write to my sister — she will expect you. I am sure also my father will write and make reconciliation easy. Trust on your father's part may be slow of coming — it can only be entirely established, after what has taken place, by honourable and persevering work. Are you prepared for that?"

"I will do my very best, Hetty," he said, with decision, the dawn of an honest purpose appearing on his face. "Then the result I anticipate is sure to follow." There was new resolution in his hand-shake at parting as he kissed her brow.

Hetty stood till his figure was silhouetted from the apex of the hill against the lingering rose of sunset. Poor boy! what a long race he had taken from his father's house to learn the comforts of home.

As she turned homeward there was a crackling amongst the brushwood behind the beech hedge. It was probably a sheep, or a delinquent collie among the rabbits. Joy shut the door against fear; her cousin Willie was dead, but was now alive again. She would hurry home and write the heartening news to Violet.

CHAPTER IX

A ROUP AT SMIDDY-YARD

THERE was a displenishing sale at Smiddy-yard — a roup it was called — and all the country-side turned out to buy, or see how prices ranged. Smiddy-yard was a large, well-stocked hill farm, owned by the late Stephen Barbour, better known as the Rev. Steenie Barbour, owing to his habitual use of scriptural forms of speech. In early life he was three parts on for the ministry, but "reisted" at fore-ordination and free will. He turned his college-lear to farming in succession to his father, and prospered. Two sons, inheriting their father's tastes, were at college, and the widow, being well left, resolved to displenish the farm and remove with her boys to the city.

The farm steading was large, and included a superior dwelling-house, barn, byre, stable, hay-loft, and potato-sheds, with an expansive court-yard between. Round about the walls of the

outhouses all manner of implements — ploughs, harrows, carts, churns, a dog-cart, cheese-presses, a winnowing machine, flails, and such like — were arranged in the order of convenience, and numbered for the purpose of sale. In the milk house a table was plenished with various eatables — home-made scones, oatcakes, loaves of white-bread, and milk. There was also a couple of small casks of ale laid on trestles. This provision on the face of it betokened hospitable welcome to neighbours, but if frankness be allowed, it was also designed to promote business and hinder adjournment elsewhere; while inside, in the best parlour, liquids and solids of a more genteel order were provided for family friends possessing palates of subtler culture. There was little work done that day for five miles around, for even farm servants who had not permission to leave home, feeling the yoke easy in their master's absence, kept on dreaming about the humours of the occasion, the wholesome fare of which they were not allowed to be partakers, and idled their hours away over reminiscences of roups at which they themselves had been present.

The inquisitive rooks in the Garnet woods came out again and circled above Kilspindie wondering, for no anvil rang, and not a shuttle was thrown. The tinsmith deserted his soldering iron, the candle-maker suspended his frame, and let the tallow cool. Even McLennan left the road for a day, and entrusted Brownie and the cart to his brother-in-law, the dry-stone dyker, and mingled in the human tide that impinged on Smiddy-yard. By ten o'clock the field behind the farm was littered with all kinds of conveyances. Horses, freed from their trappings, and others wearing odd articles of harness, browsed contentedly among the cool succulent grass. Windy-yett and his wife were amongst the earliest arrivals. His desires were bounded by the thought of a cheap, serviceable horse; hers had a wider horizon and a weightier purpose, which for the present it was her own business to conceal. It was a motley gathering that found its way to the hillside farm on that fresh, early autumn morning. Responsible landowners, bonnet-lairds, farmers, otherwise a nondescript crowd, leavened and toned by the controlling presence of Mr. Maconkey the

parish minister. The less valuable articles were disposed of first to give voice to the bidders, and allow time for important arrivals. The auctioneer was a man of encouraging humour. Natural tact and long experience had taught him how to handle the materials of a roup, and stir the cupidity of buyers. The sacrifice of a few comparatively worthless things to begin with would excite expectation, and prepare the unwary mind for bargains. A couple of "stoups" and a watering-can were recklessly thrown away to Babby Lawson. Tinny Walker became the possessor of an anvil. The carrier enhanced his own professional usefulness by the acquisition of a hand-barrow, and Ritchie Meiklem, plough-man at the mains, had a cradle knocked down to him amidst the plaudits of the company. This was acknowledged to be a providence of forethought, inasmuch as Ritchie had only been "cried" (proclaimed in church) for the second time on the previous Sunday. But the ploughman heroically faced the merriment by saying, "a roup didna happen every day."

