had done well, and had already remitted a few thousands home—not bad for twelve months work. His claim was considered one of the richest in the district. He was in great spirits that night as he turned into Smart's saloon. They had struck a new vein of quartz; it looked as if Bertie would yet be a good *parti* in Yorkshire. He had written home about it—two letters—one very long, but then it was to some one called 'Dearest Flo,' (he had no sister of that name). He wrote of coming home to marry—would she come out with him but for a year or two; the life was rough, but she would like it; everywhere she would be treated as a queen; and then when he had made enough—when he had made his pile—they would once more turn their steps to England. 'It will only be a long honeymoon; shall I come home for you?' he wrote. The letters he posted before entering the saloon, for Smart's bar was post office, store, general meeting place—everything except church.

"A crowd of men were there; the miner's evening life was in full swing.

"'There's White holding his glass up to the light,' thought Bertie, as a broad-backed miner stood contemplating his liquor in an expressive attitude before drinking. Drawing his revolver (he was a sure and a steady aim), click went the trigger, crack snapped the revolver, the glass flew in atoms, and the drink ran trickling over Bob White's arm to the floor.

"'That's a good shot, Bob,' Bert cried, as the miner turned; but it was not White after all, but a rough desperado called Dick Baird, who had lately come to Devil's Gulch. It was said the Vigilance Committee had given him but four hours to clear out of Hell's Gate—a place where the name was even better than the people.

"'A good shot,' he drawled, 'but' (click, crack went the revolver) 'that's a darned sight better,' and Bertie threw his arms in the air, and fell forward on the floor. 'The darned fool might have shot somebody,' Baird added, as he left the room. He was lynched next day—but that's another story.

. . . . . .

"At home a fair-haired maid waited with breaking heart an answer to the letter in which she bade him come.

"And that's my story of a broken heart," said Dr Brodie, as he relighted his pipe.

"And a very sad one too; but you seem to have stories about every part of the body, Doctor. I have half a mind to write down in the day time the yarns you tell each night. They should prove interesting; at least they are to me."

"What would you call them, Bryce?" he laughingly asked, "'Brodie's Anatomy,' how would that do?"

"Well, as I had to draw them out of you, I think I'd call them 'Drawings'; or, as the first ones you told me had to do with teeth, I might extend the title and dub them——"

"What?"

"'Drawings from life.'"

The seed took root, although not on the lines I had jestingly suggested, and from it grew the random reminiscences of Inveresk and its inhabitants which follow.

CHAPTER II.

THE WHIST CLUB AT INVERESK—WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE.

OUTSIDE of his professional life, if there was one thing Dr Brodie loved more than fishing, it was a quiet rubber at whist—threepenny points and a shilling on the rub. Short whist with honours he considered a new-fangled invention—the old-fashioned long game pleased him best—but in deference to the times he gladly took a hand at the short game.

Great players they were too, these Inveresk whisters. There was the Aberdeen and Scotland Banker, Robert Duncan—as cynical an old beggar as ever stepped in shoe leather—grippy, canny, and penurious, in both the English and Scotch senses of the word. Penurious signifies in Scotch "neat, methodical, careful"—possessing, in short, the qualities an Englishman would designate as "prim." Robert Duncan neither smoked nor drank, and considered both these comforts abominations, but he had a very strong partiality for sweet meats and breads—sweeties and penny cakes, as they are generally termed in Inveresk. Robert Duncan—he never got anything but his full name, without prefix or abbreviation—was a somewhat old-fashioned player, but good withal, who swore by Hoyle and

Cavendish. He always attended to the marking of the points with pennies, his partner recording the score. No one ever remembered him failing to mark one, but he had often to be reminded to take one up when the point went against him.

Then there was Auchterless—his real name was MacBean, but he was never called anything but Auchterless, or Auchters, after the name of his farm. I remember covering myself with confusion, and the hearty laugh which went round the table, when I first addressed him as Mr Auchterless. Auchters' qualities were entirely the opposite of the Banker's—genial, hearty, careless with his dress, lavish of hospitality, fond of both pipe and glass. With the latter he seldom exceeded two tumblers and an eke, which were his regular evening consumpt; on special occasions it was perhaps rather more.

A rubber was his chief idea of happiness—good old Scotch whist—none of your American leads or calling for trumps; the latter he would have regarded as a pretty strong form of cheating. He did not object, however, to see his neighbour's hand, if by any chance a stray glance was obtained. Auchters' *finesse* was something appalling in its audacity. If taxed with looking, a broad grin would come over his comely face. "If ye're sic a gomeril as haud yer han' in my face, I hae surely smeddum to profit by it," was the only consolation the grumbler would receive from him. The rule of the game in his opinion was that cards should be held so that none should see them. Of Roberts, the solicitor, who occasionally joined the rubber, he had a hearty contempt—a contempt created simply by the lawyer's habit of almost holding his card hand flat down on the

table, faces uppermost. "Mun," Auchters once said to him, "ye're jist a livin' dummy."

In addition to these three, there were a good many minor lights—a bailie, an accountant, an auctioneer, a supervisor, and several of the local farmers—so that the whist club, which met weekly in one or other of the members' houses, could generally turn out its three or even four complete tables.

Matches with neighbouring towns and villages were not uncommon. At one which I attended two years before, I partnered Auchters against two young bankers from Aberdeen—famed whist players in the town, it was said. In the first game I noticed that the call for trumps from the one was quickly responded to by the other, and they scored three points. Auchters was totally oblivious of the call. In the second hand I particularly wished trumps not to be drawn. A cross ruff to our side seemed imminent, so, taking the bull by the horns, I boldly signalled for trumps, a call my opponents instantly detected, and fell into the snare; as in the next lead or so they played, trumps were carefully avoided, a ruff of one of their kings established the cross ruff, and the odd trick came our way—a point we certainly should not have secured.

By carefully regulated wrong leads on my part we had our scientific friends hopelessly at sea, and the first rubber or two were duly recorded to our credit; but, judging from experience that my play was poor and totally unorthodox, they began to disregard my leads altogether; when, changing my style of whist, and playing my finest game, we had them utterly routed, with their prestige gone, and when time was called—"Defeated by eight rubbers to two."

Auchters, as he pocketted his silver at the close, said, "Man, ye played a graun' game when ye settled to your wark, but I never saw siccan fule play as at the commencement; I was clean dumfoundered. Why yon twa didna play oot trumps that second han' I couldna onnerstan'."

I did not tell him of the tricks I had played with our friends, for with him the game was *de rigeur*, as we found to our cost one night, when as a mild joke we made him deal himself the thirteen trumps. From Auchters face as he sorted his cards, or when he gravely ruffed his opponents' first lead, an onlooker would not have been able to judge that his hand held anything unusual; he played out card after card until eleven tricks were tabled.

"A triple and the rub, mark a penny, Doctor," he said, "and we had a double before to their double, three for the triple, and two for the rub. How many pennies have you down?"

"Four."

"Four and five are nine. That makes two and three; cut whether it is two shillings or two and six, Bryce;" and Roberts and I paid.

"Yes," he said afterwards at supper, when asked about the game, "one han', I held a guid mony trumps, but they were maistly sma.'"

Just as fond of the game is Pitlochty. "Pitters" is getting an old man now—he must be more than seventy—but he occasionally drives into Inveresk on a club evening, though his skill as a whister must be somewhat abating I am afraid, if it is true that his two boys slammed him the other night.

"I canna jist understand this, boys," he said; "I had king and queen o' trumps, and how I lost them baith clean gets owre me." It goes without saying that one of the young rascals must have played the ace a second time.

The week of my arrival at Inveresk the club night fell to be held at the Doctor's house. The meeting hour was at eight, whist being played until ten, when a light supper was served; then a tumbler or two of toddy, and home to bed by eleven.

My stay was already doing me good; the cough did not trouble me nearly so much as formerly, and, best sign of all, Dr Brodie said I was already requiring an extra pound or two on the scale pan. Amy wrote every second day, and in her letters she entirely refused to take a dismal view of the case, so that I joined the whist party with a light heart, and was heartily welcomed by the devotees—invitations to cut in at this table or at that, coming from the respective coteries. Dr Brodie had however advised me not to play for some time yet, so I found a cosy arm chair, from which I occasionally strolled to watch the various hands. Tiring of this, I fell to building castles in the bright fire, until supper was announced. After it had been removed, tumblers were placed in position, the Glenlivet circulated, and talk became general. As a young foreigner who first made the acquaintance of Scotch toddy at Inveresk said, "It is not so much the whisky I like, but it is grand for the conversation."

"Corn all in yet, Auchters?" asked the Bailie.

"Ay, it's in a week ago; we were just in time before the weather broke; in prime order too—it will turn 44."

"Have you had a day with the birds yet?" asked the Solicitor.

"Na, na; until the river closes we maun stick to the water. Hoots, Mr Bryce, ye maun mak' haste an' get rid o' that hoast, if ye want a fish to sen' south. No! you winna manage,"—as I shook my head—"weel, that's a pity; but I'll sen' ye ane the morn. I rose a beauty at the Meadow Pot three times the day. I'se warrant I'll hae him the morn."

"I see your shares are rising, Banker; they will touch twelve pounds next year," said the Auctioneer.

"Very likely; if they don't go down or stand still they will probably go up," sagely answered Robert Duncan.

"Young Macintosh bought a hundred of them at five when the scare was on," said Roberts, the solicitor.

"Did he though? he's aye lucky yon chiel. By the way, Doctor, how's his grieve? A bad kick that black mare gave him. She aye was a nasty limmer. Will he lose the leg?"

"He has already lost it—I operated to-day."

"Did ye though? Man, it must be an awfu' thing to tak' aff a man's leg. I wouldna like to hae done it." So spake good old Auchters.

He headed a subscription for the grieve soon after with ten pounds. The banker, penurious as he is, subscribed five, but then he signed on the paper, "Aberdeen and Scotland Bank £5," so that the company got the credit, while *his* character remained the same. He said the whist night following, when the subject of the collection came round, "How improvident these farm servants are; they

spend all their money, and when anything happens to them, a cry is got up, and begging at once begins."

"I'll bet they did not get much out of him," whispered the supervisor to his neighbour, Windyyetts.

"No, the miserable old skinflint," was the reply. Little the two—who had grudgingly given a few shillings each—knew the sterling worth of the crusty old fellow's heart; but I knew, for Brodie, who had been collector in his district, had told me.

"How are they off?" asked Pitlochty.

"Oh, badly enough, poor things," said Brodie, "but Macintosh is a good hearted man, and his wife is doing all she can for them."

"Do you never feel nervous about operating?" asked the Supervisor.

"Not now, but I once did," and the Doctor paused.

Smelling fresh blood, I quickly exclaimed "When?" and the others chimed in with "A story! tell us the story!" so clamorously that the Doctor could no longer resist.

"Well," he said, "if I must tell the tale—it is against myself; I will call it

"WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE.

"I had just been appointed medical officer to a large club practice in Sutherland—a practice which extended for twenty miles in all directions, with no opposition. Every man, woman, and child was my patient, and each adult paid a small yearly fee, varying from half a crown in the case of single men, old maids, and widows, to five shillings for fathers of families, the children being attended without further remuneration."

"Will you take me on at that rate?" asked Robert Duncan. "I'll pay you the first half yearly instalment now," tabling the one shilling and threepence he had won at whist. "And me," said the Supervisor, whose family was the record one of the parish.

The Doctor went on, paying no heed to his interrupters: —"When I say that the total salary from these sources reached £300 a year, it is needless to add I had a good many souls to attend to, and that the post was no light one. A ride or drive of ten or fifteen miles in one direction, to be followed up by another of perhaps even a greater distance on my arrival home, with no certainty of a good night's rest at the end of the day's work, is not probably your idea of an easy life. Nevertheless I was very pleased to get the appointment, shortly after being capped, and considered myself fortunate, as indeed I was, in obtaining it.

"The situation was an onerous one; here was I, a young man of twenty-two, with the total care and responsibility of the health and lives of a very large number of people, and over thirty miles away from my nearest professional brother. Although thoroughly conversant with the theory of my profession, I had had little opportunity of practising it. I could have written all the steps of any major operation sufficiently clear to satisfy the most exorbitant of examiners—possibly a good deal more explicitly than I could now—but I had never done anything practically, greater than the removal of a finger, the stitching of a wound, or the opening of a whitlow. However, I had confidence in myself, and undertook the work with a light heart.

"For the first few days all went well; ordinary cases came my way—slight coughs, indigestion, a case of 'conjunction' (congestion) of the lungs, and so on—all these were treated, and patients and Doctor satisfied; but on the seventh day, at an unearthly hour in the morning, I was awakened by voices, and the sound of heavy steps crunching the gravel path.

"A furious peal of the bell, to be soon followed by the housemaid's hurried knock, drove sleep from my brain.

"'Please, Doctor, there's a man in the kitchen with his arm nearly off,' she exclaimed, in answer to my question as to what was wrong.

"The words caused the full responsibility of my position to overtake me. I was face to face with it, and, alas! I was weighed in the balance and found wanting.

"Springing from bed, with a depressed and nervous feeling at my heart, I quickly threw on a dressing gown and hurried downstairs. The servant had not exaggerated: there lying on the deece (wooden form) was a young man, about my own age, with one arm literally hanging off—a fearful compound fracture of the upper arm, with mangling and laceration of the parts beneath. Proceding to examine the injured limb, my heart painfully labouring, I commenced to think of my position. If I should fail in my treatment—if I should not carry out successfully and practically, the learning I knew so well. In a word, I felt that my professional success was at stake.

"Thus thinking of myself, I began to feel as if I were to faint, the heart-beat which had seemed almost to burst my chest, was now no longer felt, the arm faded from my sight, a pool of blood surged over my eyes, a confused

murmur of voices sounded in my ears, and I staggered. With an effort I pulled myself together, and, muttering that some instrument was required, I left the room, to fall in a faint on my surgery sofa.

"How long I lay—it could not have been minutes—I do not know, but when I opened my eyes, my patient stood before me, holding his shattered arm in his other hand. Whether the pain had been too great for him to wait my return, or whether the keen eye of suffering had detected my weakness, he had followed me alone into my surgery.

"'Doctor,' he said, 'if I can stand the pain, you can.'

"The cool sarcasm of the speech sent the blood to my brain, and did more to restore me than all the stimulants in the world would have done. Heartily ashamed of myself, I sprang to my feet, no longer faint or afraid of myself; I thought of my patient and him alone. I quickly had the arm bound up, a temporary ambulance improvised, an opiate given, and then I walked by him, through the darkness of the night, to his home some four miles away.

"Next day saw the arm off, and my patient did as well as if I had operated all my life.

"One word in explanation of the accident. In that part of the country, the little farms or crofts have small windmills to thrash their corn. One old crofter required his thrashing done, but was too old and infirm to manage it himself, and too poor to pay for assistance. Three or four of the neighbouring lads thought it would be a kindly jest to do it for him during the night. My patient—who was engaged in feeding the mill—got his arm, in the darkness, drawn into the revolving wheels, and before they could be stopped his arm was in to the shoulder. He would not

allow the crofter to be roused, as that would spoil the joke; so, among the lads the arm was literally pulled out—matches being employed to illuminate the ghastly scene. Although close at home, he would not go there, for fear of frightening his mother, but walked the entire distance to my house."

"What became of him, Doctor?" asked Oliphant.

"He was naturally a clever lad; so, by my advice, he went as a pupil teacher to the village school. He worked hard, and, fortunately, with great success. Now, I understand, he is in a very fair way of one day becoming a professor in Edinburgh, as he is headmaster in one of the famous schools there. His recent treatise on the 'Ways and Customs of the Ancient Greeks' excited great attention, and is supposed to be the standard work upon the subject."

"You don't mean to say your patient was Leyton, of the ——— school?" exclaimed Auchters. "I've read his book; it is first rate," he added, to my astonishment.

"Yes, that is his name. I am afraid I cannot claim acquaintance with the work," said Brodie, smiling, "but I am pleased you found it interesting; he deserved to succeed, for he had indomitable pluck and perseverance."

I could not help thinking as we said "Good-night," that of such men are the sons of Scotland bred.

CHAPTER III.

AUCHTERS' LOVE STORY.

"AUCHTERS was never married, I think you said, Doctor," I remarked next evening, in the surgery. "How is it that he has never taken a wife to manage that big house of his? A housekeeper is all very well, and Annie seems to have his interests thoroughly at heart; but then she is only a housekeeper. With his handsome face and kindly heart many a woman would surely have been proud to be 'Mrs Auchterless.'"

"Aye," said the Doctor, "and many a one has tried. Most of them have given up the struggle now, for Auchters is generally regarded as a confirmed bachelor; but I am afraid that Annie's heart, if it could be examined by the X rays, would reveal a hope that its owner may yet sit as mistress of the good farm she so ably rules as housekeeper. Poor Annie; she has been a faithful servant to our old friend, and would make him a real true wife, but there's little chance for her. Auchters' heart is no longer in his own keeping—it has been away from him for many a day—he lost it, hopelessly and forever, where it now lies," and the Doctor pointed in a particular direction.

"What; not Miss Smith?" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to say Auchters is gone in that quarter? I should have thought all he would have had to say was 'will you?'

for him to have had a pretty decided answer in the affirmative. Why the last time I saw them together, Auchters seemed to be as anxious to get quit of the lady as she seemed to be to keep him."

"Ah! you lovers don't know everything! but it's not there; no, it's further over," and the Doctor's gentle voice grew softer than its wont, "in a quiet part of the parish, built round with high stone dykes, and looking down on the sea—in the auld kirkyard. When my wife's sister—Mary Deane—died, fifteen years ago, and was buried there, Auchters' heart was buried with her; and, although few now remember her simple story, Auchters does. Did you notice how he slipped away from the rubber last night? Well, that was to bid 'Good-night' to her name-child—my youngest daughter."

Yes, I remembered, and my thoughts went back to the night we tampered with his cards—it was about the same hour he slipped away. Poor Auchters, I could sympathise with him—my grief at the prospect of losing Amy being yet green in my memory.

"Auchters and she were bairns together," the Doctor continued; "shared the same apple, had the same joys and sorrows in their childhood's days. You see the Deanes farmed Auchtermair while the MacBeans tilled ground at Auchterless. Both farms had passed from father to son for the better part of two centuries; now Auchtermair is farmed by a stranger—Macintosh, whose grieve was kicked the other day—and Auchterless will never in all likelihood know another MacBean; Auchters is likely to prove the last of his race. It is hard to see the old landmarks slipping one by one away from the parish."

"The children's school, which was taught in those days by two old ladies called Jeffries, was held in the village, so that the bairns walked together, morning and afternoon, to and from Inveresk. In the winter time, when the weather was bad and the roads heavy, no one could have taken the same care of Mary as young Auchters did Instead of leaving her at his own gate, he would walk the extra quarter mile to see her safely home. As they grew older, it gradually became an understood thing among the young folks that Auchters and Mary were lad and lass. So time went on until the young man had to go to Aberdeen to College. You know Auchters is a University man, and hold the M.A. degree?"

"No, I would hardly have thought it."

"Very likely not; but try him with a scrap of Cicero or a bit from Horace, and I'll warrant he'll cap the quotation; and as clever at figures as you are. I doubt if you will puzzle Auchters even now with any mathematical or algebraical conundrum. At Aberdeen in these subjects he was *facile princeps*, and when he came back with M.A. (with distinction) tacked to his name, Inveresk rose a point or two in its own estimation.

"During these years he saw nothing of Mary. While he was at Aberdeen she was at Edinburgh, at a celebrated Ladies' School, finishing her education; when she returned she came to live with us. I had married her older sister some three years before, and old Deane had joined his forebears in the kirkyard of Inveresk.

"Old Auchterless, when his son had finished his college course, handed over the farm to him, and went to live

with his maiden sisters in Lily Terrace. He only died a year or two ago.

"I need hardly say Auchters was a frequent visitor at our house, and both my wife and I looked forward to seeing Mary a happy wife at Auchterless. Mary always received him so gladly, and was so evidently happy in his company, that my feelings received a rude shock one afternoon, when, coming home from my rounds, I met Auchterless in the lobby, with such a white strained face that I knew something had happened. Grasping him by the hand—he could hardly speak—I brought him in here, and quickly learnt that he had proposed, and been rejected.

"'Tut, tut, man,' I said, 'don't let your heart down; Mary is young yet, and does not know her own mind. It will all come right. There is no rival in the field at any rate.'

"'Oh, but there is; she is engaged to a stock-broker in London. She asked me to break the news to you.'

"I gave a low whistle. Then that accounted for the frequent letters bearing the London post-mark Mary received. 'She met him in Edinburgh, where he had been on a visit to his aunt, the principal of the school Mary was at,' Auchters went on, and he further informed me that the successful suitor proposed paying a visit to Inveresk the following month.

"Well, he came; and although my wife and I never liked the man, we were perhaps prejudiced against him on Auchters' account. All our friends were charmed with his genial manners. Good looks he certainly had—tall, dark, neither stout nor thin, with his long drooping moustache, he looked more like a cavalry officer than a staid stock-

broker. He dressed neatly and with evident care, but there was nothing flashy in his appearance. His talk amongst men was largely shoppy—the price of foreign bonds, American and home railways, ran glibly from his tongue. The village soon became a hot-bed of speculation, arguments over the respective merits of Union Pacifics, Louisvilles, Chicago, Milwaukee, and St Paul Railway Companies—pronounced familiarly Unions, Louis, and Milks—were of frequent occurrence. Even the parish minister and the dominie fell out over the question whether Portugal was likely to pay the interest on the next quarterly coupon; not that the quarrel mattered much—arguments between these two worthies were of frequent occurrence—but then it used to be over a Greek root, or whether such and such a lad was best fitted for the ministry or the plough. There was no intermediate stage between these vocations at Inveresk.

"With ladies, however, his conversation was bright and sparkling—the latest society scandal, the appearance and description of the Royal Family, of celebrities in politics, literature and art—he seemed to know them all intimately—and the women folks quickly pronounced him a delightful man.

"After staying a week at Inveresk, he proposed directly to me, as Mary's guardian, for her hand. I would willingly have said him no, but what was the use; the girl was madly in love with him, so I consented, and the marriage was held four weeks afterwards.

"Mary wrote to us from London very regularly—happy, bright letters, descriptive of her immense house, the number of servants, what she had seen, and where she had

been. Much was written of her husband—love of him pervaded every line—so that in less than a year my wife had become quite pleased at the match. Auchters too, seemed himself again, were it not that his laugh was softer and not heard so often.

"After the year had elapsed Mary's letters became fewer and shorter, and a different tone altogether ran through them, until at last we had had no news from her for nearly three months. My wife was already most anxious, and even I had taken the matter so much to heart that I had written privately to her husband for news. I waited two days for his answer, and determined if it did not arrive on the third morning, that I would send Elsie south —I could not go myself. At last a letter arrived from London. Gladly seizing it I opened it with haste; but what was this? It was not from Mary's husband at all; it was from Auchterless. My eyes rapidly flew over the contents of the sheet, which read as follows:—

DEAR DOCTOR,—

I met Mary in London. Her husband has behaved badly to her—how badly I will not say. She is very ill, heart-broken I should call it; but anyhow I am bringing her home to-morrow by the night mail. I will hand her over to your care at Aberdeen; be sure and meet us there.

Yours truly,

J. MACBEAN.

"The blow had fallen without much warning, and it was with sad hearts that my wife and I waited the arrival of the south mail next morning at Aberdeen. When they arrived—Mary and her maid, Jeannie Scott, whom she had taken south with her from Inveresk—I would hardly have recognised Mary. White, fragile, and hollow-eyed, she was

a different creature to the bright-eyed, sonsie lassie, of two years before. Auchters, who came with them, disappeared; nor did he turn up at his farm until more than a week later. He said he had been at the south markets looking for sheep; so that none knew of the part he had played in Mary's homecoming.

"After her return the girl seemed to revive, but her chest was hopelessly wrong—real tuberculosis. Mary knew herself that she was dying, nor would she have had it otherwise—a sweeter, gentler, more uncomplaining patient never was. She did not know how Auchters had found her out in London, where she was nearly starving in her big house—husband gone, money done, servants away, a man in possession, and no one but faithful Jeannie to attend her.

"I asked Auchters about it, and he said—

"'Well, Doctor, there's no secret in't. Jeannie, seeing her mistress so ill, wrote to me. Mary had made her promise not to write to you; so she saw a way out of the difficulty, and yet kept her word, by writing to me. Stay, I have the letter,' and Auchters drew out of his pocket a letter addressed: 'Auchterless, Auchterless, Inveresk.' Opening it he read—

42 Regent Park.

DEAR SIR—

The maister is awa'—whaur I winna say, but he's been haudin' an awfu' time lately. What wi' drink and debt the place has been something byous, but its nae aboot that I would vright; its the mistress, poor wean, she's deein' on her feet. Could ye na tell the Doctor to come south for us; you're an auld freen o' his, an' he will tak' it best frae you. But whatever you do, maun be dune quickly, for there's nae a saxpence i' the hoose.

Your obedient servant,

JEANNIE SCOTT.

"'After reading Jeannie's letter,' Auchters went on 'I called for you, but you were out—away at some case at Blackford ; it might keep you for hours. I could not tell Mrs Brodie my errand, so, as I had never seen London, I paid it a visit. You know the rest.'

"'Did you see anything of her husband?'

"'No, but I learnt on inquiry at the Stock Exchange that his name was posted as a defaulter, and the hall-keeper said he thought he was away to Spain. At the police station, I regret to say, I heard worse news : he had sailed for Spain in company with a notorious London adventuress, a warrant having been issued for his arrest for embezzlement and forgery. Poor Mary, I thought she would die before I got her home.'

"'Does she know the facts?'

"'Yes; when I was in London she was privately examined by a police official, but I am thankful to say he was thoroughly convinced that Mary knew nothing of her husband's misdeeds, so whatever happens, her evidence will not be required. But they will never catch him, he is too smart a hand for that.'"

"I may say they never did, for three months afterwards, on opening my *Free Press*, I read: 'Murder of an Englishman in Spain.' It was Mary's husband; he had quarrelled with the woman he fled with, for her drunken habits, and she, seizing a knife, had stabbed him to the heart.

"Mary bore the news of her husband's death better than I anticipated. 'Poor Fred,' she sobbed, 'Poor Fred.'

"After that day she never rallied; nursed devotedly by her sister and Jeannie, she lingered on for three months. Auchters she often asked for, and he was a frequent visitor

to her room. She liked to hear him chat of the old days when they went hand in hand to school; and no one was so quick as Auchters to divine her wants: a bunch of grapes or of hedge roses; to shift a pillow, or to raise her head—a smile from her his ample reward.

"'Auchters,' she said one day, 'I am very tired. Do you remember how you carried me through the snow wreaths yon winter's day? We were sair done wi' the snow and the drift, both you and I. Ye kissed me then, Auchters, as you said, "it's only a little way further now, Mary"; and ye helped me through. It's only a little way further now, Auchters, and again you help me through; ye kissed me then, will ye kiss me now?'

"Riding home rapidly in the mirk that evening, along the Auchterless road, I met a man, who staggered and moaned as he walked—some farm servant drunk after market, I thought. But something was familiar in the figure: it was Auchters. With his hand pressed to his face, he passed me unnoticed. I knew before I went home that Mary was dead.

"I have told you this story that you might know the man as I know him—true, honest, and leal."

"And Jeannie; is she with you still?" I asked.

