farrant words are by-ord'nar for senselessness. It was first party this, and second party that, and aforesaid the ither, till I was clean dumfoonert. Lord, I wis' the mistress had been there; but somehoo it rins in my head that the doctor has left his ain brither and the feck o' his siller to oor Bell.'"

CHAPTER II

THE OPINION OF COUNSEL

BROOMFIELDS was a substantial baronial building erected within about an acre of ground. It commanded a view of the village and the valley of the Garnet. There was a patch of lawn in front, broken at intervals by crescents and squares, in which pansies and white lilies were in the meridian of blossom. An old-fashioned garden behind, with gnarled fruit trees, common vegetables, and herbaceous plants justified the inference that the gardener, to be fully employed, must have other duties to perform. It was a beautiful June morning some days after Dr. Congalton's funeral. A soft shower had raced over the landscape, leaving a perfume of white clover and sweet-briar on the relapsing air. A blackbird out of sight somewhere among the blue-green palms of the

larch, refreshed by the moisture, gave evidence of its simple joy of living in tones liquid and melodious. Isaac Kilgour, perhaps the most taciturn man in the parish, had paused in his work with feet enveloped in a swathe of grass. Mayhap 'twas to listen to the feathery poet overhead, or to revel in the glorious feeling of summer that pervaded the scene. One had to put one's own interpretation on Isaac's moods. It would be contrary to fact to say that economy of speech necessarily betokens wisdom, though thoughtful people, perceiving the unruly character of the tongue, will grant that there is often wisdom in reticence. Isaac, however, was wise to this extent, he did not allow indulgence in speech to betray lack of knowledge. To Mistress Izet he was a perfect pundit, nevertheless she was not slow to declare that he was "a provoking craitur; for though he heard and saw maist things, he never let on." What his present thoughts were need not occasion concern, for they were soon interrupted. He had mechanically inverted his scythe, the handle resting on the lawn, and was wiping the blade with a handful of grass, when an agile

collie, burning probably with the memory of some unrequited wrong, flashed past him like a bird-shadow, and next moment was in the throes of what seemed mortal conflict with Help, the house-dog, who was chained to his kennel in the garden behind. Isaac dropped his scythe, and, seizing a wooden-toothed rake with a safely long handle, literally but ineffectually hastened to tear the combatants asunder. The housekeeper, who was amongst the early vegetables catering for the mid-day meal, seeing Isaac's failure to promote amity with the rake, took up the broken handle of a spade, and laid on till her back ached; but the blows added fury to the conflict, which seemed likely to terminate only with the life of one or other of the dogs. While Isaac was raking and Mistress Izet was belabouring, a small, bright-faced figure emerged from the kitchen door carrying a jug of cold water in her hand. This she proceeded to pour coolly over the writhing animals. In a moment the conflict ceased. The intruder passed the gate like an arrow, and Help, as precipitately, retired to his kennel, refusing to come out either to receive sympathy

or show the injuries he had received in the encounter. Isaac looked at the housekeeper with the spade handle, and Mistress Izet gazed at the gardener with the rake, while the girl stood calmly smiling at the foolish attitude of both.

"Weel, I declare," said Mistress Izet, "if that wasna like a wumman in Houston parish." — Isaac was accustomed to the housekeeper's parallels from Houston parish, and stopped further palaver with a characteristic grunt.

"Umph'm," he said, wiping the perspiration from his brow with his sleeve, and speaking to the kennel: "That was clever."

"It was clever nane," deprecated the girl. "I've seen the keeper at Mossfennan doing the like mony a time. It's the only wye to pairt fechtin' dougs."

To their dismay they became aware that a gentleman was overlooking them from the study window, and that a bright child at his side was clapping her hands in recognition of the little maidservant's triumph. The party was dispersed by the ringing of the front-door bell, which the housekeeper hastened to answer.

"Eh, Maister Sibbald, it's you," she said, recognizing her late master's legal adviser, "I'm hardly presentable, being sair flustered wi' layin' on a couple o' fechtin' dougs. Come awa', ye'll find Maister Congalton i' the study."

She led the way up-stairs to that apartment, and taking the little girl by the hand under the pretext of telling her about the canine encounter, left the two men alone.

By his last will and testament Dr. Congalton had directed that his estate, with the exception of the house, which he left to his brother, was to be divided into three equal parts. One part was to go to his brother, and one part to his niece, Eva Congalton, while the remaining part was bequeathed to Miss Cowie, daughter of Richard Cowie, of Windy-yett, whom the doctor evidently intended his brother to marry, for there followed this important and significant stipulation, namely, should his brother marry while Miss Cowie was still a spinster, the whole estate with the exception of the house was to go to her. Similarly, on the other hand, should Miss Cowie marry while George Congalton remained single, her share was to be

forfeited, and pass to Eva Congalton. In the event of any of the parties deceasing before marriage, the share of the person deceasing was to be equally divided between the remaining lives. Meantime, the estate had been committed to trustees, whose duty was to hold and conserve it for the legatees; but should his brother marry Miss Cowie, the trust was then to cease and determine in so far as the senior legatees were concerned, and their respective shares were to be placed entirely under their own control.