When they had time to encompass its import

the women-folk were sore scandalized. Mrs. Caughie rubbed her knotted knuckles, and whispered severely to Nancy Beedam that it was "an unco ondecent like thing," while Pringle the smith slapped the now blushing purchaser on the back —

"There is nothing like lookin' foret, lad," he said; "gin ye dinna need it yersel', ye'll fin' folk'll gie your ain siller for 't."

The cartwright's humour became illustrative.

"What the smith says is richt, Ritchie," he said, taking the ploughman aside; "aye have odds and ends handy. Ye'll maybe mind John Halliday, him that got the place in the Glasgow bank; weel, things fell oot wi' the mistress rather afore-han', and I'm told he was seen wan night efter the darkning driving aboot in a cab seekin' for safety preens."

About mid-day most of the miscellaneous articles outside were disposed of, and half-an-hour's adjournment was allowed for refreshments. Windy-yett had lost his wife in the crowd, or rather she had deserted him for her own ends, and feeling for the moment a free hand, he retired with the smith to the dairy to

have a "bite o' something to eat, and a wacht o' yill." General Alexander had just arrived from Blacklaw, and it was known he had a mind to purchase a couple of young horses for carriage-work: the "horse beasts" were to be taken first on the resumption of business. The promiscuous discourse in the dairy was outspoken and hilarious, neighbour chaffing or congratulating neighbour over their purchases. Brinkburn had got "a michty bargain" of the winnowing machine. A plough and a couple of harrows had gone to Meilkeflat for the price "o' auld airn;" while there had been a "keen toozzle" between Coultarmains and Auchentorlie over a dog-cart, that had fallen to the latter at a price which the cartwright — being a practical man — declared for extravagance was "clean oot o't." Cowie had a mind only for one thing at a time, and preferred the prospective to the backward look. He was concerned about how prices might go when the sale resumed. As was the custom, he knew the less costly beasts would go first. In this class might be reckoned the working-horse which under the dominant influence of a superior will he had

been inspired to purchase. "Dinna miss it for the sake o' a bid," was the latest utterance of the superior will, giving latitude. "Bess is owre licht for field work: noo that Bell is an heiress she maun gang aboot, and Bess will be braw and serviceable i' the gig." Cowie, feeling the "yill," and fearing indiscretion, went in search of his wife.

Meantime the object of quest was seated in the best parlour, in absorbing confabulation with Mrs. Lonen, the school-master's wife, when the conversation was interrupted by General Alexander, who, out of gallant consideration for the ladies' needs, asked them what refreshment they would have. Mrs. Cowie, who "was carrying forward the crack," impressively looked up a little flustered. Then she smiled graciously — "it was sic an honour to be waited on by a high-born gentleman."

"I had a real herty breakfast thenk you," she said, wishing it to be understood that the notion of eating and drinking at the cost of Smiddy-yard could not be entertained without pressure. The General replied affably that he could recommend the sherry, and as for the

sandwiches, they were excellent — it was long since breakfast time. With just sufficient hesitation to justify apparent indifference, and make compliance lady-like, she said —

"Weel, General, since you are so very kind, I'll tak' a gless o' sherry wine and a sang-widge."

From her advanced "pronouncemanship," as she called it, of uncommon words, she would show the General they were not foreign to her. The school-master's wife, though eager for news, was conscious of human needs which she was none loath to gratify. After the episode of refreshment, the women settled down again with their heads together to the unfinished crack.

"Really, Mrs. Cowie, ye surprise me. A common sailor, did ye say?"

