"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

account at any season of the year by a thrifty house-wife in the exercise of her culinary duties. There were flower-beds and borders with roses in abundance, wallflowers whose blooms were now shed, phloxes, and other perennial plants that gave little trouble. So far as the soil was concerned, there was nothing to hinder abundant blossoming and fruiting for, as its late owner used to say, "If ye are kind to the grun' the grun' will be kind to you," and he treated his garden on this principle. Yet this enclosure, with all its natural powers of production, had one drawback — it was infested with moles. Now if there was any mundane thing that Isaac Kilgour hated more than another it was moles. The eruptive disturbance by these eident creatures of carefully prepared seed-beds, when labour and expectation were coming to fruition, was enough to ruffle a more philosophic mind than Isaac Kilgour's. He had tried traps, but the cunning "yearthly deevils" had learned to give them the go-bye. Isaac, however, was a dogged man when thwarted. There was another method recently adopted by him in dealing with these subterranean enemies which had proved more

effective in their destruction. He bought a narrow trenching spade which the smith had ground and set to the keenness of a knife-blade. With this implement he would steal out on the early summer and autumn mornings in felt slippers, and taking his stand where he could see the first quiverings of the soil, he would move noiselessly to the spot, and strike with remorseless aim into the loose earth. Isaac had attained remarkable skill in these operations, and his spade was seldom unearthed without sanguinary evidence that the enemy had suffered. He had some of the instincts of a true sportsman, and the pleasure of slaughter in this special direction had grown into a passion like fishing or shooting. The thought of it drew him early from bed. At times he would bring forth the parrot and hang the cage on some sunny spot where the inquisitive, ever-observant eye of the bird could see. "Clip the moudie, clip the moudie," it would cry encouragingly, as it watched the gardener moving cat-like to the scene of action. Then when the blow was struck it would chuckle a strange guttural laugh, and commence in a high-toned, fairly soft voice to sing what might have

been the post-mortem reflections of the mole—"Up in the morning's no for me, up in the morning ear—ley."

It was a blue, cloudless morning; such perfume-bearing roses as the garden possessed were past, but there was the scent of old-fashioned carnations and southernwood in the dewy air. The comings and goings of footsteps were visible in the grass where lines of dullness marred the diamond glitter of the dew. Isaac had already struck his spade with mortal directness six times into the rising soil. He paused to wipe the perspiration from under his cap, for there was excitement in this occupation which aided the physical exercise in giving pace to his not over active blood. The morning was too far advanced for such pastime, even although there had been moles left to tempt further mortality. The parrot had witnessed the activity of its master, and was in a flutter of garrulous excitement. Many new phrases had got into its mimic head, caught up from Eva and the governess, whose tones, as well as words, it could reproduce with remarkable accuracy. Isaac sat down on a block of wood under an umbrageous maple, and

lighting his half-filled short clay pipe, let the creature talk.

"Pretty Poll, pretty Poll—ey—clever bird—O—you bee—uty," it went on; occasionally lapsing into the vernacular, "Eh, haud yer tongue—irr ye there?—there's Janet."

Isaac sat looking dreamily at the rockery without seeing it. He was the last of his family. Old Tam Kilgour, his father, had been, to Isaac's shame, the latest survivor. He was a notorious poacher, and too fond of a dram; even otherwise he had not been a good man. Perhaps the best that could be said of him was said by Willie Faill, when he and others had been invited to see him before being "nailed doon." "Weel, weel," Willie said, scratching his head in a swither, "there lies Tam Kilgour; whatever waggin tongues might say aboot him when in life, he maks a real decent corp." Isaac had no near relatives alive that he could trace. He had been brought up in Mauchline, where in youth he was engaged as a stable-boy. Later he was transferred to Kilspindie to drive Dr. Congalton's carriage, and fill up his spare time in the garden. He and Mistress Izet had grown old together in

the same service. She was his junior by perhaps five years. In early life she had a fair dower of comeliness, to which Isaac was not insensible. It could not be said he courted her — he was rather shy for that. The young housekeeper, however, was too human to keep him altogether out of her thoughts. Probably if things had been left alone, mutual regard might have come to the fruition of matrimony. Zedie Lawson's wife was the unintentional means of putting an end to her sister's prospects in this direction. She was a presumptuous, masterful woman, but her force of character had no feminine delicacy in it. Unknown to her sister she sent for Isaac, and said bluntly to him she thought it was high time he was marrying Janet. From that moment the spell under which the young couple were insensibly creeping was broken. Janet Izet was distressed at the unwisdom, not to say immodesty, of her sister's interference; and Isaac's shyness and Janet's sense of shame took such a severe form of self-consciousness, that for many a day they never spoke to each other, unless compelled to do so by the call of duty. Out of this period of constraint they emerged in the

course of years, but it was as if they had been born again in the relationship of brother and sister. They were cognisant of each other's weaknesses, about which they spoke freely, and each other's good qualities, but of these they had no mutual converse at all.

The leaf shadows were fluttering like lark-wings on the garden walk while Isaac smoked. Physically he was exhausted with his morning's work — or sport, for it had the elements of both.