"No, Jeannie would not stay; she did not like places where other servants were. She preferred to become a 'general.'"

"Not in the Salvation Army?"

"No, no; a general servant, I mean. Auchters—who had meant to make a place for her at Auchterless—asked her soon after the funeral to come to him.

"'Na, na,' she said, 'I'm fee'd as maid to twa auld ladies an' a coo.'"

CHAPTER IV.

THE AULD KIRKYARD—THE OLD RESURRECTIONIST.

Next morning was clear and bright—the air bracing and keen, it evidently contained more than its fair proportion of ozone—so when Dr Brodie sent back a message from Auchterless, where he had called on his forenoon round, that I was to be sure and take a good long ramble through the pleasant paths of Inveresk, I obeyed willingly.

My steps took me through the village, where I chanced to meet with several of my former acquaintances. Roberts and Oliphant stopped to chat a moment or two about old times, Robert Duncan gave me a hearty wave of his hand as I passed the Bank window, and came running after me to ask if I felt able for a rubber yet, and Toddlehall, driving into the village, drew up beside us, and pressed me to come and spend a day with him—so that it was well on to noon before I found myself outside the village at the Auld Kirkyard of Inveresk. The gates were unfastened, and I entered.

The churchyard was rarely used now—only when a member of one of the old families went to rest was the green turf of the churchyard disturbed, and not always then. The New Cemetery which had been opened a few years before, with its bright green grass, cut regularly with the mower, its mathematically planned walks with their carefully trimmed edges, its showy flower beds, and palatial lodge house, was now the favourite resting place

of their dead, and one of the prides of the inhabitants of the parish.

The Auld Kirkyard was a marked contrast to the village show place. There was not a path, properly so called, in the whole place—the grass was long, untouched for months with scythe or mower, and a few sheep found a rich feeding ground within its walls. To go from one part to another, you had to walk over the little heaps of raised earth, dodge round this old tombstone, or walk over that—the lettering almost effaced on some and totally on others. Many of the inscriptions were extremely curious and quaint. I could have spent many a day studying the various epitaphs. Here and there a boat, a ship, a plough, or a sword would point to the occupation of the deceased, but more commonly a skull and cross bones would indicate that all occupation was ended here, save for a hole six feet by two.

Thus wandering aimlessly among the stones, my eyes lighted on a familiar name—the name of Auchtermair. A large stone of Aberdeen granite, built against and into the wall, was literally covered with the names of generations of Deanes. Among them I read the name of Auchters' sweetheart:

MARY
YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF THE ABOVE,
WHO FELL ASLEEP
ON MARCH 17TH, 1881,
AGED 20.

Enclosed within the same railing was another stone, some yards away, like the former built into the wall. To my

astonishment I found it marked the burial ground of the MacBeans of Auchterless. The names were not nearly so numerous as those of the Deanes—the latter seemed to have been a prolific family—but the dates went back to quite as remote a time. How strange, I thought, that the two grounds should lie together, without even a fence to mark the boundary between them. Auchters will not lie far from Mary when his time comes.

Dinner time was nearly at hand, so, tearing myself away from the spot, which began to have a distinct fascination for me, I returned home. Leaving the kirkyard by a gate at a different side to the one I had entered by, I noticed on my way a curious house, standing in the centre, and wondered what it could be for, but had not time to examine it. I questioned Dr Brodie about the burial ground that evening.

"Some two hundred years ago," he said, "the farms of Auchtermair and Auchterless were one property—they were then called the lands of Auchter. When Inveresk of Inveresk acquired the ground, he split the place into two farms of four hundred acres—at least Auchtermair has 405 acres and Auchterless 400; hence the names. The burial ground which belonged to the old Auchters family was never sub-divided, one half goes with Auchtermair, the other with Auchterless. But it is very seldom a funeral takes place in the old kirkyard now, unless it is one of the very old families, and even then special permission has to be obtained. No doubt you noticed the place seemed overcrowded."

"Yes; I found it totally impossible to avoid walking over the mounds. What was that round house in the

churchyard built for, Doctor? It seemed too large for a tool house."

"Oh, that is a watch tower: a relic of the old resurrectionist days. Bodies for purposes of dissection were not then easily obtained, and large prices were frequently offered and given for them; so that a business quickly sprang up in the ghastly trade, and many a grave was rifled in the country. So bad indeed did the matter become, and so powerless was the law to stop it, that these watch towers were built, in which the male friends of the deceased could keep a nightly vigil, until such time had elapsed, as by a natural process of dissolution the body was no longer fit for the unhallowed purpose; but in spite of all precautions the watchers were often tricked, and bodies removed almost in front of their eyes. I remember a patient of mine, a man long since dead, confiding to me some of his experiences in the body-lifting line."

"I should like to hear some of them, if you don't mind," I said, passing the decanter to the Doctor.

"Well," he said, mixing himself a tumbler as he spoke, "the old man was slightly garrulous, and I am not sure he did not draw at times on his imagination, but the story I will tell you has the merit of being strictly true, for I knew the doctor to whom the body went, and he recollected the matter perfectly. But I see you are anxious to hear about my friend,

"THE OLD RESURRECTIONIST.

"'Yes,' he said, 'Doctor, bodies were scarce at that time; so when Dr M———, of Aberdeen, offered me forty pounds for the body of a full-grown man, I felt that the

money must be raised somehow. I was sair needin' the siller at onyrate—I had just lost the best milk coo in Inveresk, and I kent fine whaur to get anither guid yin, but how to buy it was a different thing a'thegither. The kirkyards were that carefully watched that a body needed to be as clever as a tod, and as slippert as a leveret, to escape the watchers. If he was seen, it was weel for him if he got off nae waur than I did,' and the old fellow struck his hip, on which he was somewhat crippled, with his hand. He had received the full charge of an old blunderbuss, but luckily for him the shot was somewhat spent, or he would never have escaped the clutches of his pursuers.

"'But as I was saying,' the old man continued, 'I was sair needin' the siller. Windyyetts had just lost his second son at the time—a likely laddie, some seven or aucht and twenty he would hae been; he was to hae been married to a lass o' Cromlierieve's within a month or twa, but he was aye owre fond o' a glass, and he fell asleep in the ditch as ye gang up to Windyyetts, ae winter's nicht. That maun hae been near forty years ago.

"'Weel, weel, he jist took to his bed, and ten days saw him buried in the auld kirkyard frae inflammation o' the lungs—Peeneumony the doctor ca'ed it, but it wisna that. Crumlie's lassie was in an awful state—they thocht she would gang silly; puir lassockie, I mind her fine. She married Blackie the neist year come hairst.

"'Young Windys would suit me fine, I thocht, but how to get him was the job. I kent fu' weel I couldna manage alane, but Hughie Gordon, who drove a fisher's cairt frae Aberdeen, just chanced to come my gait. The vera gurk, I said to mysel'.

"'Hughie,'" I said, 'do you want to mak' a five pun note?'

"'Fat wid I no dae that for,' says Hughie, wi' a droll look in his e'e to see if I was haverin' wi' him.

"'Weel,' says I, 'jist put in that auld naig o' yours in the byre (the coo's deid) and we'll hae a crack on't.'

"'It wasna wi' a cauld she dee'd?' says Hughie, 'for I widna like onything to come ower Meg.' That was his horsie—a puir auld screw, but a guid yin to go.'

"'She choked hersel,' says I, 'ye needna be afraid.' An' so she did—but it was wi' a hoast.

"Hughie was no vera keen on the job at first. I had to argle-bargle wi' him the maist pairt o' twa hours; but, like me, the siller proved owre muckle for him, although I had to stretch another poun' before he wad consent. Hughie aye was on the grippy side.

"The job had to be done that nicht or never. Ye'll maybe min', Doctor, I lived in yon thacket housie aboon the kirkyard—I was beadle at that time, so they never suspecket me. The nicht was a no ordinar' black yin, and the little watch hoose was seemingly deserted when Hughie and I scaled the dyke. We were michty carefu' that naebody was aboot, afore we started diggin' up the body, but when we did start we made the turf and divots flee, I can assure you, and it was not long before we had the coffin oot. Hughie prized the lid off wi' his spade, while I kept an anxious watch around us. I trusted mair to my lugs than my een, for, as I said, the nicht was a maist amazin' dark yin. Hughie soon had the corp oot, an' we had it in the sack in less time than it takes me to tell't. There was some sma' difficulty in gettin' it owre

the wa', but we managed a' richt—except that the sack burst, as I lowered the body doon to Hughie in the road.

"There was a gey wheen o' tolls on the road in those days between Inveresk and Aberdeen, and folk aye cast vera suspeecious glances at ony parcel in a cairt; and Hughie and I were ower weel kent on the road for us to run ony risks, so we had to disguise our man. It was an uncanny job, but it had to be done; and when we had Windys dressed up in an auld pair o' breeks an' coat o' mine—the sack we left on him for a sark—wi' an auld cloth bonnet put on his head, he looked for a' the warld as weel-faurt a man as ye'd see in a day's travel, as we propped him up in the seat o' Hughie's cairt, a'tween the pair o' us.

"Hughie's naigie was no sic a bad beastie, an' it covered the grun' in gran' style between Inveresk and Aberdeen. We passed a toll or twa, where the gates were lockit, but the keepers were owre sleepy to be vera particular in noticing wha passed. By the time we got near Maggie Whyte's Public it was getting weel on to twa o'clock, but Hughie wad hae a drink, to 'tak' the taste oot o' his moo,' he said, an' I was some thirsty mysel'.

"'It's ower late, Hughie,' I said, half wishing he would say it wasna.

"'Na, na, man,' he said, just as I was hoping, 'it's never owre late at Maggie's.'

"'But if they see the body i' the cairt,' says I, raising difficulties, when I saw he was on for't.

"'Deil the fear o' that, man,' says he, as bold as onything. 'They will never tak' him for a corp, an' it will tak' suspeecion aff us at onygate. There's boun' to be an

awfu' fash about this ploy the morn. Nae yin wad think the resurrectionists would hae stopped at Maggie's for a drink.'

"The temptation was a great yin, an' there was something in what Hughie said, but still I wadna hae gien in, had he no' driven richt up to the door. Striking the window wi' his fup, he ca'd oot for twa gless o' whisky.

"A lassie soon brocht them oot.

"'Will I no bring ane for the ither man?' she says, glowerin' up at Windys. 'Wha's wi' you, Hughie?'

"'His name's Tam Buchan,' answers Hughie, as smairt as ye like; 'he comes frae Carledoddy, an' he disna drink.'

"'He'll no live lang in Aberdeen,' says she, laughing, 'if that's true.'

"'Weel, guidnicht tae ye, kimmer. I've had a lang day since I saw ye yestreen, but I've selled a' my fish—ye see there's naething i' the cairt,' said Hughie, as he pit his horse tae the road again.

"Three o'clock saw us in Aberdeen.

"'Man,' Hughie said, 'that was a gran' nicht's wark,' as I handed him over sax notes neist mornin'.

"'It wisna that bad,' said I, grippin' thirty odd notes in my breeches pocket.

"I dinna richt ken whether I was suspecket or no, but anyhow I lost my office o' beadle soon after that, an' I canna say that thirty-four poun' did me muckle guid. I never flourished well after't, or I wadna be lyin' here (he was lying in the Poorhouse of Inveresk), wi' nane o' my ain folk tae close my een. Oh! Doctor, I canna but think David kent a gey thochtie aboot men (it wis Solomon wha kent aboot wimmen), when he wrote yon first psalm. That

verse that says 'The wicked are not so; but like they are unto the chaff,' is aften i' my heid o' nichts. Dae ye think they'll tak' a body-snatcher in up there ?"

"So closed the old man's story—his own life closed shortly afterwards. I do not think he ever regretted at heart his body-stealing adventures, for the occasional chuckles he emitted whilst relating his narratives were both hearty and prolonged."

"He must have been a horrid wretch," I said. "Can't you tell me something, as your friend would say, 'a wee thochtie' more cheerful ?—it's not a pleasant tale to go to sleep on."

"Well, perhaps not, if you have eaten not wisely, but too well. A supper of devilled kidneys and gorgonzola, and a resurrectionist story should lay a good foundation for a first-class nightmare."

CHAPTER V.

An Interesting Episode in the Life of W. N. Roberts, Solicitor; with some Thrilling Experiences in the History of R. Brodie, M.D., G.P.

It had been an exciting afternoon, and Lawyer Roberts was the cause of it—"W. N. Roberts, Solicitor and Notary Public," as the gilt letters on the wire guaze blinds in his office window informed all those whom it did or did not concern. Roberts was by no means the only lawyer in Inveresk; the place literally swarmed with them. They were all "solicitors" too; there was not a good old-fashioned Scotch "writer" among the lot. Whatever they called themselves, the parish knew them all as Lawyer this or Lawyer that. Invereskians sounded the word uncommonly like "liar"—a term not strictly conclusive of thorough credibility on the part of clients. However, they—the solicitors—all seemed to prosper. Lawyer Roberts, although not a native of the place, had justified his claim to being called an Inveresk man—firstly by his success, and secondly by marrying, twelve months ago, a grand-daughter of Pitlochty.

Inveresk never recognised any stranger within its gates, who failed in life, as one of theirs; but let a man succeed and make his mark, then he was quickly hailed as "Inveresk a' ower." If, in addition, he married a local

lady, that at once stamped him with the real true mark of an Inveresk man *pur et simple.*

Roberts had been successful. His first cases in the "Shirra' Ccort" had been so ably conducted, and his clients' defences so well stated, that, although the decisions went hopelessly against him—they could not have done otherwise—the Sheriff had given him public congratulation on the manner of defence. Needless to say the local prints published the great man's remarks, and Roberts' name was made for life. The uncrowned Solomons—the bailies in the Police Court—were so carried away by his eloquence that not unfrequently one or other of their honours would forget the evidence altogether, and, notwithstanding the clearest proof by honest witnesses to the contrary, find a verdict for the defence in that decision of the Scottish courts, "Not Proven"—a verdict which lets off many a guilty man, but thanks to which here and there an innocent man escapes unjust punishment.

It is related of one of the local magistrates that, reading the report of a case which Roberts had defended before him, he exclaimed, "Why on earth did I not make it 'five shillings or three days'?"

It says a good deal for Roberts' real ability that he should have made his mark in spite of his appearance. Height, bulk, and pomposity were three roads to success in Inveresk, and when the three were joined in one, if a man could not get on, he must be an unparalleled idiot. But Roberts possessed none of these qualities, or rather quantities. On the contrary, of medium height, slight in figure, and, with the exception of a tawny moustache, clean shaven in face, he slipped past you in the street with

none of the turkey-cock-swelling propensities of the stronger of his professional brethren; although even he showed somewhat of a semi-military swagger in his gait when it was closely scrutinised. But his audacity was something beautiful: nothing daunted him. However hopeless a case might seem, he fought it to the bitter end, not unfrequently beating his opponents when their success seemed assured, by the detection of some slight breach of one of the many technicalities of Scotch law the latter had committed; and so had the case deserted, *pro loco et tempore.*

That the afternoon was exciting was, I think I mentioned, Roberts' fault. He surely had important business on hand with the Doctor that day; first he called a little after two.

"Doctor in?" I heard him ask the servant.

"No, sir; just gone out."

"Will he be long?"

"No; I do not think so."

"Then ask him to call on my wife when he arrives." And Sarah wrote the message on the slate.

Between three and four he called twice, between four and five he rang the housemaid up three times, and just as the hour struck, he called a fourth time.

"Not in yet!" I heard him exclaim. "What shall I do? I can't go back without him again; my wife won't hear of Thomson."

"Will you come in and wait, sir? The Doctor may be in at any moment now. Mr Bryce is reading in the surgery; he will be glad to see you." So spoke the servant, instantly opening the door to its full stretch when the name of the new and younger practitioner was mentioned.

Sarah was a faithful servant, and never let a patient slip past Dr Brodie's door during his absence, if she could prevent it.

Roberts hesitated, and Thomson lost the chance of becoming the Roberts' family doctor, by Sarah's little attention, for once and for all.

I did not find him a pleasant companion during the next hour and a half, although I could not but sympathise with him in his excitement. "Will he never come?" "Surely some accident must have happened!" "Would Mrs Brodie know where the Doctor was?" Questions such as these flowed unceasingly from his lips. As I knew no more about Brodie's movements than Roberts did, my answers must have become rather monotonous to him, for he ceased waiting for my replies, but kept up a sort of minor catechism to himself, varying his questions without answers by jumping from his chair and rushing to the door at any slight sound which seemed to betoken the Doctor's arrival.

The tea hour had come and gone, and still Dr Brodie had not arrived. Mrs Brodie herself was beginning to be somewhat anxious, for I heard her questioning Sarah as to any message Dr Brodie might have left when starting for his afternoon rounds. As for Roberts, I began seriously to fear for his reason if Dr Brodie delayed much longer; and, to make matters worse, the waiting-room had begun to fill, for the evening consultation hours were now on hand.

But there was Dr Brodie at last. Roberts was out of the surgery into the lobby before the Doctor had removed his rough riding jacket.

"Well, Roberts, what's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, Doctor, I'm so thankful you have come. Don't take off your coat, you must come with me at once."

"Stop, stop; what is it all about?" exclaimed Brodie, as Roberts was literally dragging him to the door.

"My wife, Doctor; she's awfully bad. Oh, come! come!"

"Your wife, man! Why the last time I saw her she was in first-rate spirits; in a fair way, I should say."

"Yes, yes, but she—she is going to have a baby."

"Going to have a baby! surely not. I do not remember being engaged."

"Engaged," Roberts exclaimed, his face falling. "Oh, Doctor, surely you do not require that. You have known Lucy all her life, and she trusted upon you."

"Trusted upon me. Ah, yes; that's very good, and very flattering; but if you had let me know before this would never have occurred," and the Doctor picked up the callers' slate and read:

Hour.	Caller.	Invalid.	Message.
2·15	Mr Roberts.	Mrs Roberts.	As soon as possible.
3·10	,,	,,	Immediately.
3·50	,,	,,	Urgent.
4·10	Wm. Brown.	Mrs Brown.	Confinement.

"Ah! I see here is another confinement. I am engaged for this one; Brown has the preference. Good night, Roberts." And the Doctor made off to the door, chuckling in a most heartless manner, as I thought.

Poor Roberts followed him, too heart-broken almost for speech. Making a final effort, he gasped out, "What will I do; what will I do?"

"I'll tell you what to do, my boy," said the Doctor, as he patted the Solicitor on the shoulder; "I've teased you long enough. Walk home quietly, ask for the nurse, and tell her you have my permission to see Lucy for five minutes; but mind this, there is to be no excitement; five minutes, not a moment more. The babies——"

"The what!" Roberts shouted, his eyes staring almost out of his head with excitement.

"The babies," I said. "Did I not speak clearly? Two fine bairns they are, and the mother's very well."

"Twins!" Roberts sang. "Am I the moth——, the father of twins?" and he waltzed into the surgery, as Sarah passed through the lobby to admit another caller, executing a *pas seul*, daring in its originality, in the liveliest mannner. I watched him in great amusement until he sank breathless into a chair, when further talking was heard from the lobby.

"Ah, Brown, you're needing me again, I see. Is the wife very bad?"

"Oh, naething extra; she says she's no bad eneuch yet, Doctor, an' she sent me up to say you were to be sure an' tak' your tea, as she thocht it wad be aboot aucht afore she needed you."

"I thank you for coming, but I'll be down in a few minutes," said Brodie, smiling.

The difference between the old hand and the amateur was so marked that I could not help calling Roberts' attention to it, but he was too much taken up with his own enjoyment to mind other matters. "Twins!" he exclaimed. "Just think! twins, Bryce!"

"You are not like a commercial traveller I once knew,"

I said, "who, when his wife presented him with twins, said—'My dear, surely one sample would have been sufficient.'"

"The heartless beast," said Roberts, as he left the room.

I watched him from the surgery window as he left the house. His mode of progression was rather erratic—first he ran a bit, then, thinking someone might be watching, he walked a few yards, then a skip or two on the pavement, to be followed by another run and walk. He could not have been aware of where he was going, or he would surely have noticed Auchters, before coming butt against him.

"Auchters," he ejaculated, after the breath had come back into his lungs again, "Auchters, congratulate me; I've got a double." Auchterless looked the Solicitor in the face, to see if he had been drinking. The man's face was flushed, but he seemed sober enough.

"Man," he said, "ye've surely never been at the buiks i' the daytime?"

"No, no!" Roberts exclaimed, becoming confused with excitement; "I've got a double pair of twins—at least I mean a pair of twins. Two boys and a girl—by jove, I don't know whether it is two boys or two girls, but anyhow it is two twins. Fine bairns! Brodie said," he added, proudly.

"Twins! you! weel that beats a'. To think that you should hae gotten twins, o' a' the airth! Weel dune, man; gie us a shak' o' your han'. I'll sen' up a kebbock the morn. I'se warran' Pitters will be brawly prood. Man," Auchters went on, "if ye'd jist haud up yer han' at whist a wee thochtie higher—ye're nae an ill player at the

game, but that open han' o' yours spoils a'. The faither o' twins need ne'er haud his han' below his neighbours'."

From that day Roberts had no heartier friend than Auchters, and Roberts' hand was so closely held that *finesses* on the part of Auchters became confined to reasonable limits.

Auchters was so excited over the event—Lucy was a niece of his own—that he drove straight out to Pitlochty to tell the news; and many a joke passed between the two cronies over the wondrous event, and great were the rejoicings when the further news arrived that the twins were "baith loons; nae little wee bit twinnockies o' lassockies, but twa, great muckle, weel-faur't, strappin' gurks," said the grieve, who had been sent to Inveresk to ask how the mother and children were.

Mrs Brown did not detain the Doctor long, so that it was not quite nine o'clock when we settled down for our customary surgery chat.

"I met Robert Duncan," Brodie said, "as I was coming home. He was taking his constitutional, after bank hours, along the south road, and he told me he had seen Roberts talking to Sarah with a most woebegone expression on his face. 'The Lawyer's sair needin' ye, I'm thinkin', Doctor,' he said; 'you had better hurry on.' Instead of coming home, I rode straight to The Myrtles (Roberts' house). Just in time too. By jove! poor thing, she was real bad. I am thankful Roberts stayed where he was, safely out of the way."

"He was not very happy here, I can assure you."

"Well, he would have been a good deal more miserable there. It was perhaps hardly fair of me to keep him in

suspense, but I make it a strict rule that in all cases I attend I must be engaged. I'll warrant he will attend to it next time; I gave him a pretty severe lesson. Roberts must have found it a very thrilling experience."

"There is no doubt he did. But, by the way, Doctor," I said, "you must have had some thrilling experiences in your twenty-five years' practice. Can you recall any of them?"

"No; I cannot say that in my quarter of a century of medical life I have had many tragic, or even stirring experiences. Nor do I think the one or two I can at this moment recall are likely to prove of absorbing interest.

"You would like to hear them all the same? Well, the first one I recollect occurred some twenty years ago, not long after I came here. About two o'clock one dark winter morning my night bell rang furiously—not once or twice, but peal after peal—the whole house seemed pervaded with that most horrible and loathsome of sounds—the night bell. Springing quickly out of bed, I commenced to hunt for the matches, which were not in their accustomed place. My housemaid, stirred to unusual agility by the furious ringing, with a rapidity which seemed almost incredible, opened the hall door and admitted a man to the surgery. The gas in my surgery remains lighted all night, merely requiring further turning on, and this she did, after admitting the caller, before leaving the room.

"My hunt for matches proving unsuccessful, I was about to ask her to bring some, when she knocked at my door, and, in answer to my query as to what was the matter, replied that a man was in the surgery, seemingly

in a great hurry, as he was extremely excited. The patient or messenger being of the male sex, and not wishing to delay him further, I found my way downstairs without slippers or dressing gown, clad simply in my white night attire. Quickly opening the door of the surgery from the dark lobby, I was greeted by a fearful and appalling shriek—an awful cry which I cannot compare to any sound. The man, who on my arrival was seated in a chair immediately opposite the open door, sprang to that cupboard there," and Brodie indicated a cupboard in the room. "Opening it, he came face to face with its grimy occupant—my skeleton in the cupboard, which hangs suspended from a cross bar, its bones clattering and swaying from his touch. For a moment he stood petrified; then sinking to the ground, he crouched as though to sink beneath the floor, his eyes glaring, his hair on end, his mouth open, as it had remained after emitting that fearful and most piteous moan, shriek and howl combined—an abject picture of mad and grovelling fear. I do not suppose I am much more nervous than the rest of my fellow-men, but I must confess I felt benumbed—the apex of my left ventricle was striking very much more forcibly and frequently at the wall of my chest than it is in the habit of doing. I stood in the doorway with my hand on the handle, bewildered for a moment, and uncertain what course to pursue, but my professional knowledge quickly came to my assistance. I saw the man was suffering from acute fright, and that I was the cause of it; in other words, he had taken me for a ghost. My stockingless feet had made no sound on the carpetted stairs and lobby, the silent opening of the door (it is lined with indiarubber), and the

white, good-looking figure—I hope I may say—with its black background, the dark lobby, had proved too much for the weakened nerves of the drinker of alcohol.

"Drunk? No, he was not drunk, but he had been drinking heavily for some days before. He was on the verge of delirium tremens, and he had come to consult me for sleeplessness. I can assure you I was very glad to get rid of him with a pretty heavy dose of bromide.

"On the stairs, when I opened the door to let him go, were two figures in white—an engineer in the navy and my wife, with a poker, which she carefully concealed behind her back. It is perhaps as well I did not give vent to my feelings by screaming too, or a trial for manslaughter by a woman might have proved a sequel to the night's proceedings.

"I had a curious experience with our friend Mr Skeleton myself. On one occasion I was reading an interesting article on 'Occult Phenomena. Hallucinations: Their Origin and Treatment,' by Dr Macnaughton Duncanson. The midnight hour was approaching, but still I read on, when—

"'Tap, tap,' came from the cupboard.

"'You are surely wanting out, my friend,' I thought.

"'Tap, tap, tap,' it went again.

"This was becoming somewhat exciting; skeletons are not usually so urgent. I went on with my book.

"'Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap,' once more from the cupboard, with increased distinctness.

"'Oh, confound this; if you want out, by all means come,' and I opened the door—when out came a kitten. Puss had been locked into the press, and had been amusing

itself with my old boy's toes. Would you like to see him? No! Well, I have had him for over twenty years, and that is the only time he ever became obstreperous. One day I was confined to the house with a cold, when Windyyetts—old Windys; he must be nearly ninety now—there are three generations of Windys living on the farm, old Windys, Windys, and young Windys, they're a long-lived race—came to consult me for something or other; I forget what, but rather think it was an aching molar; he had never much the matter with him. I was sitting in this chair, Windys in that, and between us and the door was a screen to check the draught. After I had removed his tooth, he left, passing round the screen to the door. I heard the handle turn, and—

"'Gorra michty! Guid save's a'! Fat's yon?' gasped Windys, as he rushed back to me.

"'Oh, that's my friend the family skeleton.'

"'Lauks me,' said Windys, 'I thocht it was the deevil.'

"More? Well, Bryce, if that sort of thing interests you, the following may also prove acceptable. The case occurred in the practice I had before coming here. The patient was a small farmer, or crofter, as they are called, who lived right out in one of the bleakest moors of Sutherland. He and his family had reclaimed a few acres of land, and there they lived in a small hut or cottage, to get to the single dwelling-room of which you had to pass first through the cow-shed, in which the pigs were also kept, then to the stable for horse and hens, and lastly to the living room—a room with no chimney, merely a hole in the roof to allow the smoke from the peat to escape. To crown all, the house was fully three miles from the

country road, the rest of the way being nothing better than a sheep track. A desolate spot, I can assure you.