"Ay, 'deed, a common sailor, and a strong, ill-set looking tyke too. I was just coming back i' the gloaming from my sister's at Crosby, when I saw him sauntering aboot the road en' downright suspicious like. I thocht my gentleman had tint his gate, or maybe he was efter some uncanny ploy, so I made bold to speak, but he was barely ceevil, and lurched past me.

It was on looking over my shoulder that I got a glint o' her coming up the loaning."

"There would be a tryst — like enough."

"Oh, they didna meet there by chance, ye may rely on that, Mrs. Lonen, and from what I saw and heard efter-hin', I feel there was mair than friendliness atween them."

"Eh, the cunning piece — weel, woman?"

"Mrs. Lonen, what do ye think I did? I'm no one bit ashamed to tell ye, though ye ken I'm the last woman that would pry into ither folk's ongauns; but when I thought o' the late Dr. Congalton's niece, a puir, innocent, unsuspectin' bairn left to the care o' a woman that could steal oot i' the darkenin' to meet a man that, for a' I kent, might be a common keelie (thief) or a cut-throat, I stepped across the field into the wood, and was behind the beech hedge or ever they won to the ither side o't. They spoke low, and I didna just catch a' that passed, but she spoke maist, and seemed to be pleading wi' him. Mrs. Lonen, ye have seen a heap o' the world, and I need not mint my suspicions to you, but ye ken brawly there's aye something wrang when

a woman steals oot secretly under cover o' night to plead wi' a man!"

There was a pause, to let the remark gather importance.

"I couldna see their faces, but I think or a' was dune she was in tears: — then he kissed her. I heard it! Yes, Mrs. Lonen, the shameless hussy actually stood up and let the man kiss her i' the open road. That's the wye o' yer fine governess gentry. The parish schule wasna guid enough for the bit bairn, but my certie, Mr. Congalton made a sair mistake when he put his daughter under a woman like yon."

"But Janet Izet should ken, or Isaac Kilgour, they wud speak to the maister."

"It's no use — they're baith clean glamourt, and 'll no hear a word against her. Noo that Mr. Congalton's back somebody maun tell, of course, but it's a story no modest woman can mint to a strange man."

"We could speak to the minister," whispered Mrs. Lonen, nudging her friend. The individual spoken of was sipping whisky and water humanly enough at the other side of the table.

Mrs. Cowie shook her head — this was not in the drift of her intention, but she endeavoured to justify her negation.

"The minister and her father are said to be auld frien's — class-mates i' the college, or something o' the kind; but mair than that, from what I've heard tell, Mr. Congalton has but little faith in ministers. No, Mrs. Lonen, the thing wud come wi' far greater force from your ain guidman. They tell me the twa were real chief before Mr. Congalton gaed to London; and no to be wondered at either, baith being book-learned and leeterary."

The school-master's wife proudly admitted that Mr. Congalton had occasionally smoked a pipe before leaving for London at the school-house — indeed one of the first things he had done on his return the previous day, was to call and present a copy of his new book to her husband.

"Ye see that," and Mrs. Cowie's face beamed; "nothing could be better — nothing could be more providential, as I might say. The men smoking their pipes and cracking owre the news; the thing will come up as natural as

ye like. I'm willing to tell a' I ken at the right time, however painfu' it may be, but, Mrs. Lonen, it maun be real private, ye ken, and he maun speir."

Windy-yett had for some time been standing at the parlour door cap in hand, trying ineffectually to attract his wife's attention. Mrs. Lonen was the first to catch sight of him, and having promised to mention the matter to her husband, the farmer's wife, satisfied that the leaven would work, bustled out of the room.

"Save us guidwife, ye're among gentry the day!" said Windy-yett, rendered jocose by the self-complacent glow on his partner's face.

"Ay, among the gentry no less," she replied, "wi' a General to serve 's too; but I've tell't my story to that body Mrs. Lonen, and there'll be few in Kilspindie that'll no hear't or the day's dune."