To do Mr. Sibbald justice, he had no sympathy with the doctor's whimsical disposition of his means. At first he had treated the proposal as a joke, due to some passing caprice, but the deed had remained unaltered. The doctor's thought, according to Mr. Sibbald, was that his brother should marry again, particularly for the sake of his child. He felt that the younger man's unsettled life as a newspaper free-lance afforded him few opportunities of mingling in the society of women, and the terms of the will had, he believed, sufficient suggestiveness to lead his mind in the direction of matrimony. As to the person intended for his wife, the will left little dubiety.

The doctor had been feasted and flattered not with the expectation of what had occurred, but in the hope that he himself might propose, and thereby bring the money into the Windy-yett family. It can hardly be said that either the farmer or his daughter realized the purport of these schemes. Windy-yett enjoyed the personal license and social amenities which his wife's hospitality to their neighbour afforded him. The habitual curb was on these occasions removed, and he jogged on happily with the driving rein resting lightly on his neck — that was enough for him. Bell simply and unconsciously acted the part assigned to her by the diplomatic head of the house. She was a rosy-faced, healthy, rollicking young person of about twenty. She had something of her mother's activity of mind and firmness of temper, but there was also her father's lack of worldly ambition, which Mrs. Cowie secretly deplored. Bell was tutored to be "blyth and couthie" to their guest, an injunction which thoroughly accorded with her own buoyant nature; and the exercise of these agreeable qualities during the doctor's visits had suggested the terms of his

will. The trustees, of whom Mr. Sibbald was one, had, at the suggestion of the latter, taken the opinion of counsel for their own protection. This opinion was to the effect that the will was perfectly valid, and could not be set aside. Such was the information the lawyer had brought to Broomfields. Congalton had not doubted the result.

"The doctor's money is really an unimportant matter to me," he said smiling. "He had a perfect right of course to do what he liked with his own. But his humour was always of a grimish order, and this is part and parcel of the man. I remember the night before he died — he was comparatively free from pain — 'George,' he said, after beckoning me to his side, 'I have been thinking of you both — you and the bairn. You will see after I am gone how thoughtful I have been — philosophically thoughtful. I have not laboured and saved for nothing — money there will be, but I have endeavoured to put within your reach that which money cannot buy. Man, you will be surprised — you will think me a rare good fellow!' He lay back on the pillow; he was

too weak to laugh, but the tears came into his eyes with the stress of inward merriment. 'You always accused me of want of sentiment,' he resumed, 'but I have put all the sentiment of my life into a nutshell, and now bequeath it to you.' Poor Harry!"

"I presume you have seen this young lady — this Miss Cowie," the lawyer inquired.

"No, I have not had that honour. Her mother, a bulky, loud-speaking woman, called several times during my brother's illness to inquire for him. She was full of professions of concern and maternal confidences. Nothing would do but that I should break the monotony of my stay at Broomfields by drinking tea with them at the farm."

"The doctor was not slow to inform me that the daughter is a 'weel-faured' dame and very presentable," the lawyer said, laughing. "It would be an excellent, or, as I might say, a curious coincidental joke if she caught your fancy after all."

"It would indeed," Congalton replied, not insensible to the humour of the thought; "but that is a contingency exceedingly doubtful.

My mind was certainly not tending in the direction of matrimony, but even if it had been, so contradictory is human nature, that my brother's good intentions have put marriage in that quarter out of the question. Let matters drift. Neither of us, I presume, is under compulsion to marry the other. As for me, if ever I should think of marrying, the thought of relinquishing poor Harry's money will not stand in the way. Meantime, I presume I am free to occupy this house?"

"Most certainly. In express terms of the will it is your own."

"That is so far well. As yet my plans are rather uncertain. I have a book of war sketches in the press, and other irons in the literary fire which will necessitate an immediate journey to London. Indeed, I shall be pretty much on the wing for some time to come. I should like, however, to leave my little girl in a comfortable home, to which I may return as occasion permits. Mistress Izet, I see, is an excellent housekeeper, and a motherly woman, but she is not exactly the kind of person to train Eva, nor would I like her to be dependent on the parish school

for her education. She wants companionship, refinement, sympathy, but only a lady can judge of such matters. I am afraid I am taking a liberty, but if your wife, of whom I have heard my brother speak highly, would find a suitable person for the post of governess, it would be at once a great obligation and a relief to me." Mr. Sibbald was sure this would be a congenial task for his wife.

While the lawyer was on his feet, and ready to go, Mistress Izet came in and announced Mrs. Cowie.

For the moment Congalton lost sight of what humour the situation contained.

"What is the woman fussing about?" he inquired with ill-concealed annoyance.

"The visit may be congratulatory," said the lawyer; "or it may be the curiosity of her class, that lacks consideration for the time of business men. Though I should say, it is probable she has come to claim you as part of the doctor's legacy to her daughter. In any case, as I have no wish to be involved in delicate issues, permit me to wish you good-morning."