"No wonder I had a patient under such circumstances you say. Yes, but the man had really nothing the matter with him, except his imagination. He believed he suffered from everything—if he swallowed a pill, he believed it stuck in his throat, necessitating a visit to the doctor; a glass of water contained the eggs of frogs, lizards, or other imaginative creatures. Laughing at these patients does them no good. Moral treatment is said to be the correct form, but I have usually found that a good quack medicine costing shillings—and the greater the cost the better—in which the patient has faith—Faith in Roman letters, and with a capital F—is the best remedy of all.

"Of course you understand these 'miserables' are really suffering from a form of insanity—that their illnesses are mental, not physical. Frequently they quickly recover when removed from home to some temporary retreat.

"After undergoing all the known and unknown diseases to be found in a dictionary of medicine, he at last developed the idea that his blood-vessels were full of small animals: *filariae sanguinis hominis* was the nearest approach to his malady. I fancy he had got hold of some medical book, which he secretly gloated over, but from the fancied portrait he drew of these sportive creatures, they were a cross between a mermaid and a crocodile.

"Nothing would convince him that they did not exist; moral treatment he threw to the dogs; medicine he would have taken bucketfuls of. The friends would not hear of his removal to an asylum, but they consented to my request for a consultation.

"Next day Dr Allardyce and I visited him, when he detailed in a clear and succinct manner the symptoms these lively little alligators produced, and finally demanded that he should be bled, in order that they might be released.

"As the man was stout and full-blooded, my friend thought that we might humour him; that possibly, if a thorough cure was not effected, his illness might take another and a less disagreeable form; so we removed a few ounces of blood from his right arm, much to the patient's satisfaction and delight.

"For two days after that he did well, expressing entire belief in his cure, but on the third morning I was summoned hastily to attend him. 'The animals have come back again,' the messenger said. Entering the house, we found him in the cow-shed, dead—his throat literally severed with a razor cut, 'to let the animals out.'

"Horrible! Yes, the man should have been in an asylum months before, but his relatives would not hear of it. He was to all appearance harmless, and seemed to enjoy his imaginary grievances in a melancholy way," said Brodie, as he put on his overcoat; for he had to pay an evening call on Mrs Roberts and Mrs Brown.

"They are both well," he said, when he came home.

"And Roberts, has he got over his excitement?" I asked.

"He is looking over a list of names; he thinks he will call one after Pitters, and the other after Auchterless."

"He could not call them after two better men," I said

CHAPTER VI.

TODDLEHA'S PRACTICAL JOKE—WHA KILLED DOWNIE?

GREAT jokers they were at Inveresk, and if the tricks they played were somewhat broad, it could at any rate be said in their favour that no malice inspired them. They were meant as jests pure and simple, and even if Blackie used strong language, and stoned both hearse and driver, when he was released at his own door after a five miles drive, still he bore no spite, but carefully abstained from more than four tumblers of Pitters' Glenlivet after that date.

Blackie must have been pretty well sobered by the time that drive was done, for his aim was true, and his throws forcible. A couple of knocked-off plumes and a broken door cost the jokers the best part of a five pound note, so that the laugh was not altogether against Blackie after all. It was carrying a jest somewhat too far, however, when they applied eighteen leeches to Auchters' old strapper, Geordie Robertson.

The strapper was "far through" at the time with inflammation of the lungs, and Pitters and a few of the whist club went down to see him after supper.

"Man, Geordie," said Pitters, "I've seen a wheen leeches dae a stirkie a powerfu' sicht o' guid. We'll try some on you."

And tried they were, a dozen and a half of them. It is a mercy the poor old fellow did not die; but not he. Next

morning at six o'clock he nearly startled his poor old wife out of her senses—she had sat up with him all the night watching his heavy, oppressed breathing gradually pass into a quiet sleep: the change before death, she thought—by calling out in a lusty voice: "Woman, is that porridge near ready yet?"

When Dr Brodie called next day he found his patient well, the crisis past, and an almost unappeasable appetite set in.

"It was kill or cure with you," Brodie said to Pitters afterwards, "and thank goodness it was cure; but I would not try that trick again."

"Na, na," said Pitters; "I never closed my een last nicht for fear we had daen him ony harm. I'll mak' Auchters gie him a fortnicht at the Strath, to tak' the waters."

The tricks they play now-a-days are hardly so bad as these, but still they are pretty bad. Why, it was only last week they ordered a bran new cradle to be sent down to Robert Duncan's. Robert's housekeeper is somewhat hard of hearing, and the boy with the cradle had to stand fully a quarter of an hour in the busy High Street before she answered the bell. The news was heard twenty minutes afterwards at the furthest end of the parish that Robert Duncan had got a cradle home, and many and varied were the speculations regarding it.

The old housekeeper had been too bewildered to either receive or reject the useful article, so the boy quietly deposited it in the lobby and left.

"It mak's a gran' beddie for Nellie" (his little fox terrier), Robert Duncan remarked afterwards, "The beastie jist fair enjoys rockin' hersel' to sleep in't."

But a climax came at Auchters' a week or so after Roberts' twins were born. Auchters, I have already told you, was extremely interested in that important event. A member of the whist club to become the father of twins was an event to be celebrated by a royal night; so notices were sent out that next meeting of the club would be at Auchterless, and instead of eight the hour was fixed for five, supper was to be at nine, and play to be resumed afterwards.

To get to Auchterless, although the distance was little more than a mile from Inveresk, all drove; those who had not traps of their own getting lifts from other members of the club. Farmers from the other side of the village, passing through Inveresk, would call for the Bailie, the Supervisor, Robert Duncan, and so on. The Cattle Salesman had a trap of his own. So that, on the eventful evening, a matter of a dozen gigs, dog carts, and phaetons, were stationed at Auchterless. When the stable became filled, a byre or cow-shed was used to accommodate the extra horses.

After supper it was customary to take a breath or two of the fresh air, to see what like a night it was, before going back to the game; so that when young Menzies of Toddlehall disappeared for a little, no one wondered.

Finding his way to the stable, he found Auchters' new strapper dozing in a corn bin. Rousing him up, Toddles commenced to speak of the respective merits of the horses on the Auchterless farm, and of the various stranger horses stabled there.

"Man, strapper," he said, "that's a gran' black beast o' Roxten's."

"Na, that's Pitters' shalt."

"Hoots no, strapper; yon's Pitters' ane, that brown mare."

"Ye dinna mean that surely, Mr Menzies? I kent fine I'd get dumfoonered wi' a' them strange shalts the nicht. Dae ye ken wha's they a' are?"

"Fine that," said Toddles; and he carefully pointed out to whom each beast did *not* belong—the only one he named correctly being his own grey mare. After the strapper had got them all carefully fixed in his memory, Toddles returned to his rubber.

As I have said before, it was a royal night, and it was the "wee short hoor ayont the twal" before the strapper received his first order to yoke. When one party left they told the strapper which trap to bring round next, and, as each member gave him a sixpence or a shilling, he was usually well pleased with his night's work; the more especially as he usually waited in the kitchen after supper was over. There would be one of the maids' lads there, and the strapper was the sweetheart of the other one, so that the hours of waiting were none too long for him.

The night was dark, but the air was clear and crisp, which perhaps accounted for the horses proving unusually keen—at least some of them were—all exhibiting tricks and ways altogether "no ordnar" to their owners.

"Auchters' corn maun hae been as plentiful as his whisky the nicht," said the Cattle Salesman, whose notedly slow beast was holding its head up, and bringing its feet down with quick, strong stamps totally unlike canny Maggie's sober gait. "Haud up, Mag; it's no that gate we

gang," he exclaimed suddenly, as the mare slewed rapidly round a corner road which led to Windyyetts. Pulling her violently round, the wheel caught a stone on the edge, and over went gig and shalt. For a minute or two nothing was heard but the rap rap of the mare's hoofs on the now shattered gig. Shortly she kicked herself clear, and went clattering up the road to Windyyetts—some hundred yards off upon the hill.

The Auctioneer had cleared himself, but poor Robert Duncan lay with a white face, insensible, on the way side. The lamps had gone out, and the distracted Salesman was utterly beside himself what to do. His horse and gig he did not mind, but that his brother whister should be perhaps dead or dying paralyzed him. To his joy a light appeared in the Windyyetts road, and hailing it, a man quickly arrived on the scene, proving to be the farm strapper, bearing the stable lamp. Holding it up he said, "Ye're no hurt are ye, Maister Dawson?"

"No; but I'm afraid Robert Duncan is badly injured."

"Robert Duncan! but whaur's the maister?"

"I don't know; he will soon be here—that mare of his won't take long to cover the ground. But bring your lamp here."

"The mare," the man said slowly, as he brought the lamp before Robert Duncan, "is at the stable door, and I expect that's the mistress hersel' comin' doon the road."

And so it was; half distracted, the poor woman had thrown on a few clothes, and, fearing the worst, rushed down the hill, bemoaning her husband's fate.

"Is he alive, Peter?" she screamed, as she saw the prostrate figure on the grass. Kneeling down beside him, to

her amazement she recognised the Banker. "Robert Duncan!" she cried, "but where is Windyyetts?"

"I expect there has been a mistake in the horses," said Dawson, who now began to realize what had occurred.

Her mind relieved, the good wife now turned her attention to the Banker. "He's not dead anyhow," she said, as she put her hand on his chest. "His heart is beating brawly; bring some water from the ditch, P eter."

Soon Robert came round—he had been merely stunned, but his wrist was also broken. As they helped him to his feet the sound of voices and approaching wheels betokened another trap on the road.

"Come up, mare, what ails ye the nicht? It's no aften I have to use the whip to your hide. She's surely nae weel, Supervisor; I ne'er kent her gang like this afore. My bonnie Bess, I wouldna like onything to come ower her. She's sickenin' for a cauld; there maun hae been a draught in Auchters' byre, I'm thinkin'. See how she hauds her head atween her knees, and her feet will hardly move. Ye'll no mind walkin' the bittock from Windies to Inveresk the nicht?"

"Not a bit; but what have we here?"

"Some one's been having a turn up. Is that you, Peter; and Dawson, are you there?"

"Aye; we've come by a mishanter wi' that confounded beast o' yours. And the Banker has broken his arm."

"Wi' my beast," cried Windys, grasping the situation at the words; "and its your auld broken-kneed fisher's naig that I hae been pityin' the nicht. But my, I'm sorry aboot the Banker. Here, get up and drive your mare yersel', and I and the guidwife—I see she's there too—will tak'

care o' Robert. Ye had best ca' in at Brodie's, and send him oot the nicht." For the Doctor had not attended the whist club on this occasion.

There were many other adventures on the road that morning, but Robert Duncan's broken arm was the only serious accident which occurred.

Toddleha' himself told who was the culprit, next morning when he called to ask for the Banker; but he would easily have been traced, as he was the only one who had his own horse home with him. That fact would soon "hae latten the pooder oot," as Auchters said; but Toddles would not have trusted his grey mare with any one for love or money.

Robert Duncan bore his broken arm stoically. He had insured a few months before in an accident insurance company, so he compounded for a certain sum and the doctor's fee. A day or two saw him in his old paths again.

The Cattle Salesman had been badly in want of a new gig for many a day; so, as Auchters said when he called on the Doctor next evening to ask for Robert Duncan, "things micht hae been waur."

"Yes," said Brodie, "but practical jokes often have worse endings."

"Ay, like 'Wha killed Downie?'" said Auchters. "Dae ye ken the story, Bryce?"

"No," I said. "What is it?"

"Oh, you had better get the Doctor to tell you."

"It's so well known through Aberdeenshire that I thought you would have heard it," said Brodie; "but if you care to listen, here goes for the veracious history of

"WHA KILLED DOWNIE?

"But first of all, let me tell you who Downie was. He was an old soldier, who had served in several campaigns. That he had borne his part with considerable distinction was manifest, for not a few medals adorned the blue jacket he wore as janitor in the College at Aberdeen. Unfortunately, the man was of a rather sour, unforgiving nature, and every slight trick played upon him was treasured in his memory; and when the offender was caught, or if he overstepped the College rules in however slight a degree, he was quickly reported to his professors. The result soon came about that a nasty feeling got up against Downie in the University, and the innocent tricks formerly played upon him began to be replaced by others of a more serious nature. Downie was, however, too cute for the lads, and many a grim smile came over his face as one or other of his tormentors came out of a professor's den with sobered and melancholy visage.

"Various fines and penalties were enforced by the College laws, and these were usually subscribed by the entire class to which the delinquent belonged; but fines and consequent collections were getting rather too heavy and frequent for the slim purses of the students, when, to crown all, the favourite student of the year was threatened with rustication if Downie should have cause to report him again. As the lad was high-spirited, it was not long before he had to walk the plank, and seek temporary retirement for the rest of a winter's session among the Howes o' Formartine. The grin on Downie's face broadened into a series of apoplectic chuckles as he heard the news; but

dark were the looks with which the under-graduates regarded their open foe as he stood at the College gates.

"Now, if there was one thing that Downie loved, it was tripe. He and his cronies held a weekly meeting at one of the inns in town, where the cooking of the luscious viand was considered superb—a place in fact where both quantity and quality were assured at a very moderate price. The afternoon of the rustication Downie received a note from one of his friends stating that an old brother campaigner had arrived in Aberdeen, that he had succeeded in life, and that he was to provide the supper at such and such an inn that evening. Downie was so delighted with this climax to the day's proceedings that, for once in his life, he actually omitted to report some few delinquencies on the part of his foes.

"Punctual to time, he arrived at the meeting place. 'Have my friends come yet?' he asked the waiter, as he entered.

"'Yes; a good many of them have arrived; please come this way,' said the latter, conducting Downie upstairs.

"Just as the janitor was about to enter the room, he was seized by the arms by two stalwart youths, the door was quickly opened and Downie led in. What was this that met his gaze? No bright supper room with its white table, sparkling glasses, and brilliant lights, but a long narrow hall, the walls and seats of which were draped in black, and the lights burning dimly. On the benches Downie quickly recognised the forms of his tormentors, their faces no longer bright and smiling, but fixed, stern, and motionless. At the upper end of the room, a portion stalled off enclosed a space furnished with tables, desks, and seats.

"He had been tricked; trapped. Speedily recognising this, Downie struggled violently, but soon realising his impotence, he resigned himself to his fate, promising himself a great and glorious revenge on the morrow; a pretty tale he would bear to the Principal. He submitted quietly enough to be conducted to a seat, evidently reserved for him, in front of the enclosure. His student guards stationed themselves beside him.

"As the hour struck nine a side door opened and a series of figures in black, bewigged and robed in flowing gowns, entered the enclosure. As they proceeded slowly to their seats, the whole body of the students rose *en masse*, and remained respectfully standing until the leader was seated.

"A jury being empanelled, the case of 'John Downie' was called. The writ stated that the said John Downie had been accused of various (detailed) offences against the students of the University of Aberdeen, for which offences the said John Downie was called to answer before this tribunal.

"'Guilty or not guilty?' asked the judge.

"Downie refused to plead, so a plea of not guilty was recorded. Counsel for and against the accused examined and cross-examined witness after witness, and many were the counts brought home to Downie.

"The counsel for the prosecution contented himself with a brief recapitulation of the main facts of the evidence. Downie's man, however—who people say, subsequently became one of Aberdeen's leading solicitors—gave an eloquent oration, in which he dwelt strongly on such points as 'duty,' 'Downie's service to his country,' &c. Had it not been that the judge summed up dead against the

prisoner, a verdict of 'Not Proven' might have been recorded in Downie's favour, as some of the more tender-hearted of the student jury began to consider what his advocate had pleaded as 'extenuating circumstances'; but the summing up proved too much for them. Without leaving their seats the jury found an unanimous verdict of 'Guilty, my Lord.'

"Donning the black cap, his Lordship proceeded to sentence. 'John Downie, after a long and honest trial you have been found guilty of a series of mean and despicable offences against the under-graduates of Aberdeen. Two of them have been rusticated and one expelled through the gross exaggerations you issued in your reports concerning them. Such offences as these cannot be lightly condoned, and it only remains for me to pronounce the last and binding sentence of the law—that you shall be taken to the place appointed, at the hour of eleven to-night, and there meet the death. May the Lord have mercy on your soul.'

"All through the proceedings Downie had striven to regard the trial as a farce, but his face now became somewhat serious, his sullen looks giving place to anxious and furtive glances at the surrounding faces.

"The judge and counsel having left the court, Downie was conducted within the barrier. As the clock struck eleven, a man wearing a mask, robed in black, and bearing an axe, gravely entered. He was followed by others, similarly clad, and carrying a block, sawdust, and water.

"The prisoner's hands were now bound behind his back, and it was not until then that the man's courage really failed him. He fought, screamed, and struggled to escape, and it

was only after a somewhat long and protracted tussle that his eyes were bandaged and his neck placed on the block.

"A sharp flick with a wetted towel, a dash of cold water on the neck, followed by a wild yell of laughter, proclaimed the execution over; but Downie did not move.

"'Rise up, man; it's all a joke,' whispered the affrighted executioner; and the silence that followed over the hall showed how quickly the nervous apprehension had spread.

"Downie was dead! The shock had proved too much for him. The man who had met a shower of bullets without flinching and without fear, had succumbed to the flip of a wet towel.

"Horror-struck and affrighted, the students clustered together in groups, none daring to leave. At last a leader amongst them rose up and said. 'Gentlemen, this is a bad business. Downie is dead. God knows, we meant him no ill. We all bear an equal part in the blame, so none must ever mention the names of the chief actors in this, our tragic play.'

"As twelve o'clock struck that band of students swore an oath, a fearful and binding oath, which has ever been faithfully kept, for to this day—and it is now many years ago—no one knows 'Wha killed Downie?'"

"Were you there, Doctor?" I asked, as Brodie finished speaking.

"No; I am an Edinburgh graduate, and it was before my time at any rate. But you ask Pitters about it the first time you meet; he was a student at Aberdeen the year it happened. As you know," he said turning to Auchters, "it is well said in Aberdeen that the students were 'a' airt an' pairt in Downie's slauchter'."

"Which, being interpreted, means?" I asked.

"That Pitters never was a quiet youth; if any devilment were brewing, he always had a hand in it. Get him to tell you how he and his brother once ran off with a lady in a sedan chair. But here comes Oliphant," Brodie continued, as a step sounded in the lobby. "I sent for him when Auchters came in, as I think you are able to take a hand to-night. Come away and cut for partners."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHOOTING PARTY AT TODDLEHA'—THE STROMA GAUGERS.

DOWNIE'S untimely fate had evidently made a great impression upon me, for my night's rest was disturbed by various visions of dark rooms with ghoul-like occupants, axes, guillotines, and black-wigged judges. I must have been in the prisoner's dock myself, for, awaking with a start, I shouted out, "Not guilty, my Lord," to find it was only the housemaid knocking at my bedroom door.

"Nine o'clock, Mr Bryce," said Sarah, "and the grieve has come with a message for you from Toddleha', to ask if you will join a shooting party there. If you are not feeling able to shoot, Mr Menzies says you might go to luncheon at one, and he will drive you home in the evening."

"No; my night has been too bad for the exertion of shooting, but I will have breakfast in bed, and walk over in time for lunch. Will you tell the man that, Sarah?"

Toddlehall is some three miles distant from Inveresk. To get to it you have to pass some of the finest scenery in Aberdeenshire. Starting a little after eleven, I rambled slowly along, enjoying the gorgeous views that crisp September day. As I approached the farm, the bang, bang of guns assured me that my friends were at any rate

seeing something to shoot at. I arrived in good time, and not at all wearied by my walk. Toddles' mother and sisters, whom I already knew, were at home. They were famed folk in the parish—the former for her kindness and hospitality, the latter for their looks, being known throughout the county as the "bonnie maids o' Inveresk." The lasses were as "guid" as they were comely, so that it was with no surprise that I found the shooting party composed, besides Auchters and Roberts, who were both out of the running, some three or four of the most eligible young bachelors of the district; a friend of young Cromlierieve's from Aberdeen, named MacCallum, was also with them.

Toddles farmed his own land—there is no better ground in Aberdeenshire. It ran to about eight hundred acres, so he and his brother Ronald went shares in the concern. Ronald, like his brother, was a great favourite in Inveresk. Both were bachelors, but Toddles had succumbed to the bright face of Miss Eppie Watson, and the marriage was to take place during my stay with Dr Brodie. Miss Watson was visiting Toddles' mother at Toddlehall. I could not help thinking when I was introduced to her, that Toddles had been extremely fortunate. His plunge into the matrimonial lottery bag looked as if it were to be a lucky one. Ronald, however, considered himself a confirmed bachelor, though he was only twenty-one; and whether or not this state of things was due to an *embarrasse de richesse* of fair maids—and they are neither few nor far between in Inveresk—ready and willing to fall at his feet, he was to all appearance heart-whole. However, those in the "know"—some of those wonderful people are still to be found in the parish, who can always

say "I know," or "You can take it from me," or "I have it on the best authority" that so and so is or is not the case—said that he went far more frequently to call at Auchtermair than seemed necessary for mere civility. "Mr Macintosh may be a very nice man," they said; "we do not say he is not, but Ronald Menzies does not require to go there three times a week; now, do you think so?" Certainly the youngest Miss Macintosh was a very pretty girl, and Robert had always a keen eye for good looks, so perhaps the Mrs Candours and Miss Cracketts of the village were not so far wrong as they often are; but time will prove.

Shortly before lunch we went out to meet the sportsmen, as they came along the farm road at the back of the house. They all seemed to be in good spirits as they straggled in from their sport, except one, who Miss Watson told me was MacCallum.

"Mr MacCallum has surely been unsuccessful," she said; "he does look glum." And he certainly did seem rather down on his luck.

"Well, what sport, Toddles?" I exclaimed, as we joined the first group.

"Fairish," said Toddles; "we have got fifteen brace of birds, a woodcock, two snipe, forty rabbits, and eight hares."

"An' a little ane," added Auchters, his dark eyes twinkling with merriment, as he and Roberts came up.

"Yes, by jove," said MacCallum, brightening up; "don't forget the little one; I won't forget it in a hurry. I don't know when I will handle a gun again."

"It will not much matter if you never do," snapped

Crumlie, "for all you killed to-day." Crumlie it seemed, had been bragging before-hand of his friend's prowess with the gun. "I don't believe you shot a thing the whole day—except 'the little ane,'" he added, sneeringly.

"Nonsense, Crumlie; Mac. brought down two of the partridges in yon big covey i' the moss stubble," said Toddles. "I watched him do it; right and left."

"Aye, so he did; but who knows which birds he aimed at?" said Crumlie.

"I'll tell you, Crumlie," said Mac, "if you care to know."

"Well, which two was it? Your birds were the two flying by themselves at the extreme right, and they got clear off—never dropped a feather—I watched them as they flew."

"Yes; but it wasn't those two I aimed at. I just blazed at the whole heap."

"And you call yourself a sportsman," said Crumlie, in a tone of utter disgust. "I thought you made the biggest bag at Stratherron grouse drive last month?"

"Me! No! that was my brother, Charlie. I have not lifted a gun to my shoulder for years, and I don't think I will in a hurry again. I have had a grand day, Mr Menzies, and I think we have seen all the kinds of game in Scotland; but when it comes to shooting 'little anes' that are not even in the same field with you, I give up the sport. It's too expensive," and Mac. put his hands into his trousers pocket with a very expressive gesture—an action which was followed by a peal of laughter from his brother sportsmen.

"What's the joke, Toddles?" asked Eppie Watson, as the girls and I looked wonderingly from one to the other. "Let us see this 'little one' that Mr MacCallum has shot."

"Oh! it's just a little dear," said Toddles.

"Very dear," interpolated Mac.

"You'll find it at the foreman's house, if you care to go and see it," continued Tod.

"How lovely! has it horns? You ought to be proud of yourself, Mr MacCallum. It is nothing to shoot one of those great big deer—almost as easy as hitting an elephant, and considerably safer—but to shoot a 'little one' must have required skill. Crumlie was right after all when he said you could shoot. How clever of you!"

"Yes, was'nt it clever, Miss Watson?" said Roberts; "only fancy Mac. hitting it in four places. He aimed at a hare and shot a 'dear'; now, I do call that real smart, don't you?"

"Could'nt you go one better than that, Ronald?" said MacCallum, who bore his roasting pleasantly.

"Yes; if you ante up, I'll find the joker," said Ronald, who had lately been bitten with poker fever.

"'Ante up! it was the mother up," said MacCallum. "I'll never forget—but stay, we had better tell the ladies and Mr Bryce what it's all about, or we will never get any lunch at this rate. The fact of the matter is this, Miss Menzies," addressing himself to Toddles' second sister, "we were coming over that field in front of the cottar houses, when a hare rose from her seat. I fired at it and missed—at least Crumlie says I missed. The shot must have scared another hare, for one sprang up in front of me, and made off towards the houses. I let blaze, but you won't

make hare soup of that chap; he should be well out of the parish by now.

"As I was loading again a woman came out, and called —we were fully a hundred yards off—"Ye've shot a we'an." For a moment I felt sanguine that the hare had dropped on the other side of the wall, but the tones of her voice were neither so sweet nor so mild as I should have liked them to be. No; on the contrary, they were distinctly angry, threatening and aggressive.

"With my heart in my boots—for I began to realise what had happened—I rushed over to the house, and sure enough in the middle of the floor was a child."

"Not dead, Mr MacCallum?" cried Dora Menzies.

"No, not dead; but howling—a real, good, genuine, hearty yell. I never hope to enjoy a child's cry so much again in my life. It was not much hurt: a pellet had gone through the lobe of an ear, another through its upper lip, a third in the skin of the forehead, and a fourth in the cheek. I am not a doctor, but still I could see there was no real danger. A little money in the child's hand soon put a stop to the crying, and—that's all."

"And a little politeness to the mother—Mac. has a nice, soft, soothery tongue"—added Toddles, "quieted her murmurs. But he was not really at fault; the bairns had been playing on the road behind the dyke, and when Mac. fired at the first hare, they bobbed their heads up over the wall, and the child received a few spent pellets in the face. There is really nothing the matter with it, bnt Mac. would not rest until I sent off for Brodie. Luckily the Doctor was just passing, and he says there's nothing at all wrong, So we can afford to laugh at Mac.'s shooting after all."

"Yes, but that's not all," said Mac. "You see I am not a shooting man; indeed so seldom do I shoot that I have neither gun nor a game licence. Now it would not matter for the latter if I had not let blaze into that covey, but the gun one I can hardly get over, and the revenue people are sure to hear of my escapade."

"No fear of that," said Toddles. "The foreman's a good man. I'll tell him to hold his tongue; but you had better get Crumlie to buy a gun licence for you as you pass through Inveresk. Come on girls and let us see what you have for lunch."

After lunch Miss Watson and the above named Miss Menzies went down and saw the child. It did not prove a bad accident for it, for many little presents found their way from the house to MacCallum's 'little ane.'

"I suppose the Supervisor will not let MacCallum off, on account of his being Toddles' friend," said I, that evening to the Doctor, "if he hears of the accident?"