"The moudies are by for the day," he said, speaking vaguely in the air, but it had not been of the "moudies" he was thinking during the last ten minutes of reflective idleness. "There's Janet," screamed the bird at his side, and then it sent out a metallic peal of cackling laughter, as its master turned his head involuntarily toward the kitchen door, for it was indeed of her he had been idly dreaming during his reverie. The night before Mistress Izet and Isaac had been summoned into Mr. Congalton's study, where he supplemented his knowledge of the history of their connection with the house by personal inquiry. He told them it was his present intention

to remain at Kilspindie for a time, but that circumstances might occur to call him away at once, either for a considerable period or permanently. Should the latter event take place — and it was not unlikely — he would arrange, in virtue of their long service to his brother, that such provision should be made as would help to keep them from want during the remainder of their lives. It was his wish that in the meantime they should continue their duties under him as they had done under his late brother, but he thought it due to them, as old and faithful servants, to make them aware of his intentions, that they might be in no perplexity about the future.

Isaac had retired to his castle of one apartment as if it had been a baronial residence. Indeed the assurance of being preserved from actual want was to him more than a superfluity of wealth, for, as he thought in his own mind, money beyond what is requisite to satisfy one's personal needs as often as not brings the reverse of happiness. During the watches of the night he had rolled this sweet morsel of intelligence under a metaphorical tongue. It was so comforting to possess a secure sense of immediate

independence. Under its stimulus he had risen early and killed six moles. But as the day advanced the mental horizon had widened and let in other considerations. For over thirty years he had gone in and out of Broomfields finding his simple prayer for daily bread answered with unfailing regularity. Breakfast at eight, dinner at twelve, tea at five, and brose before going to bed, barring the interference of professional irregularities, but even when these infrequent exigencies intervened something hot and toothsome was always forthcoming by the time he got the mare stabled and fed. Such washing, dressing, and mending as he required were done so unobtrusively that he almost forgot he had this blessing also to be thankful for. Now and again he was partially awakened to the consideration of what was being done for him by the remark — "Ye'll gang on wearing thae flannens till they'll no wash white," or, "Ye maun get a pair or twa o' new socks for yer feet, or ye'll sune be like a body I kent in Houston parish ——" Besides this, to a lonely man whose temper sometimes gave way by contact with an unfeeling world outside, it was always a com-

fort to have some one to scold. Mistress Izet knew his constitution and did not speak back, but gave him physic; moreover, she was always telling him things, and even when he did not care to listen to her talk she was there. These matters had passed through his mind in vague procession while he was putting on his clothes, and now he began to see them in a clearer light. Mere monetary considerations are not everything in the lot of a human being. He had not been aware that Janet's presence was to any great extent a comfort to him till he commenced deliberately to think about the probability of losing it. Isaac had reached this point in his ruminations, when the parrot screamed, "There's Janet," and with that personage on his mind he naturally turned his head to be greeted with an eldrich laugh, as if the uncanny creature knew his thoughts. What if Mr. Congalton went away altogether, as he said was likely? The household would be broken up, and the place taken probably by the Bleachfield people, who would do their own gardening. Janet might go to that "randy" woman, her sister, and Zedie would not weave a stroke as long

as her money lasted. As for him, he could get a cog at the table of Sandy Munn or William Caughie. Sandy was a dyker, and had an immoderately large and needy family in which there could be no repose. Then again the thought of William Caughie's Sabbatic face and attenuated red nose bestridden by the horn specs confronting him at every meal aggravated him into articulate utterance.

"No, by the man!" he said, "no." This was his one form of abjuration when speaking under excitement. If things could go on as they were, he felt he could be more thankful for his mercies than ever he had been before. Who would put up with the parrot as Janet had done, or indeed, for that matter, who would put up with himself?

"Isaac, Isaac, let the bruit awa'." The gardener put past his pipe. Then he rose and went over to the cage.

"No," he said, speaking to the bird with an unusually grave expression of face, "we maunna be separated, you and me. We canna mak' new friends at oor time o' day."

The bird evidently concluded that his master was in a conversational mood, and that it would

not be consistent with sociable fitness that the talk should be all on one side, so it set its voice to the soft high tones of the governess' voice, and commenced to sing — "Up in the morning's no for me, up in the morning ear — ley." Then coming down to the normal pitch, it screamed with a flash of excitement in its black eyes — "Isaac, there's Janet. Irr ye there?"

As a matter of coincidence this was true, for at that moment the housekeeper appeared at the garden gate.

"Your parritch is dished and on the table," she said; "dinna stan' there palarvering wi' that bruit till they're dead cauld."

Isaac was glad to be brought back from the thought of uncongenial possibilities by the voice of his old friend, and was nothing loath to obey the rude summons. The cogitations of the morning had brought into the life of this lonely man new thoughts and new feelings, which seemed to trend entirely to one result. He took the cage in his hand. "Oo — ay," he said, "we maun tak' time to think farder o't, my pretty Poll. We have been pushed into a bonny maze

this morning, but ony maze that ever I have seen had aye ae ootlet."

This remark provoked the parrot into a rasping paroxysm of laughter, which continued till they were half-way up the outside stair.