The farmer was wishful that his wife should stand by and prompt him at the bidding, in order, as he said, that there might be "no back-spangs." The basis of their mutual understanding, moreover, had been slightly disturbed by the information he had received from the

smith. The understanding was as to the probable price at which the horse might go. He had learned that the beast had received an injury, and was now a "roarer."

"Then it should go a five-pound-note cheaper, at the very least," Mrs. Cowie remarked. "Gavin Lindsay, the innkeeper at Dalwhinzie, I am told, wants the horse for gig use, and may bid against ye; but dinna fail to let him hear it's a roarer. The creature, I'm told, is a willing beast, and would serve us weel enough for leisurely work. A dram 'll no be lost on Pringle gin ye get him to gi'e the horse a guid race before the bidding begins."

Windy-yett, armed by his wife's authority to give and take refreshment after the purchase, sought the smith and confided his plan to him.

"Wants it for the gig, does he?" said the latter with a significant nod, then he took the halter from the stable-boy, slapped the creature on the flank, and set off at a violent pace down the field. When he returned Gavin Lindsay seemed to have his mouth buttoned at both ends, and Wattie Dron, the cadger from Kilmallie, who aspired to a horse, got to the end

of his means by one opposition bid, so that the roarer fell to Cowie considerably under its intrinsic value as a serviceable horse.

Windy-yett and his friend waited till General Alexander had made his purchase, which was completed after brisk competition between himself and the factor, then they retired to the Railway inn for the well-earned dram.

Meantime the assistant auctioneer had just disposed of the contents of one of the rooms inside, and Effie Dougan, in company with Elspeth Marshall, was leaving the house laughing and chatting over the incidents of the sale.

"Cock her up," said the latter, "the siller has turned that woman's head, I'm thinking; a farmer's wife going for to buy an article like thon."

"Eh, she was clean set on 't," responded Mistress Dougan, "and was oot and in the room a' day like a peeweet watchin' its nest. But wasna the ither a funny bit — 'Mrs. Cowie, you're bidding again' yoursel',' says the unctioneer. 'Is it mine yet?' says she, in an unco pliskie. 'No,' says he, and she noddet her

head again." The two gossips passed on laughing.

When Cowie returned from the inn he found his wife packing some crockery in the boot of the dog-cart. She had heard from Coultarmains what her husband had paid for the horse, and this, combined with her own purchases, had produced a flush of pleasure and a feeling of uncommon amiability.

"Ye'll no guess what I've bought," she said, inviting inquiry after they had yoked, and were on their way out of the thick of the home-going vehicles.

"I saw ye putting past some delf," he said, thinking only of how he and the smith had managed the purchase of the horse.

"Na, that was nothing but some coorse crockery-gear for Nance to break, it's something that 'll surprise ye. I bought the Smiddy-yard book-case."

"What, yon great press wi' the gless doors?"

"Ay," she answered, with defiant goodnature, "the book-case and the books. I have the key in my purse. What d'ye think o' that!"

"Lord save us!" He let the whip-lash fall about Bess' ears in a way that made her think she was expected to break into a gallop, "Wo, then, woa, lass. Are ye gaun to let books oot at so much a week?"

"Na, na," she replied, "it's pairt o' my plans. I got the thing cheap wi' Bell's siller, and of course it will gang wi' Bell. Mr. Congalton is a great writer himsel', and I'm sure he'll no think onything the less o' her for having a guid leebrary o' books."

CHAPTER X

ISAAC KILGOUR COGITATES

THE scene of Isaac Kilgour's daily occupation was enclosed on three sides by hedges of thorn and privet, and on the fourth by a rubble wall, exposed to the southern sun. The wall was veined with healthful shiny branches, amongst which various fruits ripened under fostering leaves. There was a rockery in the centre of the enclosure, surrounded by a moat or trench, in which flowed constantly a crystal purl of cool spring water. On this point the walks converged, sloping downward. It was a garden of the old-fashioned type, containing gnarled bushes with red globes and pendant clusters of fruit, pots where celery blanched, solid lines of peas, cabbages, leeks, green kale, and such other vegetable varieties as could be turned to useful