"Not he," said the Doctor; "Oliphant's a splendid fellow, but his duty is his duty, and he does it. Why, I do not believe he will let that boy of his keep his collie pup a day after it is six months old without getting a licence for it. It will be of age on Christmas day, and all the whist club are anxious to see what Oliphant will do. Of course you will keep the matter a secret, as one or two small wagers have been made on the event."

"It would be rather hard to have to pay seven and six for a week's licence," I said.

"Yes, but Oliphant will do it; at any rate I will lose a new hat if he doesn't. There's one thing to be said about this country—our Government officials are usually, like

Cæsar's wife, above suspicion; if they are not, then it is time for other men to take their places."

"I suppose you have little smuggling here now-a-days?"

"No, very little; some tobacco, a cask of Hollands, or a few bad cigars may be brought in by one or other of the steamers that come to port, or our fishermen by their erratic walk proclaim the fact that they have been making the acquaintance of some Dutchman's schnapps when at sea—buying it probably with a few fish—but that is all. This used to be a noted place for smuggling though. All round the coast from south of Aberdeen to John o' Groats smuggling was carried on. Nearly everyone was concerned in it, and a great trade was done, but those days have passed away. The island of Stroma on the Caithness coast was also a great place for the game. Stroma is a small island, some three miles off the mainland; it is said to be a most picturesque place, and well worthy of a visit. In the centre of the island a deep natural pit is situated, having direct communication with the sea, which comes right up to the foot of the place, and at high tide there is a considerable depth of water. I forget what the Stroma men call it, but I think it is The Punch Bowl.

"The Stroma men were on good terms with their fellows on the mainland, and whenever the excise officers appeared and hired a boat's crew to cross the Firth, a particular blanket was hung out to dry at the side of Red Dick's cottage—a signal the Stroma people quickly acted on by having all their smuggling plant and proceeds sunk at the bottom of The Punch Bowl. Wind and tide would usually, by some means or other, be against the boat, and the crossing would occupy an hour or more. When the

excursion was made by night, a candle placed behind a red window blind sent its danger signal across the water.

"Once, however, they were nearly tricked. Two new gaugers had been placed on the Caithness district, and their innocent looks and southern dress marked them as English tourists come to visit far-famed John o' Groats. Staying a day or two on the mainland, they strolled about, and that they had eyes for more than sight-seeing was evident a few weeks afterwards, when many an illicit still was captured; but nothing occurred during their visit to create suspicion. On the contrary, they were considered a pair of harmless English loons, with more money than brains—what they had of the latter they could keep, but the more they left of the former, the better for all concerned, was the prevailing sentiment regarding them. So, when they proposed visiting Stroma, a boat's crew of seven men was soon ready and willing to start with them from the landing-place at Huna. A very uncomfortable landing-place it was, and maybe still is. You had to be carried a considerable distance from the shore on strong men's shoulders, over slippery, slithery, seaweed-covered rocks, which afforded but a treacherous footing at the best; and it was no wonder if Ralph Dunnet or Jock Mowat would slip with their burdens as they carried gaugers to or from the shore; but somehow they never slipped at other times.

"'How long will it take us to cross?' asked Rodwell, the older of the visitors, when they were comfortably seated in the boat's stern, having been carried as tenderly as if they were 'chiney' through the shallow water.

"'With this wind and tide, twenty minutes should see us at Stroma,' said Bob Gunn, the skipper of the boat.

"'Well, let us see how quickly you can cross,' said Pilkington, taking out his watch to time the passage; 'for I am a bad sailor.'

"Up went the two sails, out went the jib, and away the boat tore across the waters, the blue waves lapping almost over her gunwale as she lay well down to the wind. Occasionally with a gurgle some would pour over, making Pilkington see visions of the boat submerging; but he need not have been afraid—the crew were splendid sailors, and knew the crossing like a road.

"'Five minutes gone,' he said, again taking out his watch. As he drew back his hand, his cuff stud brought from his coat pocket a letter, which fell into the boat. The colour of the envelope was blue, and as Bob Gunn stooped to pick it up, his quick eye detected printing on the top. Robert was no scholar—he would have told you that himself—but he knew that the printed words he saw stood for 'On Her Majesty's Service.' Without another glance at it he handed the note back to Pilkington.

"Not a word passed between the crew, but, in some way or other, each of those seven men knew that the enemy was upon them; that they were almost at Stroma, and no warning had been sent. What was to be done? The situation was critical, nay dangerous.

"'I am thinking the wind will have gone about,' said Bob, 'we will not see Stroma as soon as I was saying, if we do make it at all. There is a bad look in the sky, and I will be not surprised if the sea gets up. The gentlemen might maybe like to turn, it might be safer? Mr Pilking-

ton is looking very white himself. I will not say that the sickness is a bad thing; no it is good for the stomach, but it is a very sore thing, a very sore thing indeed.' This to Pilkington, who had confessed himself a bad sailor.

"'Nonsense man,' said Rodwell; 'Pilkington's looking splendid, and we will be there in no time. Where is it you land?'

"'It is the south side we generally sail for—these rocks at the foot of that small house—but we will have to hold round for the harbour at the north side I'm thinking. It is a good way further we have to sail, but the south side is not safe to-day.'

"'It looks safe enough,' said Rodwell, testily.

"'Oh, and you will not know the Firth, Mr Rodwell. When she does look the most safe, she is not much to be trusted to, I do assure you; and the coast of Stroma is a bad and dangerous one; aye it is almost as dangerous as the Stroma people will be.'

"'Are the people dangerous? I have always heard they were a quiet God-fearing race.'

"'Yes, it is a God-fearing people they are, but God is the only thing they will fear; and the women, they will be just as bad, or maybe more so than the men. You will not have heard what they did to Macintosh the gauger?'

"'Macintosh the gauger; who was he?' asked Rodwell.

"'He was a gauger body who lived in Thurso; he was not the one before the last, but one, or maybe it was two, before that one. The Queen she is always sending new gaugers here, but they do not stay long whatever. Macintosh he was a big strong man, and he took a boat from May; it was to the fishing he said he was going, by

himself, but he sailed straight over to Stroma. The men of Stroma they were at the herring fishing at the time, or maybe he would not have been so bold; but he sailed straight to Stroma, and he found—— I will not say what he found—maybe it was a still, or maybe it was a cask or two of whisky—but he never came back to tell what he found; for when the women saw that Macintosh had found what he had found, they stoned him.'

"'Did they kill him?' asked Pilkington, nervously.

"'No they would not have killed him—that would have been murder; but it maybe would have been better for him if they had. They just stoned him, and when they had struck him down, they tied his hands, and they tied his feet where he fell. He lay just on the edge of The Punch Bowl, and the grass was slippery. He could not turn unless he wished to drown, and when he awoke he was like a sheep on his back, looking up to the blue sky above his head. When the men of Stroma came home from the fishing he was lying there still, but I did hear his body lay there six weeks before they threw it into the sea. They are a very bad and a very dangerous people the people of Stroma.'

"'That's surely not true; I am sure we would have heard of it before,' said Rodwell.

"'True; you may be sure it is true, when I tell you,' said Gunn, proudly lifting his head; 'but how would the gentlemen from London hear the things that will go on in Stroma. The Stroma people they would steal—what is it they would not steal. We will have to stay and watch the boat when you land, so you will give me a written paper to say we landed you on the island.'

"'A written paper! What on earth for?' gasped Pilkington, now too frightened to be squeamish.

"'It will be in case anything should happen to you on the island. The people are very suspicious—they will be more suspicious than the Canisbay people—and if they should take you for gaugers, they might not let you back again; they might keep you, as they kept Macintosh. We will be in the harbour soon; will you write that paper now? But you will not have to stay long on the island, or we will not get back again until the tide turns.'

"'I don't think we should go on shore to-day,' said Pilkington somewhat timidly to Rodwell; and, brightening up as he saw Rodwell agreed with him, he added, 'we can come back another day.'

"'Well, Pilkington, if you are feeling seedy, perhaps we had better turn. It hardly seems worth while if we will not have time to see the place. Now then, men, home again to Huna.'

"It was provoking that after all Jock Mowat and Ralph Dunnet should both have slipped as they carried the southern loons ashore, and they certainly need not have been so slow in rising—the water was not particularly warm just then. A very miserable pair of half-drowned men the visitors looked as they paid Bob Gunn on the bank.

"'You do look for all the world like the two gaugers who got nearly drowned when Red Dick's yawl capsized as we sailed into Stroma Harbour last year,' said Bob, as he pocketted the money.

"'Damn you and Red Dick too!' exclaimed Rodwell, realising that he had been sold.

"'Amen,' heartily echoed Pilkington."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PENNY READING—GLADIATOR WINS; OR CONFINED DURING HER MAJESTY'S PLEASURE.

INVERESK was famous for penny readings. Once a fortnight in the season the inhabitants turned out to a woman, and when that is the case there will always be a considerable number of the other sex willing to follow their lead—at any rate, most of the unmarried members of the male community will. The readings usually commenced in October, and were intended to be continued during the winter months. The first three or four would be well attended, but after that time, one had heard the whole of the Free Church precentor's *repertoire*; Mary MacDougal's soprano had become a little too familiar to subdue the audience into stillness; the youngest dominie's elocutionary attempts had begun to pall; in fact, the penny readings became stale, and they occurred less and less regularly until, by Auld Yule, nothing more was heard of them.

But when September came again you could not have dropped in for a cup of tea, on any of the Inveresk ladies' "At Home" days, without hearing some such scrap of conversation as the following—

"I do hope the readings will soon begin again. Have you heard when the first one is to be? They really were so delightful last year."

"Yes; were they not? I would not have missed one for the world, only baby had such trouble with its teeth that I was unable to attend very many; but they were quite a literary treat—the working people must appreciate these concerts. So cheap! so interesting! so elevating! Do you not think so, dear?"

"Yes, I quite agree with you; one could not go without experiencing a feeling of having gained something. I went to quite a number of them, but after the term my new servants were really so stupid and so useless that I could not leave the house."

Go along Wallace Street on a Monday afternoon when the wives are at their common wash tubs, and, if you listen, you will hear the subject also mentioned there.

"The readin's will soon be on noo. Oor Maggie's aye practisin' 'Ye Banks and Braes.' She's gotten no an ill voice."

"Is she to sing it by her lane?"

"Na, na; she's ane o' the choir i' the Pairish Kirk, an' the precentor there isna tae lat himsel' be beaten by the Free Kirk man this year, he says. There's an' awfu' jealousy atween the twa choirs. They'll hardly speak civil to ane anither."

"Dae ye gang tae the readin's yersel'?"

"Me! What wad I dae amang a' that gran' folk; its as muckle as I can dae to pit on my best claes ilka Sabbath, forby dressin' mysel' up on a Friday nicht. Na, na; they're nae for puir folk like me."

"I gaed ance, and paid my penny at the door. There was just a puckle loons i' the penny seats—a' the folk were i' the shillin' seats—an' I didna think I got ower

muckle for my penny after a', barrin' hearin' a chiel frae Aberdeen singing—he had a maist pooerfu' voice."

"Had he though; what was't he sang?"

"Weel woman, it was jist 'John Grumlie swore by the licht o' the moon'; I kent the sang brawly afore, but it brocht back my man to me, for a' the warld as if I saw him. I had bit to steek ma een to see Tammas sittin' in front o' the fire, wi' ae fit at ae side o' the fender, the tither at the tither, an' the bonnie letters 'Home, sweet home,' carved on the fender, glimmerin' atween the pair o' them. It brocht the tears to ma een, Marget."

"It maun be sair tae pairt wi' the guidman. Hoo lang is't sin' he dee'd, Betty?"

"It's four an' twenty year neist neep time; but, as I was tellin' ye when ye interuppit, that wis a' I got for ma penny. The rest wisna worth the hearin'. A sang or twa frae a leddy or gentleman—the tunes were maybe nae that ill, but the words were fair balderdash. There wisna anither guid Scotch air sung that nicht. Then we had a bit o' play-actin'."

"My! that maun hae been graun'. Tell's aboot that, Betty. I've never seen a theayter."

"Weel, there wis naething graun' aboot this ane. There wis bit the twa o' them—a lassie o' Cromlierieve's an' the postmaister. The lassie did rael weel—she ca'd hersel' Lady Tizzle, an' the wye she spak' back tae postie wis something nae ordinar'; puir critter he seemed fair took aback, tho' he did ca' hissel' Sir Peter."

"Sir Peter! ma certes, his name's plain Peter Fyfe. I kent his faither an' mither weel; his faither was second horseman tae auld Windyyetts the year Willum was grieve."

"He jist pretended he was Sir Peter; he didna mean he was a real lord, it wis jist the play-actin', ye onderstan'. There wisna muckle i' the words o't either. I min' he said she wantit twa white cats, why wad she no; an' she said the best thing he could dae was to mak' her a widdy. Gin she's had as lang o't as I hae, she'll no be so greedy tae lie her lane. Syne they made frien's, an' syne they argle-bargled again; then the lassie gaed hame in a tantruff. A sang or twa frae the choir, an' then we cam' awa'. No, I dinna think I'll gang back."

"I'd like tae see Maggie singin' i' the choir. I maist promised the lassie I'd gang. It's the first Friday neist month. Will ye come wi's?"

"If ye're gaun I hae nae objections, gin ma loon's hame in time frae his wark; he's workin' at Blackie's i' the noo, an' he disna louse till half-sax. It's a gey lang tramp for a man when his day's wark's dune."

When the Friday came, like Maggie and Betty, I found my way to the penny reading. It was held in the Parish School, and the room was pretty crowded when I arrived. Toddleha', who was already there, had kept a place for me; so I found myself in congenial company. Toddles and Eppie Watson, MacCallum and Toddles' sister Dora, Crumlie and a third Miss Menzies were further along the seat. We had not much time for conversation beyond a few inquiries after MacCallum's "little ane," before the Bailie took his seat on the platform as chairman, where, like Robinson Crusoe, he sat monarch of all he surveyed.

Rising to his feet, "Ladies and Gentlemen," he began, "I have been asked to take the chair this evening. I need not tell you this is the first of the readings that are to be

held this season under the auspices of the Inveresk Clothing and Coal Association for the relief of the aged and infirm poor, and, as the proceeds of these entertainments go to swell the coffers of this deserving society, I hope you will make it your aim to encourage the committee in their good work by your regular presence at these harmonious gatherings. The secretary has just handed me last year's balance sheet. I see the six concerts realized the handsome sum of £13 5s 1d, and of that amount they have been able —they have been able"—(cheers), as the Bailie hesitated in his reading. "As I have not my glasses with me, I think I will hand the balance sheet to the reporters; but from what I see, the committee have not been able to hand over the whole of this amount for the relief of the poor, but this year they hope the amount at their command will be a larger one than formerly. I have now much pleasure in calling on Miss Marion Macintosh to favour us with a song."

The balance sheet, which duly appeared in the advertisement sheet of Tuesday's *Inveresk Banner*, disclosed a business account of :—

To Coal and Lighting	£1	1	0
To Hire of Piano, 6 nights, at 10s nightly ...	3	0	0
To Mr Bowie, Scotch Vocalist	2	2	0
To Stage Scenery, Dresses and Effects, in "Cinderella"	5	4	9
To Door Keeper	0	10	0
To Printing and Advertising	1	1	0
To Postages, &c.	0	10	6
	£13	9	3
By Proceeds of Readings	13	5	1
To Balance due Secretary	£0	4	2

A note appended by the secretary stated that the committee regretted to find that the hire of the piano had made so heavy an inroad on the funds, but that this year the committee intended purchasing one, in order that the expense should be avoided in future years.

Betty should have been pleased that night, for the first song Miss Macintosh sang was, "We'd better bide a wee;" and very well she sang it too. I saw MacCallum and Dora Menzies' hands going together, and as for Toddles, he whispered pretty loudly to Eppie Watson "We'll bide nae langer than the 14th of this month, whatever happens;" so Miss Macintosh's song must have touched at least four hearts that evening. Miss Macintosh was the Inveresk music teacher—a demure, prim-looking lady, somewhere on the shady side of forty.

After the applause her song elicited had somewhat died down, the Bailie again rose. "Miss Macintosh has sung us a very pretty song," he said, "and the words are extremely touching and sensible; but Miss Macintosh should remember the saying that 'time is fleeting and delays are dangerous,' and take care not to bide a wee thochtie owre lang."

What the chairman really meant to say, goodness only knows; the balance sheet had put him somewhat off his balance. Poor Bailie! he had undoubtedly meant to kill two birds with one stone—to pay a compliment to the lady, and to crack a joke with the audience—but somehow both missed fire, for a silence fell on the hall like a bolt from the blue.

Miss Macintosh cut the Bailie dead next Sunday before all the village as they skailed from the Kirk; nor would she sing at a penny reading again.

As for the Bailie, realising his mistake he subsided into his chair, the picture of a heart-broken man, quite forgetting to call on the next performer.

However, the Reverend James MacNoughton was no bashful loon. Ascending the platform, he said, "I see my name comes next on the programme, and that it is down for a recitation." Mr MacNoughton was assistant in the Auld Kirk, but the minister was getting an old man, and the former hoped soon to be called "assistant and successor." He never lost an opportunity of improving the shining hour.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he continued, "the poem I am about to recite may perhaps be familiar to some of you, but to the majority of my audience it is doubtless new. The poem is a powerful and tragic story, telling in simple yet beautiful language how a young lad, I may say a boy, bravely stood after a battle on the deck of a burning ship, at his post—braving the fury of the elements: death by fire and death by water—simply because his father had commanded him to remain there. How many of you, my hearers, would have waited in such an uncomfortable position under similar circumstances? Is it not far more probable that you also, following the example of the crew of that ill-fated barque, would have fled, and sought safety in the boats? But this lad, fearless and undismayed, the poet tells us, stood gallantly at the post of duty until the end came. After I have recited the poem, I will endeavour to point out its moral, in order that, in similar circumstances, you may go and do likewise"—Loud and prolonged cheering.

"The minister had aye the gift o' the gab," whispered Betty to Maggie, "but wouldn't it hae been wiser for the loon tae gang and see what hinder't his faither. I'se warrant he wis awa' i' the boats——"

"Wisht! Betty; the minister's beginnin'," whispered Maggie. The Reverend James began :—

> The boy stood on the burning deck,
> Whence all but he had fled,
> The flames that lit the battle's wreck,
> Shone bravely on the dead.

"That's nae richt," a fifth-standard boy behind me said to his mother, "he's gotten't a' wrang."

I do not know whether he had it all "wrang" or not, but as the Reverend James went on, he forgot, if not the words, certainly the sense of Mrs Hemans' familiar lines. "It micht hae been very guid poetry," somebody said next day, "but it wis vera bad prose." However, MacNoughton stuck to his guns, and saw the laddie home at last, although the fifth-standard boy and the rest of his companions had occasionally to end a line for him, or tell him the beginning of the next verse.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he said, smiling pleasantly, when the recitation was over, "I am sorry I neglected to refresh my memory before coming this evening. I meant to draw a moral for your benefit from the poem, but after the disgraceful way I've murdered, not the Queen's English, but the poem itself, I will merely say, to myself in particular, and all of you in general, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.'"

What Maggie and Betty thought of the proceedings I don't know, but it seemed to me as if we were getting both quantity and quality for our money at that penny reading anyhow. MacCallum was evidently impressed by the minister's exortation, for after that the concert interested him no more—he devoted himself to Miss Dora, to the exclusion of everything else. Then we had a part song—"Willie brewed a peck o' Maut"—by three local singers, and very well they did it too; a solo or two, a chorus by the choir, and lastly the comic singer from Aberdeen, who closed the first part of the proceedings.

That this was the event of the evening was evident, the applause of the previous item—a magnificent violin solo—was cut fearfully short, in case the parish organist would take it as an encore, and delay the expected *bon bouche* a minute longer.

The accompanist struck a few chords, and here he was; what a yell greeted him! His broken-down hat, white cheeks, red nose, blackened eyes, seedy dress coat, pantaloons, and inflated umbrella were dear to the hearts of the audience, but when he turned his back, and showed a white placard on it, bearing the words, "Try——'s Boots, High Street, Inveresk," the joke almost proved too much for the people; they laughed and cheered, and cheered and laughed again. It was not the penny seats only that made the din, for the two ladies, a part of whose afternoon society small-talk has already been given, were visibly convulsed. That laughter is infectious was apparent, for I found myself smiling too—even MacCallum looked up for a moment to see what the joke was—and when the chorus was joined in by the audience, I found

myself humming along with them, to the wave of that infernal umbrella, as it kept time to the music :—

Then who will be Mrs Canoedledum doo,
I only want one, cos I mustn't take two,
Don't mind if she's large, don't care if she small,
For anything's better than nothing at all.

The second part proved a repetition of the first, except that the comic singer gave us four songs instead of one, taking Miss Macintosh's turn besides his own.

"Yes, I thoroughly enjoyed myself," I said to the Doctor in the surgery that evening, as we took a pipe or two before going to bed; "but if ever I saw a man head over ears in love, MacCallum's the man. He behaved in the most hopelessly-gone manner all the evening. There will be an engagement there before long, you mark my words."

"Well," said Brodie, "I hope if it come about, that it will have a happier ending than her sister's had; you know how it ended?"

I had heard rumours of a tragedy in connection with the story, but had put them down to village gossip. "Do you mind telling me about it?" I asked.

"No," he said, "but the story is a somewhat long one; we had better defer it until to-morrow night. Eh! you are not sleepy? Well, I am not sleepy myself," so filling his pipe, the Doctor told me the tale, which I wrote out next morning, entitled—

GLADIATOR WINS; OR CONFINED DURING HER MAJESTY'S PLEASURE.

Of the many pretty girls in the parish of Inveresk, Alice Menzies was undoubtedly the most beautiful. At every

ball or party held in the district, none disputed her supremacy as reigning belle. A little over the medium height, singularly graceful in figure, with clearly-cut features, hair of glistening brown, and eyes of deepest black, her skin and complexion rivalled that of the celebrated Annie Laurie, of Scottish song, whose

> Brow is like the snaw-drift,
> Her neck is like the swan,
> Her face it is the fairest
> That ever sun shone on.

As she was as pleasant, genuine, and sterling, as she was bonny, it was no wonder many a man would have done much to win her love. But of all her would-be suitors, two only were in the running, and the running they made was so keen and so strong that the parish doubted if any one of the trio knew which was the most favoured man. If Alice in her own heart knew, she must have been an arrant flirt, for at this picnic young Corbhill would be her constant attendant, while at that dance Fred Smeaton's name would occupy a prominent place on her card. But then Fred Smeaton was a lovely waltzer, his step was perfection; while Corbhill on the other hand, although he danced well, would just as soon sit out a dance as dance it —a good deal sooner if Alice was by his side.

The two young men were great chums, and fond of the same amusements. No one in the county could sit a horse like Smeaton, while no fence was too high, and no stream too broad for Corbhill and his black mare Gloaming. Both were fearless riders, and whether fishing, driving, skating, or curling, at all the country sports they divided the honours. Both were well-to-do—Corbhill had suc-

ceeded his father in the farm of Corbhill, and Smeaton was factor on the Inveresk estates.

It was no wonder the parish was puzzled which would be the winner, and many and varied were the speculations regarding the issue. The result was beginning to be somewhat anxiously waited for, as for months past it had been a theme in every parlour in the place; the more especially as Smeaton had been away from home for a week or two, leaving the coast clear for his rival.

When Smeaton returned from his tour in the south, he brought with him a magnificent horse. "A perfect picture, and a noted hunter in one of the southern counties, it will beat any horse in the shire. I have brought it for our races, and have entered it for the Inveresk steeplechase; you had better get your money on Gladiator, I assure you, Toddleha," he said at a party at Toddlehall one evening.

Most of the young fellows of the district were there, and many of them had horses entered for the races, but it was generally considered that none of their steeds had any chance against Corbhill's mare Gloaming.

"How about Gloaming, Corbie?" asked Toddles. "Do you think your mare will beat the southerner? I should not like any but a home-bred beast to win our Grand National."

"I have not seen Mr Smeaton's prodigy yet," said Corbhill—this was the first time he had ever called Smeaton "Mr Smeaton," it had always been "Smeaton," or "Fred,"—"but," he continued, "I'll back my own mare against the field, for all the wonders this new horse is said to have done."

"Will you?" sneeringly said Smeaton; "that's easily said, but how much are you prepared to bet on the event?"

"I am not a gambler, but I'll wager anything I possess, my mare comes in before your horse on Monday."

"Will you? will you really bet anything? even—" and Smeaton covertly signalled to Corbhill in the direction of Miss Menzies: a sign undetected by the rest of the company—"even the filly herself."

Starting up Corbhill exclaimed, "Yes; by Heavens, I will; my chances against yours on Monday, and may the best man win; and he stretched out his arm and shook hands with Smeaton across the table, to clinch the bargain.

Nothing more was said about the matter, but it was tacitly understood between the two men that the loser of the race was to stand aside, and allow the winner to gain the hand of the lady they both loved.

Monday came, and proved a grand racing day; the ground was in splendid going order, and the horses were keen and in grand fettle. Half the country was there; the other half only stayed away because it could not get. It was a pure country race meeting, there was no grand stand—merely a roped off paddock and enclosure, and a dressing and weighing tent. Here and there a few bookmakers, mounted on stools, did a lively business. Those who had carriages drove into the field, and those on foot chose the places they judged most likely to afford the finest view of the races.

There were five events—three flat races, a pony race, and a steeplechase. The course was somewhat long, and the obstacles many and formidable—the water jump had been

widened a couple of feet in view of the interest aroused by Smeaton's late purchase. It was a bad place to tackle, coming almost at the end of the course. After taking a three foot hedge, a field of old grass some three hundred and fifty yards long gave the horses an excellent run up to the final leap, which consisted of a turf mound two feet in height, on which a single barred fence was placed, and immediately on the other side was the ditch—an ugly place, some eight or nine feet in depth. The width would not have been too great had it not been that the bank was rotten and slippery; the jump had to be a clean one to clear. This safely over, four hundred yards on the straight brought the riders past the judges' box.

For the race five horses were entered:—Mr Blair of Corbhills' mare, Gloaming; Mr F. Smeaton's horse, Gladiator; Captain Armitale's horse, Firefly; Mr Ross of Cromlierieve's horse, Bob; and Mr John Reid's mare, Maggie. Of the three latter, the Adjutant's horse, Firefly, was the only one considered to have any chance with the favourites. Maggie was only introduced by its owner, the local horse dealer, in the hope that her performance might lead to a purchaser, while Crumlie had entered Bob, trusting to the chapter of accidents to give his steady-going horse a place—a bad third would satisfy Crumlie well.

The race was owners up, and it would have taken many a long day's travel to see a finer sight than those men as they guided their horses to the starting post. Corbhill in crimson and gold, elicited a burst of admiration as he rode up on Gloaming, her black coat gleaming in the sunshine. Smeaton in his black and yellow attracted many ladies' eyes, while Gladiator, being a novelty in the district

engaged the men's attention, and they were evidently favourably impressed, for the betting, previously a shade in Gloaming's favour, now became changed. "Five to four on Gladiator; five to four, five to four, six to four I'll lay on Gladiator," came from the stentorian voices of the bookmakers. The Adjutant was in scarlet, Crumlie in blue, and John Reid in purple and white.

"Are you ready?" said Auchterless, raising the flag. "Then go," he added, as he dropped it to his feet.

"They're off," shouted the crowd, and the people settled themselves in their places to watch the running. "Aye and Maggie leads," cried the stable hostler, as the roan rose to the first wall, taking it like a bird, "but ye'll never keep up that pace, Maggie my lass." But Maggie held on her way. Jack Reid had betted heavily on Gladiator, and was anxious to force the pace. Smeaton's horse, he judged, could stand the heavy ground, while Gloaming required careful handling over ploughed land. Away they went, keeping close together—Firefly second, Gladiator and Gloaming in the rear. Now glasses are raised to watch them as they race.

"See, there's that rasper of a dyke; the Captain's over that first, or was it purple and white that gained the meadow first?"

"By jove! Bob's down!" and a half-smothered "Oh!" escaped the crowd.

"Yes, but he's over; and see Crumlie's up again. Well done Crumlie lad; the Cromlierieves were aye grand stuff."

Whether Alice watched Gloaming or Gladiator with most interest I do not know, but it was a poor joke of Toddles

to ask which of the gee-gees she hoped would win, shortly before the three first-named horses came in sight again over the three-foot hedge leading into the field before the water jump.

"By jove, Gladiator wins," shouted Toddleha', as Smeaton's black and yellow jacket appeared in the field.

"Yes, but Gloaming's there too," said Alice falteringly, as Corbie took the hedge in grand style, shortly after his rival.

"And Firefly also," said Toddles, the Captain joining his comrades in the field. "The horse first over the brook wins, Alice; and that horse is Gladiator," Smeaton's horse being almost at the paling now.

"Ah! he's refused it. I wondered if he would stand the water," excitedly cried Toddles as Gladiator jibbed; but Smeaton, wheeling round once more, brought his horse to the jump, and coming up at a bound he struck the horse violently with his whip; at first it seemed as if it would go over, but rearing up instead, it almost overthrew itself upon its rider.

Gloaming was now up, and, taking the leap grandly, cleared both fence and water; only however to alight on the treacherous bank, and slide back into the stream, throwing Corbhill in its struggles.

Firefly and Gladiator now approached the leap; and allowing the Captain a slight lead, Smeaton rode at the jump for the third time, his face pale with fury. Grasping his whip, he raised the loaded end in the air, and it looked as if he would kill the horse if it again swerved; but this time, following close at Firefly's side, it sprang over the water, and as it alighted the whip came down.

Corbhill, who had released his horse, was re-mounting, and it appeared as if there would be a race for home yet, for Gloaming was undoubtedly the faster on the straight. As the others flashed past him, however, Corbhill staggered and fell.

"Gladiator wins!" "Firefly wins!" "Gladiator! Gladiator! I say," shouted the crowd, as Smeaton and his horse swept past the judges' box—a short head separating him from the gallant soldier's Firefly.

After being proclaimed winner, Smeaton went rapidly to the Toddlehall carriage to receive the congratulations he longed for; but when he found it, it was deserted.

Alice's quick eye had seen Corbhill stagger and fall, and she would not rest until she and her brother had found their way to the brook, where a crowd was rapidly gathering. Hardly able to conceal her feelings, it was with a very sad heart she followed her brother into the crowd, which opened up to allow Toddles and his sister to pass, Toddles being well known as a friend of Corbhill's. As a space opened Corbhill was discovered lying insensible in the green field, his silk jacket dyed with blood, which welled from a wound in his head.

"Kicked by his mare," whispered the local veterinary surgeon; "she must have struck him as they struggled on the bank. I am afraid he is seriously hurt."

Utterly unable to control herself, the poor girl flung herself on her knees beside the body, placing an arm beneath his head, while with the other she held her handkerchief to the wound.

"How will we remove him?" asked Toddles, as the bleeding ceased.

"I have sent for a stretcher," said the V.S.; "and here it comes."

"Well, get the men to carry him to my carriage, and we will drive him to Toddlehall—Corbhill is too far away—until Dr Brodie comes. Here Smeaton, take charge of Alice," he said, as Smeaton approached, looking very gloomy.

"He is not much hurt is he, Toddles?" he asked. "What has happened?"

"The mare must have struck him."

"But I saw him mounting his horse as we leapt the brook."

"Yes," said the Vet., "but the loss of blood from the wound must have overpowered him, and he fainted as you passed."

"Poor Corbhill," said Smeaton; "he would have done much to win the race. Come, Alice," he said, somewhat roughly, as he took Miss Menzies by the arm, "this is no place for you."

"I will remain with Tom," said Alice. "Who would look after him if I did not?" she added, defiantly and somewhat proudly, as she looked Smeaton in the face.

Then Smeaton knew his fate. Men might wager, but the women must decide, and that Alice had decided was evident—her look, her posture, her voice were full of love, but not for him. Flinging her arm from him he strode silently through the crowd.

Corbhill was driven to Toddlehall, and Dr Brodie, who saw him, pronounced the case "dangerous; compression of the brain; removal impossible; he must remain at Toddlehall." Alice nursed him back to consciousness, and the

first thing Corbhill recognised was his sweetheart's face as she sat by his side. Long before he was able to be moved, it was understood and announced that Corbhill and Alice were to be married.

The marriage was fixed for Spring.

Smeaton during these months became a changed man; his bright happy spirits were replaced by sullen and morose moods, and his occasional outbreaks of temper became the talk of the village. He hardly went out, and rarely saw anyone except on business. As the time for the marriage approached, he became more cheerful, calling at Toddle-hall, and meeting and visiting Corbhill cheerily and frankly, so that the old spirit of friendship seemed to revive between the men.

Corbhill, who remembered nothing of the blow he had received, was thankful to welcome his former chum again, and, although somewhat timid at first about asking Smeaton to be best man, he was glad he did so when Smeaton said, "I would have been hurt, if you had passed me over. You know, old man, I loved Miss Menzies, but the better man has won, and I won't cry over it. By the way, Corb-hill, are you going to try the finnocks to-morrow; the river is in glorious ply, and I am making an early start. Will you come?"

"Yes, I will be delighted; it will be like old times, going fishing with you again. Smeaton you are a good fellow; I could not have borne it so well as you."

The other's face clouded, but he answered lightly, "Oh yes you would, and better. We will meet to-morrow morning then at nine."

Nine o'clock next morning saw them start for the river. No man ever saw Corbhill alive again. His body was found three days afterwards at the foot of the Black Rock Pool. At first it was supposed he had fallen in and been drowned—that his fishing stockings had prevented him from swimming—but the Doctor said "No, he was not drowned; how were those marks on his throat caused?"

Smeaton, who had not been seen for a day or two, was questioned; and his answers were so confused, and his manner so strange, that a warrant was issued for his apprehension.

Arrested for murder, the trial was fixed for a certain date, but it was a mere formality. Symptoms of insanity became so marked that he was ordered to be confined in an asylum during Her Majesty's pleasure.

In his mutterings he said, "I'll pay him for stealing her. She is mine! I won her from him in fair fight. Who speaks? Who asks was it fair? Why did you strike him with the loaded whip? I tell you, man, all's fair in love and war; aye, and it was both love and war. Whose horse is first past the post wins, and Gladiator wins—yes, Gladiator wins. Oh, Corbhill, man, crouch down and cast your line in the Black Pool. There's fish there, man, worth the catching; but wait till this rope's drawn round your neck, Corbhill. You'll meet a bonny bride in death. Ah! Would you! Over you go. Over you go. The Black Rock Pot will keep it's dead. Goodbye, Corbhill, and Gladiator wins! Yes, Gladiator's won!"

CHAPTER IX.

A DAY ON THE RIVER—NURSE BROWN.

That I was better was evident. My friends ceased asking "How are you, Bryce?" or "Is the cough not away yet?" New acquaintances no longer remarked within a minute or two of introduction, "That's an' awfu' hoast ye hae," or "I min' my grieve's laddie wha dee'd i' the spring, hoastit jist the same wye's yersel'—a fell kirk-yaird hoast. Ye should tak' a glass o' rum in milk i' the mornin's—it's a gran' thing for slocknin' the breest." No! my health was rarely mentioned now; Auchters might occasionally say cheerily how strong I was getting, or Toddles make impertinent remarks concerning my personal appearance—once before a mixed company he causally mentioned that I was "as roun' as a neep—a different looking vegetable a'thegither to the sharger o' a carrot I was when I came north." More re-assuring still, Dr Brodie, after another prolonged examination, had assured me that my lungs were now perfect, the suspicious spot gone, and that I would be able to start work after my six weeks' visit was up; four happy weeks of it were gone.

It was time I was back at work, for the bank officials had written to ask when I would be able to resume duty, as they wished to consult me about a vacancy in one of their branches in a suburb of London.

Amy wrote regularly; in her letter in answer to mine telling her to have everything ready for our marriage in two months, she said, "I have just had happy news this morning—a letter from Inveresk—not from, but about, you. Dr Brodie tells me you are thoroughly cured, only needing a—something or other, I forget what—to look after you, and see that you do not work too long, turning night into day, as you did before. Oh, how thankful I am to him for curing you. I will have everything ready by the first of December, as you say you will not wait a day after then. You have said in your letters that you often wondered who told the dear Doctor of your illness; and that he would not inform you. I think you should be able to guess now; I never thought you were half so dense before."

So it was to Amy that my thanks were due. It was really stupid of me; I might have known why Brodie would not tell me who the unknown friend was, although I had asked him many times. The little minx; she must have told him not to tell.

Tuberculosis indeed! I would like Sir James Williamson to find any about me now, I thought, as I sprang from bed one morning in the second week of October, full of life, energy, and health. It was the last day the Gerry was open for fishing—the river was closed much earlier than the rest of the Aberdeenshire streams for some reason or other—and I had promised to meet Auchters and Toddles at the river soon after nine.

The Gerry runs almost at the back of Inveresk, broadening out below the town, into a wide mouth, as it joins the sea. A famous salmon stream it is, and many

are the fish lured from the various pots and streams in its course. This being the last day it was open for rod fishing, we were not surprised when we arrived at the Stone Pot to find we were by no means the only followers of the gentle sport. Crumlie and Mac. were casting their lines over the broad surface of the stream, while Roberts and the Supervisor were getting their rods ready on the bank.

"Got anything, Crumlie?" Toddles cried.

"No we have not long begun; Mac. lost a beauty with his first cast, but the gut was brittle, and the hook snapped when he struck."

"Always soak your cast before beginning," prosed Auchters, laying down the well-known fishing aphorism. "What hook was't tae, Mr MacCallum?"

"A Cameron's stand-by, but I was hardly fishing at the time; if I had been, there would have been a beauty on the bank by now—it must have been twenty pounds at least."

"They're aye big fish the anes we dinna get; but what was't made you lose it?"

"I was following that confounded rule of yours, letting my cast lie in the water, floating down the stream, when suddenly the line tightened. I struck—— Wisht! I'll get the beggar yet," excitedly whispered Mac., as a huge fish leapt clean over his line, "that's him, I saw the mark on his back before."

The sight of the fish excited us. What a strange fascination the sport possesses. When I approach a river, rod in hand, I always experience the curious sensation that my body cannot keep pace with my legs. I seem to

lose control over my nether extremities altogether, my body seeming somewhere in the rear of those useful articles, which appear to be at any distance, from one yard to three, in advance of the rest of me. To prevent their total loss, I generally have found, by the time the water's edge is reached, that I have been indulging in quite a fast trot, and that what I have gained in time I have lost in breath.

Oh, it's a strange, grand sport! To thrash the water hour after hour for a fish which will not come, and yet every moment of those hours to feel as if with the next throw of your line it might be here. A little further over, under that bank, or higher up stream—at every cast you keenly feel the fish may come. It seldom does, but that is a mere detail.

If it does come; one short, sharp, glorious twenty minutes—or ten if you use a gaff—and the sport is over, and a fish lies gasping on the bank. A fish which you could have bought for a few shillings, and which has probably cost you ten times its price, if such trifles as licences, hooks, casts, lines, and all the various paraphernalia a fisherman indulges in are taken into account; but what Waltonian would compare sordid dross with those few minutes? Away with it!

Speak of the pleasure of hope, the agony of fear, the horror of uncertainty, the joy of power, the misery of weakness, the satisfaction of success; all these and hundreds of other sensations, pleasureable and otherwise, are crowded together—a jumble collection of the excitements of the human mind—but above all reigns supreme the unspeakable silent joy of fishing.

Golf may have its devotees—there is more in the game than to strike a ball as far and as hard as you can, to lose and look for it, and, having found it, to repeat the stroke again ; tennis its lovers, who comfortably sit, clad in white flannels or resplendent blazers, sipping their claret cup in the shade of some cosy tent ; croquet its candidates for matrimony ; cricket its followers ; and football its mad enthusiasts ; but, with perhaps the single exception of being first in the field at the close of a hard day's run, give me fishing. Hey boy ! fetch me my bag and rod ; I'll to the water.

But where was I ?

The sight of the fish made us run up our rods with more speed than discretion, for my cast got entangled in the operation, and Toddles found his line was twisted round the butt of his rod above the reel just as he was going to begin, which necessitated the taking of it down again. Auchters—well Auchters did not hurry much, but still it was his line that first swished through the air to fall silently, far over at the further side of the Stone Pot. The Stone Pot was a glorious place for salmon, but nothing repaid our labours that morning.

When we separated to fish up the river, Crumlie proposed a fishing competition—a dinner in the evening at the Inveresk Arms, to be paid for by the one with the lightest basket.

"The prize won't do, Crumlie," said Mac. ; "I can't go."

"Can't go ! Why not ? There's nothing else on."

"I am going down to Toddlehall this evening."

"Toddleha !" exclaimed Crumlie, "you were there last night, and two nights before that. I'm thinking, Toddles, you will be sending me in a bill for Mac.'s keep."

Mac. blushed.

"The Miss Menzies," said he, "are getting up some private theatricals for the night of Toddles' marriage. They have asked me to play, and we are to make some preliminary arrangements this evening."

"I did not hear anything of it," said Toddles.

"Oh no; it is only being thought of. You see you won't have anything to do with it; you will be in the train somewhere between Aberdeen and London about that time. Where is it you are going?" asked Mac., who was anxious to change the subject.

"Peterhead," said Toddles.

Now if there was one place Toddles was certainly not going to, it was that celebrated resort of herrings and convicts, so the answer was received with derision; but Mac.'s question served its purpose, and the prize in the competition turned into a half-crown sweepstake. We were to meet together again at Thistledyke Station, some three miles up the river, at five o'clock, and take train to Inveresk.

I had poor sport that day; whether my hand had lost its cunning, or my hooks were not right, at two o'clock when I turned into the field leading to the Castle Pot, my basket was still in the same condition as when the day began. I intended, after fishing the Castle Pot, to take lunch, then to try the pool again, and afterwards retrace my steps to the part of the river nearest to Thistledyke.

On entering the field I looked up to see Inveresk Castle, which stood at the top of the field, on rising ground. I could hardly believe my eyes; instead of the old venerable pile, with its ivy-covered walls and pinnacled tower, a new

building met my gaze—incompleted evidently, for at different parts scaffoldings were erected, and little grey dots which I recognised as workmen, appeared upon them. The house was modern in construction, very different altogether from the old castle, which had been one of the sights of the district.

I wondered what had occurred. A fire probably; but it was strange I had not heard of it, nor of the new building. I would ask Brodie in the evening.

Sitting down to rest and lunch at the pool, I changed my cast, and with it my luck; for after a few throws of my line on the stream as it gently swirled into the Pot, a nose poked up, my hook was sucked down, and I was on my fish.

It was a big beggar; of that I was sure, although I had not seen it yet, for as it swam rapidly down the long pool I could feel its weight from the dull heavy strain on my line, as it coursed violently from the reel. Oh, the music of the reel! How is it no musician has composed a song to that air? There is nothing to equal the melody of its varying whirrs.

I let the fish have plenty of line—the pool was long and deep, and singularly free from weeds; he could run, but soon he turned, and then I held the rod high in air. Would that line never come in to make the strain taut and true? No, it still lay loose on the water, when with a leap and a splash I got my first view of my friend the salmon. Was he off? I didn't know yet, the line was still slack. I wound up, wound up. No! by jove, he was on.

Feeling the hook once more, he danced—there is no

other word for it—he danced with rage. The pain caused by the hook through the cartilaginous lip is, I understand, insignificant, but he danced with wild leaps, now circling round the surface of the water, now clearing a yard or two of space. The water churned and boiled, but still the hook held him firmly. My back ached with the strain of the rod, as it bent almost double, but the salmon was getting worn out. He husbanded his strength for another effort, sulking for a space in the watery depths. Increasing the strain, I roused him. Again a plunge, a leap, and away the line rushed out; down stream he went, but I felt by my finger on the line that the game was mine. Not so much line this time; the check was put on sooner, and he came round to my gentle pull, as I wound up once more.

Right up to the edge he came—now half on side, now feebly endeavouring to swim; he was played out. Grasping my gaff I struck—surely, strongly, steadily—but he was not done after all. With a splash he turned over on his side; a dexterous twist, and I was left standing on the bank alone, with a curious sinking feeling at my heart, and a mad longing in my brain to dive into the water after that king of fish.

I had had a glorious quarter of an hour at anyrate. He had played his part well; a gallant fish. Up with the next spate may he go to the higher waters, where he will find safety for a while, and when he returns next year to his old haunt, the Castle Pot, may I be there to see.

When I arrived at Thistledyke my basket was "teem" so far as fish was concerned. Auchters was already there, and he had one—a beauty. He and the station-master were weighing it on the scale pan as I went in.

"Jist fifteen pun," the latter said, as he lifted the fish off the pan. "I thocht it wad hae been mair."

"Lat's see your's Bryce," said Auchters.

I had placed two good-sized stones in my basket before entering the little station, covering them neatly with some fresh grass. The basket not only looked, but was, heavy, as I held the strap in my hand.

"The basket weighs about a pound," I said, placing it carefully in the pan.

"Twenty-five pounds," said Auchters, "but lat's see them," and he opened the lid. "Vera bonnie fish, but some hard eating, I misdoot. But what's become o' the ithers; did ye see naething o' them as ye cam' up the road? The train maun be near due."

"Here they come," I said, as I looked out from the station window. "Crumlie has one anyhow; I see the tail of a grilse sticking out of the lid of his basket; and Mac. has also got something," I added as I saw the strap of the latter's basket pressing heavily on his shoulder.

"Well boys, what luck?" exclaimed Auchters, as they entered the waiting-room. The room, I may mention, was the combined station-agent's room, waiting-room, left luggage department, and all the various buildings required about a station, united in one. They did very little work at Thistledyke and the station-master was also the porter. It is related of him—but probably the story is an exaggeration—that one day when four passengers waited the arrival of the south train at Thistledyke, the agent had to telegraph to Inveresk for assistance before he got the train through.

"All clean!" said Roberts, "except Mac., and he's got

three; just fancy, he went back for that beggar at the Stone Pot, and bagged it after all. Twenty-two pounds," he continued, lifting a fish off the weights.

"Where did you get the other two?" said Crumlie proudly. Crumlie was always pleased when his friends did well. If Mac. was not much of a shot, he had certainly proved himself to be a fisher that day, for the others were six of the best rods in the Gerry waters.

"The big one I got in the Castle Pot, but I never saw a tamer fish. I am sure I had him landed in four minutes, and you know I do not use a gaff. Strangely enough, I got the better part of half a cast with him; a Cameron's Stand-by and a Durham Ranger."

It was my fish. Poor beast! after my peroration over his escape, I had hoped for better things. He turned the scale at thirty-two.

"The grilse," Mac. continued, "I caught in the crieves; it gave me more fun than all the lot. As I suppose the seventeen and sixpence is mine, Auchters, you had better hand over the dollars."

"Let me see," said Auchters, "you gave me half a crown each—seventeen and six, quite right; taking off your own half crown, that's fifteen shillings you've won; here they are," and he handed over the latter sum to MacCallum, who pocketed the money.

"Now," added Auchters, "I'll get the tickets. Seven firsts to Inveresk, station-master; you're busy to-day. How much?"

"Two and fourpence."

"Two and fourpence; here's half a crown; give the tuppence to your loon, frae Mr MacCallum."

"Eh! what's that?" said MacCallum, as we chuckled joyously.

Although dead tired, I never felt better in my life as I sat down to a comfortable smoke in the big easy chair in the Doctor's den in the evening, after telling him the events of the day. "But Doctor," I said, "what on earth has happened to Inveresk Castle?"

Dr Brodie's face grew grave.

"It was destroyed by fire; the place was almost totally wrecked. Fortunately no lives were lost."

"How did it occur?"

"How do fires usually occur? Carelessness on some one's part. But, by the way, Bryce, I have been in Aberdeen to-day, and there I met an old class-fellow, named Clarke; he has retired from practice, having married a rich wife. Perhaps you would care to hear a story he told me."

"I would like to hear more of the fire first; you don't seem inclined to speak of it. Is there a mystery in connection with it?" I asked, laughingly.

"Oh, never mind the fire; just listen to this tale—you like medical subjects. The story is about a nurse called Brown."

"A common-place name," I said.

"The story isn't common-place at any rate; if you don't mind, I'll tell it in Clarke's own words. He was not perhaps much of a doctor, but a thoroughly good fellow."

"It's a good job he has retired from the profession," I said, "if that's his best recommendation; but go on with

"NURSE BROWN."

"There was no doubt the case worried me. I could not take my meals, my sleep was disturbed, when I sat down in my surgery for a comfortable read after hours, I thought of nothing else, and, worst of all, when visiting other patients I found myself comparing their symptoms with this case. This case! What was it after all? A wretched attack of acute indigestion, which refused to yield to the usual remedies.

"I had not been long in practice at the time, and I well remember the joyful alacrity with which I attended the summons to visit Mrs Bruce of the Manor House, Ashville—the Bruces were perhaps the most important people of the district. Within a fortnight it seemed likely that I should be superseded, and possibly disgraced, for Captain Bruce had evidently begun to lose all faith in my remedies, even suggesting others himself, while his manner plainly hinted that a consultation would be desirable.

"A consultation! Why should I not have one? Many leading members of the profession are not only willing but anxious to consult with a professional brother in an obscure or difficult case. But their names are already made, and mine—well it was not known very far afield, and the case was neither obscure nor difficult, but only indigestion.

"I could imagine Griffiths, my opponent—a good old fatherly man—coming in, spectacles well down on nose. 'H'm, tongue not very good, taste bad, sickness great, can't take any food, pulse weak,' and so on; and then his verdict: 'Indigestion, bad attack, but you will be all right in a day or two; no need for us to retire about this case

Clarke; just try a little nux and potash before meals. You've tried it; well go on, must persevere; hardly needed a consultation.'

"And then when recovery did come, as come it must; why there would be no more calls for me to the Manor. This picture I drew, endeavouring to reassure myself that all would go well, but still I was not satisfied. Something was wanting in the chain of evidence. What were the facts of the case? A young lady, not yet twenty-four, married to a man who simply adored her, who worshipped the very ground she walked on, who had everything money could procure, and who yet refused to get well. Her constitution was thoroughly sound, lungs, heart, and all other organs perfect—she suffered from nothing except the symptoms I have mentioned; but that she was growing weaker, more delicate, nay dangerously fragile, was palpable to the merest tyro.

"She had been married little more than a year. Her husband, Captain Bruce was a tall handsome man. He had been an officer in a cavalry regiment before marriage, but after marriage he had resigned his commission. His wife had been the acknowledged belle of Yorkshire and was also one of the richest heiresses in the county. An only child, she had been left an orphan some years before, her father having been killed by a fall from his horse in the hunting field.

"To be called as their family attendant was a stroke of luck I had never expected to come my way so soon after my arrival in the country town; but, as Captain Bruce said, 'Griffiths was getting a little behind the times.'

"Musing over these facts, I was aroused from my

reverie by the ringing of my surgery bell, and Captain Bruce was ushered in. I saw by his face that another relapse had occurred.

"'Mrs Bruce is much worse again, Doctor,' he said. 'She has had a most violent attack of pain and sickness since you left. I am almost distracted. Will you come with me at once; my dogcart is at the door.'

"Of course I went, and found that his wife had had the worst attack she had yet experienced. The pain was now gone, and the sickness was almost stopped, but the poor white face was terribly wan, and the slight hand seemed almost too delicate to touch. I could stand this no longer; I would have a consultation at all costs.

"Captain Bruce waited my report in the library. As I went in he was sitting on the sofa, with his head buried in his hands, and when he looked up his features were so drawn, haggard, and weary, that my heart bled for him.

"'Well, Doctor,' he said, 'I need not ask for your report: I see that you think Mary is worse. What can we do? Shall I wire for a doctor to come from town, or what would you suggest?'

"'I do not think there is any necessity for that, but I will ask Dr Griffiths to come with me to see Mrs Bruce to-morrow. Mrs Bruce—I need not conceal it from you—is getting into a very weak state, but there does not seem to be anything the matter further than great functional derangement of the digestive organs. I will bring Griffiths with me to-morrow, and if he thinks it desirable we can have Sir James Morrice up from town. In the meanwhile, Mrs Bruce's nurse is an elderly woman, and I think you might wire for a trained one.'

"'Most certainly; and luckily I know of a most excellent nurse. She was with a cousin of mine, and nursed her most devotedly; I do not think we could have a better.'

"'Do you know her address?' I asked.

"'No, but I can easily get it by wiring. I will attend to the nurse, and to-morrow you will bring Dr Griffiths to see my wife. Oh, Doctor, I trust to you to do all in your power. I have every confidence in your skill, but still it is hard—it is more than I can bear—to see the one I love best on earth fading before my eyes.' And the poor fellow's voice faltered.

"Next day I brought Griffiths, and the consultation was much as I expected. He did not see Mrs Bruce at her worst, a change for the better having taken place; the pain and sickness had not recurred, and she had even been able to take a little nourishment; so the consultation was rather a happy one.

"After it was over, Dr Griffiths said 'Dr Clarke has done everything possible, and I have no doubt recovery will soon set in. No, there is no need for bringing Morrice to see Mrs Bruce.'

"The nurse arrived that night. I found her at her duties when I called. A tall, handsome woman of about seven-and-twenty, in her nurse's uniform she looked extremely smart. She was all that a nurse should be—quiet, neat, methodical, and evidently well up in her work.

"'I have been doing private nursing for the past five years,' she said; 'before that I was on the staff of St Peter's Hospital.'

"Mrs Bruce's recovery was merely transient, for on the

third evening after the consultation, a most violent attack, accompanied with fainting fits and great depression of the heart's action, almost brought her to death's door.

"'When did the attack begin, Nurse?' I asked, after my examination.

"'Shortly after I had given a spoonful of the jelly you ordered,' she said. 'It seemed to be the cause, for almost immediately the pain became violent.'

"'Has Mrs Bruce been having the medicine we ordered?'

"'Yes sir; it is almost finished, there is only one dose left in the bottle. Will I send it to the surgery to have it re-filled?'

"'No,' I said, as I slipped the bottle into my ulster pocket; 'I will take it myself.'

"'It is almost time for the next dose. I saw there was enough left, or I would have sent it sooner; perhaps I had better give it her now,' said the nurse, as she held out her hand for the phial.

"I gave the bottle to her, and she poured out a table-spoonful into a glass measure. There was a little more than the required quantity, and she emptied the dregs into a basin; finally, after rinsing the bottle, she handed it back to me. The medicine glass I had taken from her hand to give to Mrs Bruce myself, when something in the colour of the contents caught my eye; the mixture did not appear to me 'just right,' I thought.

"How it was I do not know, but the cloud which had gathered over my brain passed off in a second, and one word shone out before me, clear and distinct, nay, with burning intensity, and that word was 'poison.'

"I had no proof—nothing but the drumlie medicine in my hand; but I was sure—I was convinced it was poison I had to deal with, and that the poison was antimony.

"There flashed through my memory (with what rapidity thought travels) first that this was not the right time for the medicine to be administered—it was to be given half-an-hour before any nourishment was taken, and second that the nurse did not wish me to have possession of the bottle with medicine in it. After measuring the dose, how carefully she had emptied and cleaned the bottle before returning it to me—her careful training, I thought at the time. All this and more passed through my brain in the short space of time which had elapsed from taking the measure in my hand to placing an arm under my patient's head to give her the draught. Yes, and much more; for, convinced that the measure contained poison, I had first not to give it, second to keep it, and third to disarm suspicion. How was it to be done?

"Putting the glass to my patient's lips, I drew it back. 'Nurse,' I said, 'I will give this dose with hock—the effect should be excellent; will you bring some?'

"'No,' I continued, as she was about to ring, 'run down and ask Captain Bruce to give it you; he is in the study. The butler is out—he came for me, and is waiting in case I should require to send any medicines back.'

"The moment she left the room I passed to the bed head, and replaced the dose in the bottle. The medicine was but little darker than water; so, filling up the glass to the requisite height, I waited the nurse's return. I had not long to wait.

"'Captain Bruce has not the keys of the cellar; will

sherry do?' she said, placing a decanter on the table.

"'No, not so well,' I said; 'never mind this time, but after this we will try hock.' I quickly raised the glass to Mrs Bruce's lips, and she drank the water eagerly.

"So much was over at any rate, but what was to be done next? Mrs Bruce must be carefully guarded from this time. She must be left with some one I could trust.

"'What hours do you keep, Nurse?' I asked, although I already knew them perfectly well, having fixed them myself. 'From now on till night, is it not?'

"'Yes, these are my hours. Captain Bruce relieves me for an hour at five o'clock, and another hour at nine.'

"'And old Nurse Mackie comes on at twelve; well, I must see her. In my opinion she is hardly fit to manage during the early hours. If she is tired, I may have to come myself and do the sitting up; but I will go and see her,' and I rang the bell for the housemaid.

"Telling her my errand, she led me to a parlour where I found Mrs Mackie resting on a couch. She was not sleeping, and was extremely thankful to see me.

"After closing the door, I said, 'Nurse, you are fond of Mrs Bruce, I know.'

"'Fond of her! my bonnie bairn, that I have had as my own ever since her mother asked me to watch over her when she was gone. Fond of her; I'd willingly lay down my life to save her,' and the poor old lady's eyes filled with tears.

"'Nurse,' I said; 'I think I can save your bairn.'

"'Oh, thank you for those blessed words; but, ah! me, I doot ye're mista'en.'

"'No, I am not; but my success greatly depends upon

you. Nurse,' I said, lowering my voice, 'I am to place you in a position of great responsibility. It will be only for a few hours, but on those few hours your mistress's life may depend. You must sit by her, you must guard her, no one must come near her, everything she takes—whatever she eats, whatever she drinks—must be given by you, must be judged of by you. You should go on duty at twelve; to-night you must commence at eight—that is you must commence when I leave, and at your post you must wait until I return.'

"'But, Doctor, what is it you mean? You surely don't mean'—and the quick-witted old Scotchwoman's lips framed the word 'poison.'

"I nodded. 'And it is being given to her by the Nurse, though I do not know who gave it before she came.' I hesitated to pronounce Captain Bruce the villain. 'But some one must have done it, and we know who brought the new nurse here.'

"Mrs Mackie had no qualms. 'The black-hearted fiend,' she said, 'I aye wondered why they seemed so chief together,' and her eyes gleamed.

"'Nurse,' I went on, 'be discreet, be wary; above all, let no sign of distrust escape you. Get your things ready and follow me as soon as you can to the sick-room.'

'My feet made no sound on the thick carpet, and as I entered the sick-room Captain Bruce and Nurse Brown were standing whispering together at the fireside—they made a handsome couple. Possibly they might have been talking of the patient, but why that sudden start apart, I wondered, my mind now quick to detect any suspicious circumstance.

"'Mrs Mackie is quite fit,' I said; 'not a bit knocked up, Nurse—not nearly so much as you are—so I am going to make you take a rest till three, and put her in your place until then. The worst time for these cases is always between four and six, and I would like you, with your experience, to be present then.'

"'Oh, I am not at all tired; I can easily sit up all night if you wish; indeed, if there is any danger, I should prefer it.'

"'Nonsense,' I said, somewhat sharply; 'a tired nurse would be worse than none, and you will have an anxious time enough before long.'

"Whether my words possessed a double meaning to her or not, I do not know, but it was with rather a faltering voice that she replied, 'You know best; I commence again at three, I think you said, sir.'

"'Yes; and here comes Mrs Mackie to relieve you; now, Mrs Mackie, Mrs Bruce is sleeping quietly—the unconscious state has passed into a natural slumber; you will encourage this by keeping the room as quiet as possible. Let no one in, not even Captain Bruce,' I said, forcing a smile. 'I will be back in an hour or two, and will bring fresh medicine. Captain Bruce will you come with me? The immediate danger has, I think, passed.'

"'If she is not better to-morrow, I'll have a man from town in the morning,' said the Captain, somewhat anxiously, as I took the reins from my groom.

"'Yes, I think you should,' said I, as without further leave-taking I drove rapidly down the long still avenue. Instead of driving straight home I drove to Griffiths'. Fortunately he was in, and, telling the groom to wait, I went into his surgery.

"'Have you any sulphuretted hydrogen?' I asked.

"'Yes, plenty.'

"'Well, add some to a little of this mixture in a test-tube,' I said, handing him the medicine bottle. 'Is there any result?'

"'Yes, we have an orange precipitate. I am a little rusty, but I should say you have been giving your patient —whoever it is—rather plentiful doses of antimony. Heavens!' he cried, as a light flashed on him, 'it isn't Mrs Bruce?'

"'It is Mrs Bruce,' I said, gravely, 'and we have only discovered it in time to save her. They must have been giving much larger quantities since the consultation; it would not require many repetitions of this quantity to kill,' and I related what had occurred.

"'And now, Doctor, what is to be done?' I asked.

"'Done!' he said, 'have these fiends locked up within the hour.'

"'Yes, and probably kill Mrs Bruce even more quickly than if we had let the poison do its work; she is in an extremely collapsed state. No, that will not do."

"'Well, but what will do? You may inform them that they are discovered, but as you have only this one dose to rely on, they may brazen it out. They may even say you introduced the poison into the mixture by mistake, and not only escape themselves, but ruin you. Such cases have occurred. If I were in your shoes, I would take the police superintendent along with me when I returned.'

"'But how can I account for his presence?'

"'Oh, easily; say he wished to consult Captain Bruce about something or other. Bruce is a J.P., you know, and

Ferrier can easily concoct some story about poaching on the Manor Estates, or anything that he likes. Being guilty, they will probably perceive that they are suspected, and stop their murderous attempts.'

"This did not satisfy me, but still I called and took the superintendent with me, merely telling him I wished him to come without asking any questions, and he faithfully complied with this request.

"All through the drive back I racked my brains as to the right course to follow, but could come to no decision; so, trusting to chance, I drove up to the Manor House. Captain Bruce himself came to the door on hearing the sound of wheels.

"'How is Mrs Bruce?' I asked.

"'I have not seen her since you left; no one has gone near the room in case of disturbing her.'

"'That's right. Will you attend to the horse, Ferrier?' I asked.

"'Is that Ferrier with you?' asked the Captain.

"'Yes,' I said, 'I have a case that bothers me—a poisoning one I think—and I thought I would bring him out for a chat about it.'

"'Oh!' and without further parley Captain Bruce passed into the house.

"I found my patient fairly well. Mrs Mackie had performed her duties faithfully, and no one had attempted to enter the room during my absence. Mrs Bruce was still sleeping, and I hesitated to disturb her.

"Suddenly a shot echoed through the house.

"Starting up Mrs Bruce cried, 'What is that?'

"'Oh, merely a door slamming,' I said, hastily leaving

the room, and signalling at the same time for Mrs Mackie to follow me.

"'I am afraid the Captain has shot himself,' I whispered. 'If it is as I fear, for God's sake keep the news from Mrs Bruce. You had better remain near the door to keep any of the servants out.'

"Trembling with excitement the brave old lady remained to keep guard over her beloved mistress.

"Going rapidly downstairs, I found the servants rushing frantically to the study. Forbidding them to go upstairs or create any disturbance, I passed into the room. It was as I had feared. There on the floor lay all that remained of Captain Bruce. By putting a bullet through his brain he had expiated his crime—the revolver was yet clutched in his hand. Sending a servant for Ferrier, who had remained outside, I told him briefly what had occurred.

"'Is he quite dead, Doctor?' he asked.

"'Yes,' I said, 'death must have been instantaneous.'

"'Then,' said he, 'we must not let the other escape us also,' and, ordering all to leave the room, he locked the door on the outside. 'Take me to Nurse Brown's room,' he said to a footman.

"But she was not there; the undisturbed bed proved that she had not taken the rest she was supposed to require. No, like a wise woman she had scented danger from the first. The colour of the water in the medicine glass had not deceived her, and the hidden meaning of my words, taken with the fact that no bad effects followed the dose of medicine Mrs Bruce was supposed to have taken from me, had proved too conclusively that the game was up. She had probably been hinting as much to Captain

Bruce when I entered the sick-room—his guilty act at the sight of Ferrier showing that he also was in some measure aware that his crime was known.

"Nurse Brown disappeared and left no trace, and, although searched for most jealously by Ferrier, her hiding-place could not be discovered. Indeed it was supposed that she had drowned herself in the river.

"Some years afterwards, when I had retired from practice, and after Mary and I had been married for two years, I received a letter from a priest in Spain, which read as follows :—

SIR,—

I do not doubt that you will remember attending, although it is six years ago, a young lady in Yorkshire for antimonial poisoning. I have to-day laid in her grave a heart-broken penitent, who took part in the attempted crime. On her death-bed she asked me to write to you and reveal the facts of the case. She left it to you whether or not you would furnish the lady, who was under your care, with the following particulars :—

Captain Bruce had in his younger army days led a very wild life. He met, and married under a false name, a nurse in one of the London hospitals. After living with her for some time, he disappeared, leaving her penniless and forsaken ; and to maintain herself she recommenced her practice as a nurse. Some two years afterwards she discovered his retreat by accident, and found that he had again married.

Threatened with a trial for bigamy ; with loss of fortune, disgrace, and worse than ruin staring him in the face, he grew desperate ; and, yielding perhaps to the fascinations this woman had orginally had for him, he proposed to poison his wife. The money and property, Nurse Brown informed me, were settled upon Captain Bruce by the marriage deeds, in the event of Mrs Bruce pre-deceasing him. His courage, however, failed him after some time—for, strange as it may appear, he loved the innocent

lady whom he had so deeply wronged—and so he handed over the dreadful task to the woman, who, by some means or other, he had introduced into the house as nurse. You know the rest.

Nurse Brown, since coming here, has devoted herself to nursing the sick poor, and it is through her anxious care for them that she has now lost her life. During a severe epidemic she toiled night and day unceasingly, lovingly tending the poorest of the sufferers. Deeply penitent and heart-broken she was, I know; and, as I have already said, it is by her dying wish that I now communicate these facts to you.

(Signed) P. CAVIARRO.

"After all that Mary had gone through, I thought it better not to re-open that dreadful chapter in her life's history."

CHAPTER X.

A Crop of Wild Oats; or Out Whitechapel Way.

"MacCallum seems to be a frequent visitor at Toddlehall," said Dr Brodie, an evening or two later; "I have driven him part of the way there three days running now. He evidently knows my afternoon round, for I generally find him somewhere on the road between here and the Gerry. 'Toddlehall way, Mr MacCallum?' I ask, and before the question is well out of my mouth, he is on the seat beside me. 'No need to stop the mare, Doctor,' he says. He seems to be a nice fellow, though; do you like him?"

"Yes, I have found him very jolly; he is always pleased, willing for anything; a first-rate fisher too—he fished the Gerry the other day as if he knew every stream on its waters."

"And so he does. MacCallum is an Inveresk loon; the MacCallums used to farm Burnbrae. His father made a pot of money—he was a born speculator—shares, cattle, horses, land; it did not matter what he touched, all turned up trumps. To give you an illustration of his luck, which became proverbial:—An old aunt of his died, and among her possessions, which were to be divided equally among her nephews and nieces, were ten shares in the City of Glasgow Bank, and a certain sum of money. The bank

shares were in great demand at the time, commanding a high premium, and everything pointed to their continued rise. 'We winna sell the shares' one of Mac.'s cousins said; 'we can keep them among us.'

"'You and the others can do what you like,' said MacCallum, 'but I will take mine in cash. I am offered a share in a whaler leaving Peterhead, and I'll rather risk the coin in her.'

"What was the result? Each of these three cousins—like the celebrated Sir H. Dumpty—came down, irretrievably broken, but Mac.'s ship came home "full" four months after, and paid 200 per cent. The vessel was a small fortune to Burnbrae for many years, until he saw something else to put his money in. Inveresk gave him too narrow a field, so he removed to Aberdeen, keeping on Burnbrae as an out-farm. Young MacCallum keeps a constant eye on it, and I expect he will turn farmer yet. When he comes he generally stays a month with Crumlie."

"Next time he had better go to Toddlehall; Crumlie has not seen much of him this visit. But, by the way, Toddles will be married on Thursday. Where do the Menzies intend staying?"

"Mrs Menzies spoke of Aberdeen, but I am glad to say Tod. and the girls over-ruled her. Ronald is to farm Lambhill, which is on his brother's land. There is a first-rate house on it, so they are to make it their headquarters—at any rate for a time. Of course if Ronald marries, which is not improbable, they will have to look out another place."

"Toddlehall will suit Mac. well. You knew him as a boy then, Doctor?"

"Yes, intimately; young MacCallum would have been about ten when they left. His mother was a Carledoddy girl called Nellie Grey. Eppie Watson's mother and she were cousins; they were the reigning toasts of this part of the country in their time, but that's 'no yestreen' as Auchters would say. If you meet MacCallum's father, you will easily know him by an ugly red cicatrix."

"A what, Doctor?"

"Oh, the mark an old cut leaves—the scar you know; he had an ugly gash right down his left cheek. I stitched the wound for him but the cut was a severe and dangerous one, and it left its mark."

"A cut; how did he get it? A curious place to wound himself."

"He was assaulted and nearly killed; the blow was a heavy and deep one, but the woman who stabbed him was maddened by rage."

"A woman, Doctor!" I said; "this sounds interesting. Tell me about it, for I'm 'deein' to ken,'" and after helping myself to a "nippie" I passed the bottle to Brodie, who, as he prepared his toddy, began to tell me MacCallum's history; a history which I shall call

"OUT WHITECHAPEL WAY."

"The early chapters of the story," he began, "I only know from hearsay, but, from what I gathered, it came rather as a surprise when the news circulated through the village that MacCallum—or as he was then termed, Burnbrae—was engaged to Nellie Grey. MacCallum in those days was hardly what you would call a quiet young

man; he was sowing wild oats rather plentifully at the time, and was what Toddles would call 'a warm cup of tea' where ladies were concerned. His loves were so many and varied—in fact notorious—that considerable wonder was felt that Nellie Grey would have looked at him; but MacCallum aye had a soft poothery way with him, and as he was undoubtedly good-looking, full of life, anecdote, and fun, perhaps it is not so difficult to understand the girl's infatuation after all.

With one girl—Barbara Fyfe, the daughter of the Inveresk gamekeeper—he had undoubtedly gone too far. At every public ball or entertainment in the district he had been her constant attendant, keeping suitors in her own rank of life at a distance. Lovers she would undoubtedly have had, for Barbara was a dark handsome woman, of a distinctly Spanish type of beauty. Have you never noticed, Bryce, how many dark, almost sallow men we have among our folks? The contrast to the ruddy locks of the average Aberdonian ought to have marked them out to you. It is currently supposed that a few of the vessels of the ill-fated Spanish Armada were lost upon our coast in the storm which blew them away from the English cruisers. I often think some of the rescued Spaniards—they could not all have been lost—must have found a refuge here, that their handsome looks rendered them attractive in the eyes of women, and that these dark foreign-looking men are their descendants.

"Be this as it may, Barbara's beauty was distinctly Spanish, and I am afraid her blood also. She followed MacCallum about like a dog after the news of his engagement became known, at one time beseeching him with

tears to be true to her; while at another, with angry taunts and recriminations, she would threaten to tell her story to Nellie Grey.

"I am not sure that she did not carry out her threat, for after a time there came some rumours that the match was broken off. MacCallum went about as sulky as a bear with toothache; it was said he was once seen to lift his arm as if to strike the girl, who had stopped him on the road. He did not strike her though; the man was fast and wild, but he was no coward. She was evidently cowed by his looks or by what he said, for after that she worried him no more.

"MacCallum was hard hit. He went about his work quietly, but his old haunts knew him no more—billiards, cards, or drink he never touched. 'MacCallum's no lookin' weel,' was said in Inveresk. At the next Auldnowt market the news went from one farmer to the other, 'MacCallum's vera ill,' and by the time Mr Grey heard the news at Carledoddy, Burnbrae was in a very bad state indeed. 'I hear your old sweetheart, Jack MacCallum, is in a decline. They were saying in the market that he wasna like to get better, Nell.'

"How love communicates you should know better than I do, but next evening MacCallum was in Carledoddy and Nellie was in his arms. Mrs Grey had discreetly left the room when he was announced.

"'I heard you were not well, Jack,' Nellie whispered. 'I could not rest until I had written to you. You forgive me for making you come all these miles?' Jack answered with a kiss, or it was maybe more than one, but the parish was not sure on that head.

"Next Sunday the banns were cried.

"In those days they had to be called three Sundays running, for the first, for the second, and for the third time. Not as they do now—as you heard last Sunday when Toddles was proclaimed—for the first, second, and third times in one.

"'It's leein' tae the Almichty,' I heard Marget Buchan whisper to her neighbour, Betty Strachan, the first time the innovation was tried. Do you know the formula they used? 'I hereby proclaim the banns of marriage between John MacCallum, bachelor of this parish, and Helen Grey, spinster of the parish of Carledoddy. If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together, ye are to declare it.' The latter part is purely formal in Scotland, and is now nearly, if not entirely, obsolete.

"Well, the banns were called in both parishes. On the third Sunday Barbara Fyfe rose up in her pew—she was not often there—and said in a loud, clear voice, 'I object.' There was no need to ask who had spoken, for the whole congregation knew whose voice it was.

"'If you will come to the vestry after service, I will hear your objections,' the minister said gravely.

"There was some talking in the parish that afternoon. Would the marriage be forbidden? Was MacCallum already married? Stories spread and stories flew, but those who waited in the Kirkyard saw a very white, miserable-looking woman leave the vestry. The minister was with her and bade her come into the manse, but she would not go. Drawing herself up proudly, she walked defiantly through the group of watchers, and that was the last Inveresk knew of Barbara Fyfe for many years.

"What she said to the minister no one knows, for the old man—he is living yet—keeps his secrets better than I can do. The marriage came off that week, but those present were all agreed that never was the minister more earnest, more fervent in his exhortation to a bridegroom; and that's not saying little, as I know from experience.

"MacCallum's reformation was permanent, and he and Nellie were the happiest couple in the district. I do not believe he ever was bad; certainly I can speak of many acts of kindness he had done. As a husband and as a father he was without reproach.

"Six years afterwards Barbara came back, an outcast among women. Her face still bore traces of her former beauty, but now it was blotched with disease and drink. Her father unfortunately was dead, and she settled in one of the lowest places in the village, and brazenly continued her life of shame.

"For the girl's sake, for her father's sake, for the sake of all concerned I visited her, and offered to find her a home among friends, where she might lead a better life. I was not sanguine—when drink and disgrace come to women they take it worse than men—but I was not prepared for the bitter rage that filled her heart.

"'I'll shame both him and her. I'll let her see what her grand man has brought me to,' she screamed, the dark blood rushing to her face.

"She would have none of me, beyond a few bottles of medicine, which she gladly took. It was no use, she would not leave. Poor MacCallum hardly ventured into the village, and as for his wife, she shunned it like a pestilence. The horror of it began to prey upon her; she

grew ill, nervous, pale, fretful—it was shortly before her second child was born—the husband whom she adored she began to avoid; MacCallum feared she hated him. Poor MacCallum, he could not do too much for her. One evening after dusk, he slipped into the village to consult me about his wife. Would he leave the place? Would he take her away? But Barbara had sworn that where they went she would follow, and there was no doubt she would keep her word. I did my best to cheer him.

"Then he made a mistake. Leaving me he sought her in her den, among her drunken companions. He tried to buy her silence, to bribe her with money to leave. Her eyes gleamed; at last she tasted the sweets of revenge. She taunted him, she reviled his wife; his gold she would have none of it. No; his wife should die, his unborn babe should perish; then, and not till then, would she go; 'then you can have me if you want; your promised bride,' and she brought her body close to his side, raising her arms as if to place them round his neck. Her companions chuckled at the joke.

"Not knowing what he was doing, he pushed her from him. Maddened by the action, she seized a knife and struck straight at his heart, but fortunately one of her companions struck up her arm, or the blow had been a fatal one. As it was, the blade struck the temporal bone, cut its way straight down the cheek, and pierced the shoulder. MacCallum dropped like a stone, the blood spurting from his head. Sobered and sickened, the drunken revellers tore off for help; some sought the police, and one came for me.

"Barbara—all the hot love raging to her heart again—

flung herself beside the body, crooning over it, as if to some dying babe.

"There I found her when I arrived. That picture is as vivid in my memory as if it had occurred to-day. Were I an artist I could portray the small room—the tallow candles fixed in empty bottles, flickeringly, splutteringly, lighting up the scene; the table with its coarse and dirty cloth, the marks of spilt food and drink, and the half emptied glasses and greasy plates upon it; a chair or two flung over on their backs; and in the centre of the floor MacCallum's figure, pale and still, save for the red blood clotting his hair, and sickeningly ebbing out upon the worn and dirty boards. The woman in her tawdry finery and false jewellery; but above all shining out the wild beauty of her eyes, that hung so lovingly, so longingly upon the face of him whom in her mad love she had so nearly slain. In the dark background another girl with coarse besotted features, and some four or five half-sobered men whose faces bore the mark of 'brute'; further in the gloom the erect forms of two policemen, stern and silent, stood awaiting my orders, uncertain what to do—the shining silver of the buttons on their uniforms the solitary specks of cleanliness and light in all that room.

"'Clear the room,' I said to one; and to the other, 'Bring some water; this wound must be sewed,' the blood having now ceased to flow. When all had left save the police and the woman, I set to work. She watched me at my task, and every time the needle pierced the flesh, her hand went to her heart as if she too felt the wound. It was soon finished, and before I had done MacCallum showed signs of coming round. 'Fetch a cab,' I said, 'we

must have him out of this.' But a cab was already waiting, one of the policemen having ordered the men to bring one from Reid's stables.

"We brought MacCallum here, and as I was nervous lest the shock should frighten Mrs MacCallum, my wife drove on to Burnbrae to break the news. Poor Nellie, the tidings cured her, for, realising that her husband was in danger, she forgot her fears and her nervous dreads; she knew he had done it for her sake, as he had often spoken of buying Barbara off. The cab which brought my wife home brought Mrs MacCallum too.

"'Well, how is she?' I asked, as, hearing the cab drive up to the steps, I went out to open the carriage door.

"'She is all right,' said my wife, 'only wanting to know——'

"'How Jack is,' said Mrs MacCallum, finishing the sentence.

"'Oh, he's all right. He has got a nasty cut, though; you will stay the night with us, and take him home to-morrow.'"

. . . . . .

"And Barbara," I asked.

"Barbara never troubled the MacCallums more. She pled guilty at the trial; MacCallum tried to hush the matter up, but it was altogether too serious a case to be glossed over. Barbara was imprisoned for eighteen months, and her imprisonment undoubtedly did her good. I would hardly have recognised her for the same woman when I visited her after her time was up, to see if anything could be done for her. The matter had been already arranged, for the Salvation Army—all honour to it for

its noble deeds—had taken her in hand, and under its care she became a totally reformed character. The last I heard of her—I am not sure what her exact rank is now—was from herself, and she was working among the friendless and fallen, 'Out Whitechapel way,' she wrote."

CHAPTER XI.

TODDLEHA'S MARRIAGE—THE METAL SPLINT.

"Marriage," said a staunch old Cameronian to his daughter, "is a very solemn undertaking, Jeannie."

"Yes father," replied the lassie, "but it's a great deal solemner not to be."

Dickens, the greatest analyst of human affections, wrote of marriage. "Matrimony is proverbially a serious undertaking. Like an overweening passion for brandy and water, it is a misfortune into which a man easily falls, and from which he finds it remarkably difficult to extricate himself. It is of no use telling a man who is timorous on these points, that it is but one plunge and all is over. They say the same thing at the Old Bailey, and the unfortunate victims derive as much comfort from the assurance in the one case as in the other."

I do not know how Eppie Watson felt, but Toddles seemed in a very despondent frame of mind that forenoon as I turned into one of the bedrooms of the leading hotel in Carledoddy—the village in which Eppie Watson lived—where the sound of voices had assured me I was on the track of my friends. There they were, all in high spirits, bar Toddles. Poor chap, I never saw him down in the mouth before; his feeble sickly smiles were quite painful to watch, his disjointed scraps of conversation, which generally ended up with "Ring the bell, Crumlie; we

must have another drink," pointed most conclusively to a distracted brain, and to failing courage.

There must have been an unusual quantity of champagne consumed at the Carledoddy Thistle that day—and very good "fizz" it was. Toddles said it was bad (most of his glasses were wasted) but to the Inveresk faction assembled there, champagne was merely "irritated" water in a pleasanter form than lemonade—unlocked the tongue maybe, but did not affect the brain.

The prevailing costume of the company was scanty—shirt sleeves and cigars. It does not sound much, but the air seemed full of white linen and the aroma of Lady Nicotine—the costume seemed to cease there. Every now and then Toddles would say, anxiously, "What time is it, Crumlie; shouldn't we be getting ready?"

"Oh, we've plenty of time yet; neither Auchters, Brodie, nor Roberts have arrived yet. We will wait until they turn up before dressing," Crumlie would answer reassuringly.

"All right, but we must not be late; let's have another drink."

"We've not touched the last yet."

"Oh, never mind; but here come the others. Have a drink, Auchters. Ring the bell, Mac."

Toddles should have been the freshest of the lot of us—he must have been in bed by nine the evening before. The Inveresk bachelors have a playful habit of visiting an embryo husband the night before marriage, doing all in their power to prime him with toddy, and finally winding up the evening's entertainment by setting on him *en masse*, and despite his struggles, however energetic and forcible, indulging in what is called "washing his feet." This

innocent pastime, time-honoured in Inveresk, consists in almost parboiling the feet in hot water, and then, when they are thoroughly prepared, comes the grand finale—the application of some loathsome black paste, easy of application, but difficult of removal. Where the fun comes in, no bridegroom has yet been got to say.

With malice aforethought this performance had been planned for the benefit of Toddles, but Toddles proved too smart for us—I was one of the party.

"Tod is out," Miss Menzies said, "he will likely be in soon; you are to wait his arrival. In the meantime supper is ready in the dining-room, so you will just begin without him." It was a royal night—with speech, song, and jest, the merry hours flew by on eagle's wings—but still no Toddles. "Where on earth has he gone, Crumlie?" asked Roxton. "I winna leave till I wash the loon's feet; it wad be an awfu' disgrace tae us a' if we lat the cratur' escape."

"I'm thinkin' he's slippit awa' to Carledoddy; he'll be bidin' at the Carledoddy Thistle the nicht; he's a sly loon, is Toddles."

"Weel, weel, if that's so we'll jist hae an eke to drink his health, and awa'; that's surely never three I heard chappin' i' the noo?"

"Guid nicht, Ronald; we will drive thegither the morn. I've got a brake frae Reid, an' we'll start at nine. Are ye a' there? Whar's MacCallum, is he there? Come on Mac., the beasts winna stan'," cried Roxton, as MacCallum emerged from the drawing-room.

"Good-night, Jack," whispered Dora Menzies. "Ask Roxton why on earth he did not look for Tod. in his bedroom."

"You don't mean to say he's there?"

"Yes, he slipped away when we heard the waggonette in the avenue. I am thankful he has escaped."

"Weel o' a' the donnert idiots, we tak' the cake. Lat's gang back, boys; I couldna look the parish i' the face the morn, if they kent hoo we've been sold," said Roxton, as we drove down the brae, across the Gerry, and into Inveresk.

"No, no," said MacCallum; "we've been fairly done, and it will be five o'clock before we're in bed. Bryce cannot stand these early hours; and Crumlie's best man—he's got a speech or two to make yet."

After Auchters and the others had arrived at Carledoddy, frock coats, buttonholes, and silk hats, were the prevailing sights that would have met the view of an onlooker, as the wearers, towards one o'clock, found their way to the house of the bride. A carriage with spanking greys, specially chosen for the occasion by John Reid, awaited Toddles, Crumlie, and myself.

The marriage was much like other marriages—the bride prettily tearful, not too tearful, but just enough to make the wedding lucky; the mother in grey silk and hysterical sobs; the father erect and somewhat stern; the rest of the company variously affected, according to the state of their hearts' attachments—those finished hands, who had run the gamut of the various scales in the keys of love, courtship, and marriage, camly indifferent; those still practising, with more or less assiduity, the five-fingered exercises of the love called calf, visibly excited; and others, more advanced scholars, like Dora Menzies, MacCallum, and perhaps myself, highly interested in noting the slightest touches which gave a finish to the piece.

The bridegroom—I forgot him. Well nobody seemed to mind what he did or said, but Toddles looked well—he always did. His naturally sparkling features were, however, unusually demure—butter would not have melted in his mouth, as he twitched nervously with his gloves or made secret and furtive searches for the ring. That ring! there never surely was such a ring. It never left the left-hand pocket of Toddles' waistcoat, but he seemed to think it had a power of locomotion, and a wish to escape, for his hand would dive into a trousers pocket, and search among the loose collection of silver, keys, and pennies that lay there; then the opposite vest pocket would be tried; now, thoroughly excited, the hunt grew keen, and from one pocket to another he chased that restless hoop, until at last grasping it, satisfaction shone out on his face. He never really cheered up into the old Toddles until the minister asked: "Will you take this woman?"

Brightening up, he gave a pretty decided answer in the affirmative, the effect however being spoilt by a succession of strong coughs, which sounded very like chuckles, as he smothered them in his handkerchief. Toddles told me afterwards that he thought of Corbhill's grieve, who, on a similar conundrum being propounded to him, exclaimed:

"Tak' Jean! Fat wad I nae dae that for, noo I'm here. I'd maybe sooner hae had her sister Babbie, but it's ill lookin' a gift horse i' th' moo."

Toddles' "yes" meant business. After the ceremony was over he simply swelled with the newly-created dignity of a married man. The way in which he spoke of "my wife" and "Mrs Menzies" was positively grand. You would have thought no one had ever been married before.

Oh! his dignity was immense. He kept it up too—it was no mere ephemeral dignity, or transient fit of importance; no, he kept it up—right up to Auldnowt Station; but there he subsided, for, standing on the platform, on the far side of the station, awaiting the south train, he caught a glimpse of the carriage in which they had driven to the station, from the rear of which depended a "besom" and a pair of worn-out "bauchles." There were a good many people on the platform that day—whether they were all travelling by rail or not is another question; more likely it was to get a view of the happy couple, for a good proportion were of the fair sex. The titter that ran along the platform informed Toddles that these confounded articles—articles which proclaim that the grey mare shall be the better horse—were seen.

Fare-ye-well, Toddles; as bachelors we meet no more.

After luncheon, there was the usual toast-drinking. Auchters, as the oldest bachelor present, proposed the ladies, and Ronald, the youngest, returned thanks for them. It is far more probable that Blackie will take a third wife (he is a widower for the second time) than that either of these two will ever enter into the bonds of matrimony; but from the way they spoke, one would have imagined that, like the comic singer at the penny reading, the cry of their hearts was—

> Then who will be Mrs Canoedledumdoo,
> I only want one, cos I mustn't take two.

What humbugs men are after all; there is only one class that can beat them in hypocrisy, and that is——

"The ladies," said Auchters; "God bless them." But I

need not go on, for a full account of the marriage, the dresses, the presents, and the guests, was published in the *Carledoddy Observer*, on Tuesday, 19th October.

In the evening we had a small dance. Some mention was made of Mac.'s private theatricals, but it seemed they had never got beyond the stage of arrangement—"mere preliminaries," Mac. said.

"I thought you said you were to play a leading part, Mac.?" Crumlie said.

"Well, didn't I? I am sure I have been at Toddlehall every other night. Wasn't I, Dora?"

"Yes, but you made a poor lover in public. I thought you would have played the part better."

"Oh, it's only in private I excel."

"I will never speak to you again, Jack," said Dora.

"There's aye some water whaur the stirkie droons," said Crumlie sententiously, as he left the couple in the window seat. What the remark had reference to is not exactly clear, but that evening it was generally understood that MacCallum and Dora Menzies were engaged.

Dr Brodie had to return home that night to Inveresk as he had one or two important cases on hand, and was not feeling comfortable away from them. So long as the telegraph office was open he did not so much mind, but after nine he fidgetted to be off. Mrs Brodie was returning by train next morning, so I offered to bear Brodie company in his long drive.

The distance between the villages is about sixteen miles, but we had a grand pair of horses, and the carriage was roomy and comfortable.

"John Reid has done his best to send Toddles away in

good style," I said, lying back on the luxurious cushions, and listening to the steady click click of the horses' feet on the hard, dry road ; "we will be home in little over two hours."

"Yes, John can do the thing well. He has not only sent his best turnout, but he has given us the finest whip in Aberdeenshire ; I have only known one man who could hold the ribbons like our driver."

"Yes, who was he?"

"He was a British American, called Tom Smith. Have you heard Toddles speak of him?"

"No, I can't say I have."

"Well, Smith is rather a sore subject at Toddleha' ; he nearly deprived Toddles of his birthright, deceived the whole country, and finally ended up by eloping with one of our prettiest girls, who could see no fault in him."

"What became of him?"

"He went back to America ; and now he is almost a railway king, a noted leader in Wall Street, and one of the best-hearted fellows withal. He sends me five hundred dollars every year for distribution among the poor—it is from his wife, he says. His life has been a chequered one —gold digger and stage driver—he drove a team near the Fraser River, between 'Frisco and Cariboo. Some of the stories he told of these drives were almost incredible, and had the man not been such a perfect whip, we would hardly have credited them, but his power over horses was something marvellous. I remember one day he drove up to Inveresk Station just too late: the train was leaving. Looking up at the carriages from the road he saw Auchters waving him a mocking adieu.

Now the road from Inveresk to Carledoddy is straight and good, while the railway, on the contrary, makes a somewhat wide detour before entering the latter village, and there are a good many stations between the two places; but still steam is steam, and it was rather a shock to Auchters on leaving the station to be hailed by Smith—

"Hullo, Auchters; where can I drive you to?"

"The beasts looked as if newly out of their stalls," Auchters said afterwards.

"Well, I can't say your trains go very fast. Wasn't it one of your own folk who said 'Inveresk and time til't' as she got out of the train some half dozen stations before the village was reached? But what has all this to do with Toddles and his birthright? If there's a story in connection with it, trot it out; I'm death on yarns, as your Yankee friend would say."

"You certainly are, but it's a grand thing to have a good listener at any rate. So here goes for

"THE METAL SPLINT.

"To begin with, I must tell you that Toddles was not the oldest son at Toddlehall, Alec his elder brother being some five years his senior. Alec was always of a roving disposition, and went comparatively early to sea. The gold fever broke out in California a year or two after he left, and the lad, who was in San Francisco at the time with his ship, became smitten, like the celebrated Tom Brown, who

> . . . took the Cariboo fever;
> Folks said he was a fool,
> But he packed up his blankets
> And he started up the river,
> A-riding on his own pack mule.

"He found his way to Cariboo, where he did extremely well, remitting considerable sums to Toddleha'. All the time he was away he was a regular correspondent, hardly a fortnight passing without a letter from him, except when the roving fit came on; and then months might pass before his handwriting was again seen.

"But life in Cariboo suited him, and for several years he stayed there; he and a chum of his called Smith, sharing the same shanty, working on the same claim—a claim they called 'The Star of Hope'. Suddenly his letters ceased—stopped dead; in the last of them he had said he had a cold, but that was all about his health. Weeks turned into months. Mrs Menzies became alarmed, and Toddlehall took it so much to heart that I am not sure whether his son's silence had not something to do with his end; but nothing more was heard of Alec for many months, until one morning Auchters greeted me with the welcome news—

"'Alec Menzies is home, arrived last night. The same hearty, genial fellow, but graver and steadier than he was.'

"'No wonder,' said I; 'ten years makes a good difference in the lives of most people, and Alec was not much more than sixteen when he last went to sea. Let me see: Toddles is twenty in March next—I remember the month well—he was born soon after I came here, and that's twenty years ago last May. Yes; he must have been about sixteen. And so Alec's home; why on earth did he not write?'

"'I only saw him for a minute or two last night; he knew me at once. 'That you, Auchters?' he cried; 'How's Annie?' Oh, he's forgotten nothing. Why didn't

he write? Well, he intended coming home directly he heard his father was dead—poor chap, he is sadly cut up about the old man—but selling the mine and one thing or another delayed him, and he always put off writing until he could be able to say when he would sail. Things cleared up quickly at the last moment, and as the ship which brought him would have borne his letter also, he put off writing altogether. Just fancy, he was snowed up for six weeks on the line between San Francisco and New York. You must go down and see him, Doctor. Toddlehall is in a gay state this morning.'

"'Certainly,' I said, 'I'll drop in there to-day. But when I called Alec was out. 'Looking up old friends,' Mrs Menzies proudly said. He had called on me in my absence, and my wife was charmed with him; he remembered her well—asked how Auchtermair was, and who was in it now. As for Sarah, he was back in her heart again the moment she saw him. You know Sarah came to me from Toddlehall.

"'Well, Salla,' he said, calling her by the name the children gave her. 'I see you have waited for me after all. You always said you would.

'Who'll redd the banns?
I said the precentor,
Because I'm a painter.'

"The precentor in the Parish Kirk at that time was the local painter. 'A very good painter he was too, continned Alec; he once said red was a gran' stannin' colour. "Then paint my Elspet's tongue, for its aye waggin'," said the grieve, as he watched the painter apply a heavily-laden

brush to the stable door. The grieve's wife was a notorious scold—do you mind Elspet, Salla?'

"'Fine that; but it was not the stable, it was the byre door he painted red. Your father came out and stopped him before he had gone further. Toddleha' said it just wanted a wee thochtie o' brimstane to make it look like——'

"'Wisht, Salla,' we don't say such words in America.'

"'What words? I was going to say to make it look like Dan——'

"'Daniel in the den of lions,'

"'Dinna bother me. Dan—Dan—.'

"'Dan and Beersheba, Salla.'

"'Be quiet laddie, I canna mind the word.'

"'How would Dante's Inferno do, Salla?'"

"'Aye, that's it; I see ye mind the story well.'"

"'Oh, he has forgotten nothing, Doctor Brodie,' said Sarah; 'he's just my own, old, bad-guid loon, Alec; but he was maist awfu' disappointed at no findin' you in.'

"Sarah was evidently excited; for she was not in the habit of dropping into Scotch, like Silas Wegg into poetry.

"I saw him a day or two after, and very much taken with him I was. Travel had done much for him; he had gone away a laddie, and came back a man. He was most devoted to his mother and sisters. Toddles he was evidently anxious to please, but Toddles always kept at a distance from him.

"'There's something about Alec I cannot understand,' the boy said to me a month or two later, 'he is as bright and cheery as possible when he is with people, but get him alone; he seems always thinking of other things, and they

are not lively things either, for once or twice I've caught him dash his hand across his eyes. And then he confuses things somewhat. Have you never noticed, Doctor, the mistakes he makes? Why just the other day he talked of his going to school at Inveresk. Now Alec was never there; he went to the little school at Toddleha'—it's done away with now, and he could not even remember where it stood. And then, Doctor, he does not remember Punch. Why, my father used to say Alec and Punch were inseparables; if you saw Alec you might be sure Punch was not far away, and where Punch was, there Alec would shortly be. Punch was the name of an old Shetland pony; and that his brother should forget where he went to school did not seem very strange, but that he should have forgotten his pony was a thing passing Toddles' comprehension.

"I had noticed one or two curious slips myself, but thought nothing of them. 'Ten years make a hole in one's memory,' I said to Toddles, nor did I recall the conversation until some four months after Alec's return home.

"In the meantime the man had become a general favourite—perhaps the most popular man in the district. With reckless liberality he had settled a large sum of money on his mother. 'For her, Ronald, and the girls,' he said; 'Toddles will keep the land; I am no farmer.'

"'But the place is entailed, Alec.'

"'Entailed! Oh, bless me, mother, I forgot that; it must be broken.'

"'Nonsense, Alec; you know your father would never have heard of that. Indeed I am not sure that there is not a condition in the deeds expressly forbidding it.'

"Rumour also said he was likely soon to marry. His horse was to be seen frequently in Blackhouse stable, and Elsie Carnegie was a bonnie girl; he could not have found a better. The parish looked forward to a lively marriage.

"One day I had been called to attend a fractured arm. Looking over my splints to find one suitable, I came on an old bent metal one, which I thought might suit my purpose. Why, that is Alec Menzies' splint, I thought. It was one I had had specially made by the local tinsmith for a bad fracture the lad had got by falling from a tree. The break was a bad one, so bad that I thought the arm might be lost, but Mr Menzies was determined that I should try to save it, so I had this splint made, to allow the wound to be dressed without disturbing the bandages which held the fracture. The hand was saved, but upon the bone a curious lump was left; I would know it again if I felt it. Looking at the splint, my conversation with Toddles' some weeks before flashed through my mind.

"Two days afterwards I was at Toddlehall, one of the maids being ill. 'Alec,' I said, as he came to the door with me, 'how did your arm stand the rough work among the mines?'

"'Oh, splendidly,' he said; 'it never bothered me. The bone is perhaps not very true, but it was a bad break, and I have a useful arm. Lucky it was not one of the girls, or perhaps they might not be so well pleased. Would you like to look at your handiwork, Doc.?' and he pulled up the sleeve of his coat—the left arm.

"Yes, there it was distinct and real, that hard lump of callus that never rightly dissolved. 'But Alec,' I said, 'I always thought it was the right arm.'

"'Well, you should know; but there it is. Now which arm was it, Doctor?' he asked—somewhat anxiously I thought, when I recalled the conversation as I sat in my surgery that evening trying a right arm splint on a left arm. No! the thing would not work; it was a right arm splint, and nothing more. If you were a professional brother I would tell you it was a case of Colles' fracture of the radius—a compound one—and describe the splint to you, but I had better let that pass.

"I had no doubt Alec was a swindler; an accomplished one maybe, but still an imposter. This little mistake, that small anecdote, an omission or commission opened my eyes to the fact that we had been tricked. But what could be his motive? Money he had in plenty, but money it must be.

"What was to be done?

"I saw him pass the house next afternoon. I hoped he would call and confound me for my mistake, for I liked the man; but he drove straight past—to Blackhouse, I supposed.

"I have never seen him since. Elsie Carnegie and he disappeared that night. In a note she left behind, she said she was going away to be married to a Mr Tom Smith. A copy of the wedding lines were forwarded from Liverpool. To me Smith wrote that my surmises were true and that he and his wife were sailing for America. As I had found him out, I could reveal the trick he had played. 'The money I have settled on Mrs Menzies,' he wrote, 'was Alec's own; poor fellow! he is dead.' As he had never done anything criminal we hushed the matter up.

"Mrs Smith wrote regularly to Blackhouse, but a few months after, the lease being up, the Carnegies followed their daughter to America. Another good old family gone.

"The Menzies could hardly believe the tale I had to tell; indeed, I am not quite sure that Mrs Menzies ever did; until, after an interval of five years, another letter came ten days ago. Alec, being her first son, had always been her favourite, and that she could have taken a stranger in his place seemed to her impossible.

"As for the neighbourhood, the tales that were told were so many and so varied that I seriously thought of privately circulating the letter to refute the scandal. Smith in many eyes was a scamp, a villain who not only deceived, but robbed the family he lived with; Elsie was a girl he tricked, and there are many who yet will hardly believe that he married her."

. . . . . .

"What an extraordinary story," I said, as we drove up to the door; "but what was the motive?"

"If you care to have a smoke, Bryce, you can read the secret in his letter while I am out. It's a good job we came home, for I see I am wanted badly at Roberts'; one of the twins is ill, and he will not be home till morning."

"All right; I'll sit up until you come. It seems a long letter at any rate," I said, but Brodie was already gone.

The letter which the Doctor had handed me, read as follows:—

NEW YORK,
SEPTEMBER 28th, 1894.

DEAR DR BRODIE,—

I have often wished to thank you for letting me down so easily in that Toddlehall business; and I will tell you what led me into it. You may or may not believe the story, but the following are the actual facts of the case:—

Alec Menzies and I were sworn chums during the years he was in California. That we were friends was strange enough, for like usually repels like, and we were as like as two peas in a pod.

The miners just as often called me Alec as Tom, and I think poor Menzies never really knew himself as Alec. I was the more active partner.

There were several Smiths in the camp, but no other Menzies, so it gradually came about that we were both known by that name. I must have been dropped in a miners' camp, for no one seemed to know where I came from—like Topsy, "I spec's I growed"—so I did not mind the change, and we became known in the camp as Tom and Alec Menzies. New men came and went but we stayed on, and our claim, The Star of Hope, was panning out rich when Alec fell ill.

He was unfit for work for months. I read and wrote his letters for him, and in this way I learnt all about Inveresk and Toddlehall—what I did not know was not much worth learning. The home life was interesting to me, and when Alec was well enough he would tell me of his childhood's days—his boyish life and escapades. I knew them all; they sank deep in my mind—how deep you know.

Well, he died. Poor chap! he knew he was dying, months before the end came.

"Tom," he said, "you will not tell them I am gone, but when you can, go home and break the news yourself. Tell them I loved you, Tom; tell them all you have been, all you have done for me. See the old place with my eyes, take back with you the love I bear them. I do not fear death, Tom, with you by my side; but

on my mother and father the blow will fall heavily, if they think I died alone—a stranger in a strange land."

He harped much on this theme.

When the end came I buried him there, out in that mining camp. The bar-keeper said the service for the dead at sea—he was an old sailor:—"We therefore commit his body to the deep, to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body (when the sea shall give up its dead) and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who at His coming shall change our vile body, that it may be like His glorious body, acording to the mighty working, whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself" It was all Smart knew, but it served.

And still The Hope panned out, but my interest in it was gone. My whole life became absorbed in Inveresk; the letters which came for Alec I read—read them as if I still read them to that wasted form, into whose shining eyes the tears would come, and whose pale cheeks would flush as he heard the news from home.

The letters grew anxious in tone. Why did he not write? Was he ill? Then came a black-bordered one: his father had died, mourning for his son. If luck was against him, let him come back—come home to the mother who loved him, his sisters, his brothers, his land. I could bear it no longer; I must write or go. So I sold the claim, and it fetched a large sum. I would go to Scotland; I would see the place I loved as home.

When I arrived at Inveresk, the first words that greeted me were those of an old man—the Toddlehall postman, I subsequently learnt. "There's Alec Menzies hame; there will be glad hearts at Toddleha' the nicht." These words marked my fate; my fall. Was I to bring gloom and sorrow to that desolate hearth? No! here was home, mother, sisters, friends—I knew them all, I loved them all—waiting, nay longing to receive me. The temptation to a homeless wanderer was great, and I fell; I did not even try to resist it. For four short happy months I lived, I breathed in a new world. The first shock came when I learnt that the property was entailed. I must never marry, but then I was in love. My plan had been to give Toddles the land—you know I faithfully

divided the shares of The Hope, although Mrs Menzies would hardly have it settled in her name—then to build a house in Inveresk, where I might marry and settle down.

Of my discovery you were the means. I knew well it was Alec's right arm that was broken, he had let me feel the mark many a time, but having had a similar break in my left arm, I thought it better to change the arm, never doubting that the mark on mine would convince the most sceptical; but that unlucky splint of yours was too much for me.

Just one word more. I told Elsie all before we came away, and she trusted me. We are happy, Doctor, and riches pour in on us. We have one boy—you can guess his name—I fancy I can trace the old Alec in his face. But ah! Doctor, the cry of our hearts is: can we come back, can we come back?

I would not care for the finger of scorn, or the averted look of strangers, if in our hearts we knew that our friends the Menzies, the Mairs, Auchters, Crumlie, and yourselves, forgave us—forgave me the part I played—not for land or wealth; the part I played for love.

Oh, Doctor, can you bid us come?

Yours sincerely,

TOM SMITH.

As I finished reading Brodie came in.

"He is not such a scamp after all, is he Bryce?"

"What have you done about it," I said, "if I may ask?"

"I showed this letter to Toddles and his mother last week. Poor Mrs Menzies completely broke down. She would take Smith in her arms to-morrow; in her eyes Alec yet lives. As for Tod.—well you know Toddles isn't a bad fellow—he simply said, 'Tell him he has a brother here; but stay, I'll write myself.'"

CHAPTER XII.

THE EVENING BEFORE—THE MYSTERY OF THE FIRE AT INVERESK.

To-morrow I leave Inveresk.

This is a strange world—to-day among friends, to-morrow to pass from their midst, perhaps never to see them again. Will I be missed? Who can say? Dr Brodie may for a while feel his den a little dull after the day's work is over, Toddles will not find me when he calls on market-days, and Auchters will miss his partner at whist—we held the field against all comers. Robert Duncan, Crumlie, Mac., Windys, the Solicitor, and all the rest may say the first club night—"Is Bryce away? He wasn't half a bad fellow. Ye fairly made a new man of him, Doctor," That will be all; I will have passed out of their lives.

With me it will be different. It seems as if something was passing out of my life. I feel as if I were the one who stayed behind, with all the others going, leaving me desolate and forsaken.

Inveresk, someone has said, is a dull place—nothing ever happens there. Dull indeed! Happy the lives its people lead; free certainly from the many false excitements of life in a busier world, which stir the blood by their unhealthy passions, only creating a desire for stronger and more fiery stimulation. The one is natural, the other artificial, false

and hollow—a running after shadows; the one with its real and life-long friendships, its true existence, ending in sleep—a resting-place among friends, among your own, who, although you are gone from them for ever, still think of you as one not dead, but sleeping; while in the other life you are jostled by this man, and hustled by that; it is a life in which, although among crowds, you yet stand (or mayhap fall) alone—each man anxious to keep you down. If you ascend one step on the ladder, some other must fall back. Die! you but leave your place vacant for your neighbour—another shuffling of the cards; a continuation of the game, in which you no longer take a hand. Gone, absolutely forgotten, unregretted, dead!

The end of life in the country is sleep—"He taketh rest"; in town, the man is gone—"He's dead," they say.

And to-morrow I go.

Back to work; to toil—nay, not to toil, for work maketh the blood to flow, strengtheneth the brain, and bringeth with it the sense of power; there's life in it.

Back to London—that world within a world, which is yet the larger and the stronger; London is the ocean; all else the rivers, streams, or springs—all with their own separate uses, varying in importance, but all as nothing to that mighty might, that town of towns, that town of worlds, that world of worlds, they add their jot, their tittle to.

My nerves thrill, the swift blood courses through my veins. Once more for life, and life is London.

London, ye hollow, empty sepulchre! Ye hot-bed of filth, corruption, sin, folly, and disgrace! Ye ruiner of men's fortunes, of women's characters, of children's lives!

Father of mad brains, pale hearts, and withered souls! That is no life; there is no life but love.

If love means life, why Amy unto me is more than life, for she is Amy, Love and Life.

To-morrow I go.

Well, fare-ye-well, grey Inveresk. Your granite homes and granite hearts are dear to me. Your hearts and homes are like the granite—sterling, true, and leal; difficult to open, but admittance once gained, a fortress of defence, of honour, truth, and love.

"What on earth are you dreaming about, Bryce?" asked Dr Brodie, who had quietly entered the surgery. "I have been watching you for quite thirty seconds. Your eyes were shut, but I do not think you were sleeping."

"Thinking!" I exclaimed, as I started up; "I have had my thinking cap on, and was endeavouring to make out how I would get on without Inveresk. These weeks have made it home to me."

"It is how Inveresk will get on without you, my boy," the Doctor said kindly. "You have been a perfect god-send to me. Mrs Brodie says she does not know how the house will feel without you, and little Mary has been shedding tears over your fishing rods, which Sarah has been strapping up. We will all miss you, Bryce, my friend; but please God we will meet again next year. I have your promise that you will spend your holidays with us—you and Amy."

"You may be sure we will be only too glad to come. Now, Doctor, I must have a final yarn from you. You know the one I want; I have asked you about it every night since we were at the river."

"The fire, Bryce? Well for your pertinacity you almost deserve to have your curiosity gratified, but you make me reveal what is almost a professional secret. You surely will not tempt me further?"

But my curiosity was only the more whetted, and I continued to urge my request.

My readers may remember that Inveresk Castle was undergoing repairs during my stay at the village; it had been nearly burnt to the ground some twelve months before. How the fire originated no one knew; the insurance companies made no inquiries, for a claim was never made upon their funds. Inveresk was a rich man, and it was popularly thought that he had never insured the house; but it was not so—the Castle was well and fully insured. There was a mystery about the origin of the fire somewhere. Dr Brodie, when I questioned him upon the subject, was very reticent; but this evening, yielding at length to my solicitations, he said, "Well, the chief personage is now dead; and if you will not publish her true name, I will reveal the mystery.

"The present Inveresk has been twice married. He married the second time, some five years ago, a lady much younger than himself; in fact only a year or two older than Harry, his son by the previous marriage. The couple were intensely fond of each other, and the son and his new mother were on the most affectionate terms, but after the birth of her baby a change came over Mrs Inveresk's feelings towards the young laird. Inveresk is not entailed, but has always passed from father to son, according to custom, for many generations. The birth of her own son made the lady wish to change the old order. She did every-

thing in her power to blacken Harry's character in his father's eyes, magnifying his slightest faults and calling his necessary expenses 'wild extravagances.' 'As Harry was in a smart regiment he naturally required a good deal of money,' his father said; 'and he must have it too; an Inveresk must be able to bear his share in the mess expenses, and hold his own with the best of them.' As the lad was steady-going and careful, nothing his step-mother could do had any effect in weakening his father's affection for him. 'Harry will be Inveresk of Inveresk,' he would say, in answer to her many complaints.

"Things went from bad to worse, until at last it almost amounted to insanity with her, and she began to long for the lad's death. It seems a terrible thing to say of a young wife and mother, but that this desire really existed will be evident from what I have to tell.

"Harry, who was home on leave, had expressed a wish to have a horse to run in the Officers' Races at York, as his own were too slow. He knew of one—a noted goer. 'It had rather a bad temper,' he said, 'but it would sell all the cheaper.'

"'Where is it Harry?' asked his father.

"'Oh, it belongs to a dealer named Smith, in Surbiton, Yorkshire. Smith only wants fifty guineas for it; he said he would be glad to part with it at any price, although he had paid four times that amount for it some time before. Smith never sells a horse without telling its faults; consequently all the mess trust him, and he does well by us. I would have bought it, only I did not care to take another nag without consulting you.'

"'I would not have a bad beast, Harry, if I were you.

They are never to be trusted—jib at the post, or sulk when you think you have the race in hand.'

"'That's true; but Black Diamond is really a beauty.'

"'Well, we will see if we cannot find a better for you in the county. You must have a decent horse. Gladiator, I hear, is for sale; how would he suit you?'

"'We might have a look at him, anyhow, dad.'

"Mrs Inveresk, who had heard the conversation, said to Harry some mornings later at the breakfast table, the laird not being present, 'Harry, I am making you a present of the mare you wished. I wrote to the horse-dealer about it, and he says her temper is merely play.'

"'Oh! thank you, mother; I did wish the mare, but I was rather afraid father would not let me have her—he would hardly call killing two men "merely play." I cannot understand Smith saying that—it's hardly like him.'

"'He assures me it is mere playfulness. Did it really kill two men?'

"'Yes; stamped one to death in its stall—one of Smith's own grooms; and the other (a former owner) it threw in the hunting field, and then turned on him as he lay, biting and kicking him. A playful brute! but it struck me the horse had been badly handled, perhaps cruelly treated; a little care and attention sometimes turns these vicious beasts into lambs.'

"'I did not know her history. Smith cannot have meant the same beast; Black Diamond he calls the one I bought.'

"'Yes that is the name.'

"'Well you had better not tell your father her history. You won't be frightened to ride her?' Mrs Inveresk somewhat sneeringly asked, as if she doubted the lad's story

"'Frightened! I don't know; one never knows until he tries, and that I will do, at all events. Thank you again, mother, for your gift; it was good of you.'

"Two days later Black Diamond arrived safely at Inveresk. The journey seemed to have knocked the villainy out of it, for the groom rode it easily enough to the Castle stables. Harry was delighted with its beauty, for the mare really was a splendid animal—jet black, there was not a white hair in its coat—its action was perfect, and the easy way in which it went over the leaping bar, although it was put at its full height, made Harry already see the Officers' Cup gracing the Castle sideboard. For a day or two afterwards the frost was too keen for hunting, and the horse could only get a little exercise in the stable-yard, but those two days had already changed its name.

"'Black Devil' was the mildest term applied to it by Jim, the head-groom. The under-strappers applied rather hard epithets as they passed the horse's stall at a respectable distance from its hind quarters. It had some nasty tricks. At one time you could go easily enough to its head, but the next time, when you were there it would have a playful way of endeavouring to squeeze you against the side of the stall; its ears would lie back, and its eyes show an ugly gleam, while the white teeth snapped ominously. Jim got into the way of taking a stable graip with him when he went into the stall—he felt safer with it.

"'There's bad blood in that beast, Master Harry,' he said to the young laird one day,

"'Nonsense, Jim; its only play. Just wait till the Beauty has had a good run; if to-morrow is fresh, a good hard spin after the Inveresk hounds will stop its fun. It is

not getting half enough exercise. Bite! why man it would no more bite than fly,' and the lad walked straight up to the mare's head and patted her glossy coat, while she turned her sleek neck and pushed her nose against him.

"Jim said nothing, but quietly got hold of a pitchfork and waited developments. None of the stable hands would have gone up to the mare in the same way for love or money, but she remained perfectly quiet, and Harry, after feeling its legs and patting its neck, rejoined Jim.

"'Well, that beats all,' said the groom, as he allowed the fork to fall back on the wall. 'There's nae a loon i' the yard wad dae the same,' and he essayed to approach the stall, only however to leap aside, a strong word escaping him as he leapt, for the mare's heels showed clear and distinct by his side.

"'The black deevilock!' he gasped. 'Did ye see that, Maister Harry? I tell you she's nae to be lippened tae.'

"But Harry refused to see any fault in his mare.

"'She must have been ill-used in her last place by the stable lads,' he said, 'and has not got over her old fear of them. She will soon get to know and trust you, Jim.'

"'Will she? It will be a fine time before I trust her again,' thought the groom. 'You will not ride her the morn,' he said; 'you had better let Peter (a former rough rider) take her out and give her a trial first.'

"'If there's hunting to-morrow, I ride Black Diamond. The hounds meet at eleven at Corbhill, so have the mare round by half-past ten, and see that she gets an extra feed, for the ground will be in pretty heavy order, if these black clouds bring rain'—and Harry pointed as he spoke to the

sky, where rather ominous clouds were now gathering. 'I do hope the frost will not hold.'

"'Will to Cupar, maun to Cupar,' said the groom next morning, as he led Black Diamond round to the Castle door. It had taken them twenty minutes to saddle the mare, and Jim had the utmost difficulty in restraining her leaps and plunges as they waited at the door. They had not long to wait, for Harry, in his bright scarlet coat, was keen to be off.

"'Well, Jim, how is Beauty this morning? She looks a picture. I'll bring you home the brush, mother,' he called back to Mrs Inveresk, who was standing watching the start at one of the dining-room windows. 'Steady, lass,' he said, as, after stroking the mare's sleek neck, he grasped the reins with one hand before mounting. But Black Diamond was in no gentle humour that morning, and, with her back arched like a cat, she refused to stand a moment. Getting his foot in the stirrup, however, Harry vaulted into the saddle, gripping her sides with his knees, as he settled in his seat.

"'Let her go, Jim,' he shouted, as the mare plunged madly; and then the fight between man and horse began. One moment the brute was rearing straight up, as if she would fall back on her rider; the next bucking clean in the air, or grovelling on her knees, fain to lie down and crush him. But Harry could ride—the Inveresks had always been the best of horsemen—it was in the blood, and Harry had had many a lesson in the riding-school of his regiment. He stuck to the mare like a leech, despite her efforts to unseat him; and Jim, who had offered to help, had been ordered to stand back. Mrs Inveresk, with blanched face,

stood at the window watching the contest, half fainting with excitement.

"'If the mare would only crush him, kick him, kill him!' she muttered. Her mad hatred of her step-son was intense; but, woman-like even in her hatred, she half hoped he would win—in this struggle at all events.

"Once more Black Diamond rose in the air—high, higher, straight as a post. Slipping his feet from the stirrups, Harry struck her for the first time with his hunting-crop—struck with the butt end with his full strength straight between the ears. Instead of bringing her to her feet, the blow enraged her, and over she came, crashing backwards on the gravelled walk. As she came over Harry slipped off. Dazed and half-stunned, the mare struggled to her feet, only to find that once more her rider was in the saddle. The fight was over for this time at all events.

"As horse and rider went quietly down the avenue, Mrs Inveresk, who had continued motionless, with clenched hands and bated breath, was aroused from her stupor, by her husband's voice.

"'Well done, Harry, my boy.'

"Inveresk had been a silent spectator of the struggle. His face was aglow with delight; pride and love of his son was portrayed in every lineament.

"His wife, recognizing the fact, again felt how futile was the hope of separating the two; and once more her madness received new force.

"Harry brought back the brush; Black Diamond had tried no more tricks that day.

"'There was no one in the same field with me at the

finish, dad,' he said. 'I could get any money for the mare if I wished to sell her now; but we will not part, my Beauty and I.' The young fellow was in love with his new mount.

. . . . . .

The Doctor paused and filled his pipe.

I could hardly credit what I had heard; that this woman could be the pretty fair-haired girl who was pointed out to me two years before as the Castle lady seemed nigh impossible. Harry I had often seen—a fine manly lad; I remembered well the way he sat his horse.

"But, Doctor, that is not all," I said, as Dr Brodie remained silent. "You have not come to the fire; I must hear of that."

"You wish the sequel?

"Well, you will understand from what I have said that poor Mrs Inveresk was all this time practically unaccountable for her actions—that she was totally insane. Insanity in its most dangerous guise—cunning insanity—for, with all this bitter hatred raging in her heart, outwardly she was the fondest, the most loving mother a step-son could desire.

"One day Harry had been confined to his room with some minor ailment. Drugging a cup of coffee with chlorodyne, which she had for toothache, she took it to his room, but here her heart evidently failed her, for she did not wait to see if he drank it. Fortunately he did not.

"During that night, strangely enough, a fire broke out in the room next to Harry's bedroom. It broke out suddenly and with great intensity; in less than a minute, the place was ablaze.

"A flask of petroleum had been spilt in the room—by what means you may imagine—by its help the flames spread with furious rapidity. The sound of crackling wood roused Harry from his slumbers, and springing up he found that the room was full of smoke; so, flinging on a few clothes, he opened the door of the adjoining room. A sheet of flame met him in the face.

"'Fire! Fire!' he shouted.

"In a few seconds doors began to open and men and women, more or less scantily clad, began to gather; all was excitement and confusion. The men were summoned from the stables and set to work. They attacked the flames with water, but were beaten back. The fire had got too good a hold, for, running up the wainscot, the flames had attacked the roof and eaten through to the dry wood of the stairs; so that the upper rooms were soon cut of.

"'Is every one here?' asked Inveresk.

"'Mrs Inveresk! Where is she, sir?' exclaimed the old butler.

"'She has gone to the kitchen; nurse must have taken baby there, for the nursery was empty when we looked!' Even as he spoke Mrs Inveresk appeared, with white, anxious face.

"'My boy! my boy!' she shrieked.

"'The child! Where is it nurse?' cried Inveresk to the nurse, who was seen following Mrs Inveresk, sobbing loudly.

"'It is in bed. When I heard the alarm I rushed down stairs to see what was wrong; when I saw it was fire I tried to get back but could not—the smoke choked me.'

"Without waiting for the rest of the poor woman's

story, a general rush was made for the staircase. Alas! though it might have been passed a few minutes before, it was utterly impracticable now; the dry steps burnt like touchwood. Volumes of smoke and flame met the horror-stricken inmates of the house, and the bravest fell back before it.

"Desperate and despairing attempts they made, but all were beaten back—half scorched and wholly choked.

"Ladders were brought, but none were long enough to reach the nursery windows, which were on the higher storey. The poor mother, almost distracted with grief, clung despairingly to her husband's arm.

"And Harry, where was he?

"In his boyhood's days Harry had been in frequent disgrace for climbing about the house-tops. His great feat was to go from the tower windows to the roof, and from there to find his way along this ridge, down that ledge, drop a foot or two on to some narrow perch, and so on, until by passing from the low roofs of the scullery on to the iron bars of a window in an outhouse which ran at right angles to the house, he finally reached the ground. The sport, although doubtless exciting, was dangerous, and the route had only been discovered after many thrilling exploits on the part of the lad, who had on several occasions to be released from insecure positions by the stable men. Once discovered, however, the way was never forgotten; and he had done it over and over again, until not only could he descend, but even make the ascent—a far more perilous task.

"Remembering this means of access to the top of the house, at the first news of the child's danger, he had

slipped rapidly round to the kitchen door, and flinging off his coat, slippers, and stockings, so that his feet might the better grasp the slippery slates, soon his hands were on the bars, and, with a quick spring he had ascended to the first landing. Up the somewhat flat roof of the back-kitchen he ran, on to a leaden plate in which a raised glass cupola, which lighted the kitchen stairs, was set; mounting this, with a spring he reached the ledge of the upper roofs. Pulling himself up with some difficulty, he gained the higher roof, which had a gutter some seven inches in width, to the outer edge of which an ornamental band of stone work was attached. The roof here was too steep for him to ascend; so, finding his way along the gutter, he came to the house ledge where a triangular coping of stone marked the border between slates and wall. This was the worst part of the journey—on the one side a sheer descent of fifty feet, on the other the steep slippery slates. Grasping the coping with hands and knees he slowly ascended to where the margin of a chimney barred his way. To pass round this was a most hazardous feat, and a slip meant instant death; but this accomplished he straddled along the roof, and the rest was easy—a series of gradually ascending roofs and ledges brought him by slow degrees to the tower windows.

"In the tower was a small square room, which had always been recognised as Harry's own. In his schoolboy days here he kept his toys, kites, bats, and balls, and in later years his fishing-rods, riding-whips, guns, and what not—all the implements of a young man's amusements were to be found collected here.

"The room had windows on all sides, affording the finest views in the county, but Harry had no eyes for scenery that night, although the scene was striking in the extreme.

"On the lawn in front of the house an excited group had gathered, for the lad had been observed as he squirmed along the roofs, and the bright glow from the ever-increasing flames cast a lurid light on his movements.

"Breathlessly, silently, they watched his course, and with a sigh of relief they saw him enter a window in the tower. Rushing down the narrow stair to the upper landing, Harry encountered the deadly smoke. Too excited to feel it, he hurried on, and groped his way to the nursery. A gasping, choking sound took him to the cradle. Seizing his little brother in his arms he rushed back, wrapping a blanket round him as he went. He was not a moment too soon, for flames now barred his way, but rushing through them, up the stairs he flew, closing the stair door behind him to present a temporary barrier to the hungry flames.

"Joyously his blood stirred, and his heart beat gladly in his breast, as he once more re-entered the tower. His joy however was quickly checked as the thought flashed through his brain that escape by this way was not to be thought of. Although he might still be able to descend alone, the descent was utterly impossible with his brother in his arms. What was to be done? To leave the child never entered his thoughts. No! there was no escape; they must perish together.

"Wildly looking about him, his eyes fell upon a ball of twine. Was it strong enough to lower George by?

Doubling it he tested it, but the cord was frail and useless for his purpose.

"Hopeless and despairing he looked down from the window. Ah, if he only had a rope! A rope, and why not? the means was at his hand.

"Keeping one end of the twine, he flung the ball straight into the ever-increasing crowd.

"Quickly surmising what was required, a rope was attached, and Harry carefully and steadily drew the cord towards him. The suspense was fearful. If that frail string—which almost cut his fingers as he gently hauled it in, keeping it with one hand clear of the stone coping—should snap. Foot by foot the rope came nearer, until at last, with thankful heart, he grasped it.

"The room was stifling. The opened window, although allowing the smoke to escape, caused the fire to ascend with greater rapidity.

"Hastily binding one end round George, he lowered the boy to the ground, a wild cheer announcing that he was safely in his mother's arms.

"Harry at first intended returning by the roofs, but it was now too late; so, knotting the rope securely round the leg of a heavy chest, he began his descent by means of it.

"Flames were bursting out of the lower windows, some of them fearfully near the rope. Down he went, slip, slipping down. It seemed as if the greedy flames must catch his clothes, but with a rush he was through them, and safety seemed assured; when, glancing up, he saw that the rope had caught fire. Would he never be down? Was he to perish yet?

"'Harry, my son,' groaned Inveresk, as the rope parted while the lad was still some twelve feet from the ground, and with a crash the brave young soldier fell on the broad hall steps.

"Carefully they lifted him up, but he was badly hurt; dangerously injured. For days he lay at death's door. His heart-broken mother—her madness cured, her hatred gone—sat with him night after night, day after day. Nothing could tear her from his side, until, after days of anguish, I was at length able to assure her that all danger was past.

"I had another patient soon after; the excitement and the exposure to the night air, followed by her long nursing-vigil, had broken down a constitution never too robust. Consumption marked Mrs Inveresk for its prey. Occasionally she was delirious, and in her wanderings her secrets were revealed to me.

"'Inveresk,' she said to her husband one day, 'I wish to see Harry.'

"'Yes, Florence; I'll send for him. He was here not long ago.'

"'Yes, but I wish to see him alone; I have something I wish to tell him—perhaps you can guess. Bring him to me and leave us, dear.'

"'Harry, my son,' she said when he came, 'I have been a bad friend to you; I wished you ill; I wished you dead,' and, heart-broken, the weary sinner laid bare her heart to her step-son.

"'Mother,' he whispered, 'does father know? If not, we will never tell him of it.'

"'Yes, dear; I could not die happily without confessing my sin.'

"Of that scene I will say no more. Harry repaid her nursing of him by the greatest love and attention.

"'Mother,' he said one day, 'get well for me and George; we cannot do without you.'

"'No, dear,' she whispered, 'I would stay, but it is not to be.'

"And it was not!"

. . . . . .

"Confound it! there's the bell," exclaimed Brodie; "just when I hoped to spend your last evening with you. But perhaps it is nothing urgent."

"That's hardly likely," I said; "it must be nearly ten."

"Come in," cried Brodie, as a tap sounded at the door.

"We're not patients, Doctor," said Auchters, as he entered, followed by all the rest of our acquaintances—friends, if I may use the word—"we have come to bid Mr Bryce good-bye."

"Bring some more glasses, Sarah," said Brodie.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEATH OF AUCHTERS—DR BRODIE IN LONDON

Amy and I had been married for nearly five months My dear wife made our little home the brightest spot on earth for me.

"Will I say you are happy, Amy?" I asked, as I sat writing at my desk.

"Tell what you like, but you will never tell how happy I am," my little woman said, as she stooped over me, a mass of golden curls falling upon my shoulders. "But stop," she added, as her eyes fell upon my paper, "you need not write all that; it surely goes without saying."

I had been having long hours in the Bank. The crisis in its history, which occurred a year or so before, had proved the turning point in its fortunes; the public had gained confidence in its management, and its success was assured. New branches were rapidly springing up, and of one of the most important of these—the most important I may say—in one of the pleasantest suburbs of London, I had been appointed manager. The Bank House, in which we lived, was both a pleasant and pretty one. Fortune and happiness had indeed come my way.

Work was over as I sat writing that April evening at my study window, which looked out on our bright garden, already gay with flowers. From where I sat I could see the evening postman coming up the path; a rattle of the box, and he was gone.

"Anything interesting, Amy?" I asked, as my wife ran over the batch of letters. "If they are business letters, they can lie until to-morrow."

"There are plenty of circulars. But here is a letter from Inveresk; I am afraid there is somebody dead there," Amy said gravely, as she handed me that harbinger of evil, a black-bordered envelope.

"It is not the dear old Doctor," I said, as I recognised the familiar handwriting. Opening the envelope I found it contained a long letter, so I hastily scanned its contents.

"Serious news, Amy—poor old Auchters is dead: killed by a fall from his horse."

The news stunned us. Auchters was perhaps the last person to think of in connection with death. His healthy form, his strong well-built figure came clearly before my eyes.

"Auchters dead!" my wife exclaimed; "it surely cannot be true. Do read the letter, Dick."

Dr Brodie's letter read as follows:—

DEAR BRYCE,—

I have sad news to tell you: our good friend Auchters has passed away. Only ten days ago, almost at this hour, he was sitting with me in my surgery, and I can almost imagine that I have but to turn my head to see him in the old arm-chair you had so great a favour for.

Mary had a children's party in the house, and Auchters had asked himself to it; he had joined in all their games, been the sweetheart of this little girl, and the horse of that small boy. Dear old Auchters! How the bairns loved him! How everyone loved him! Oh! Bryce, how I loved him!

When my evening consulting hours were over he came down here for a chat, and we fell to speaking of old times. Mary was

much in his thoughts that night, and once or twice he called my daughter by the old pet name our Mary bore. When toddy was brought in he would have none.

"Na, na," he said, "I'm going up to the bairns again ; I will not take any to night."

I was not inclined to sit alone, so we went upstairs together. It would have done your heart good to see Auchters among the bairns—they fairly swarmed on him ; his pockets were rifled, his collar torn, his necktie loosened—Auchters was the biggest wean among them all. When the children left, he left with them, riding off on his old mare, Maggie. What happened on the road I do not know. It is supposed that Meg must have fallen, for both her knees were in a sad state ; but anyhow Auchters had been thrown and badly injured ; at least such was the message I received an hour or two afterwards.

The message was too true. The mare had found her way home alone, and the men who went out to look for their master found him between the Windyyetts road and Cromlierieve. He was quite insensible. His stertorous breathing and flushed cheeks told the tale of compression of the brain. A portion of his skull was knocked in by the kick of Maggie's hoof. I remember telling you, Bryce, that I had only once felt nervous in my life at an operation, but I had need of all my nerve when I operated on our friend. He bore the chloroform badly—very badly—and I was truly thankful to have him back in bed once more ; the operation over—the bone removed. Soon after he recovered consciousness ; but a day or two later blood-poisoning set in, and he quickly sank. I need not tell you that I remained by his bed-side until the end.

You remember Auchters' story, Bryce ! Well, there is a sequel to be told to that now. On the fourth day after the operation, the wild wandering delirium which had supervened disappeared, and he sank into a quiet slumber, which I tried to persuade myself was a happy symptom. The room was darkened, and I was feeling heavy, for I had sat up with him every night since the accident, and nature was beginning to assert itself, but a movement and the sound of Auchters' voice from the bed quickly roused me.

"Mary!" he cried, "Mary, you have come at last. It has been a long road, but I'm nearly home now; I thought the way would never pass. Your kiss still burns my brow, though long weary years have gone, and now you have come for me. Thank God, I am ready to come."

I could scarcely believe my ears, Auchters spoke so strongly, clearly, and steadily; never have I heard delirium like it. I got up and went over to the bed; his eyes were open, his pulse was flickering and unsteady—the end was almost at hand.

He went on, "You will never leave me now, dear," I will keep your hand in mine. Say you will never leave me—I'm coming with you this time—I am com—ing, Mary—com—."

Mechanically I held his pulse, but it had ceased forever.

Of Annie's grief when she learnt that her master was dead I will say nothing; poor thing, she had herself loved, and loved in vain. Auchters to her was more than master, he was friend. She is utterly heart-broken—sees no one, but mourns alone in her room at Auchterless. But everyone loved Auchters. At the funeral to-day the demonstrations and expressions of grief were not loud, but profound. All our friends were present—not one was absent—even old Windys, although the day was wet and rough, drove down to see the last of his old friend, Auchters.

At the funeral a strange coincidence happened. You know Auchterless and Auchtermair have their burial grounds in the auld kirkyard, where they lie parallel to one another, as the farms do; for some reason the boundary line has never been distinctly marked between them. Whether Mary was buried in the Auchterless ground or not I cannot say, but, standing at the head of Auchters' grave, my eye fell on a name-plate which had been removed with the upturned earth. Hastily picking it up, I traced the words on the corroded metal:—

MARY,
YOUNGEST DAUGHTER
OF
JOHN AND EFFIE DEANS,
AGED 20.

The rest of the inscription was illegible.

Stooping down as the coffin was about to be lowered, I placed it on the lid.

In the same grave where Mary was laid, Auchters now sleeps; he is with his heart again, but it is not there now. No! that dream of Auchters was too clear for mortal eyes; his soul must have been parting from its prison as the words were being spoken. It has made a deep, and even lasting, impression on me. Pray God there will be someone to come for me, as Mary came for Auchters.

In conformity with the usual custom in Inveresk, Auchters' will was read in the old dining-room after the funeral. Many of your old friends were there; many of them Auchters had remembered—something to this one, some little thing to that. The bulk of his property he has left to little Mary; poor girl, she is richer now than I could ever have made her. I was appointed trustee. Annie was not forgotten—she is to receive twenty-five pounds yearly, and a present of fifty if she marries before she is forty-five. Auchters' grieve has long been wanting her. Roberts' twins, in whom Auchters took a lively interest, receive two hundred pounds a piece.

Auchters was a rich man—from father to son, and from son to father, the MacBeans have all been successful farmers—and now the race is extinct.

To-night, writing here in my den, I feel as if my work in Inveresk must cease. To drive along the roads seems now to me like a review of the dead; this farm untenanted, and that one leased by strangers. Pitlochty gone, Auchterless vacant. The parish, as I knew it twenty years ago, is sadly changed; new manners and new customs have sprung up. Were it not that my wife cannot force herself to leave the old place, I think I would settle down near you in London. I have no doubt a few patients would come my way yet, and my practice during the last few years has been both large and lucrative. The bairns are growing up now, and Mary will soon require to go south for her education; Robert, you know, is already at Edinburgh, studying for his

degree. His heart is set on becoming a surgeon in the army, so that the practice need not be kept on for him.

Thinking of all these points, I shall not be surprised if Effie herself is first to mention the subject of going south again; especially as she has lately been urging me to take an assistant to do the long night rides. But folks won't have an assistant when I am to be had, and I do not feel old enough yet to justify me in refusing.

If you should hear of a house likely to suit us, you can let me know.

Remember me to your dear wife, and believe me to be,

Yours sincerely,

ROBERT BRODIE.

The news was indeed sad to both of us, and if once or twice my voice faltered during the reading of the letter, I hope my weakness will not be despised. Poor old Auchters! I could hardly believe that never again would he and I "haud up oor han's" at whist; that the Black Pot would never receive the salmon cast so gently on its waters that no ripple on its placid surface marked the throw; that the farm hands in the stubble and neep fields of Auchterless would know their master no more, nor hear his kindly voice calling cheerily to his black-and-white setter, "Steady there, Ned"; that never again would I see him drive past the Doctor's windows, with a smile to me, and a wave to the nursery where a little maid would be watching for him. Little Mary would recognise the sound of Maggie's hoofs long before the sound of wheels was heard by other ears, and none of her small companions were half so dear to her as Auchters—her dear old Auchters; and he was dead.

My heart bled for the Doctor. I could picture him going his rounds: I could see him pass Pitlochty on the long road to Dornock, round by Smiddyhill, stopping at one door or another, at that big farm town, or this little wayside cottage; and at each place leaving the kindly feeling that a friend had been. Then on the homeward journey, up the big brae by Collielaw, round by Blackhouse, past Auchtermair, then Auchterless, Cromlierieve, Windyyetts, and home to Inveresk. No news would he have to tell his wife of whom he had seen on the road, of what Pitters was doing, how Collies was better of his rheumatism, that Auchters was coming in "the nicht" to go to Robert Duncan's for a rubber. The farms mentioned were mostly inhabited by new Pitlochtys, Collielaws, and Blackhouses. Some of them had already called in Brodie, but they were new men, strange to the district; a generation or two of them would need to come and go before the familiar names of Pitters, Collies, and Blackies were once more heard in the parish.

Such a life would be utterly killing to him; so it was with heart-felt satisfaction that Amy and I heard, some four months later, that the house we had selected for him would suit admirably, and that he and his wife and the girls would be with us at the Whitsunday term.

. . . . . .

I had been in exceedingly good health for many months, so that it was rather a singular occurrence that I found myself once more in the Doctor's surgery—not in Inveresk but in London—on professional business.

"You will remember, then, that you are 'engaged,'

Doctor, and not treat me as you treated poor Roberts, when I come for you in August next," I said, as I got up to go.

"You are surely not going yet, Bryce?" he said. "My wife, seeing you come in, has gone out to have a chat with your Amy. Sit down again in that arm-chair—you know the seat—and we will once more have a chat about the 'Days of Auld Lang Syne.'"

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[THE END]

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