ing manner. "I declare it's like a day in June."

Mitchell thanked her, but gave signs of proceeding up the loaning. His heart was too palpably in his face, and his feelings at the moment were not in harmony with the commonplaces of farmyard talk. He required solitude, air, and largeness of prospect to encompass this wealth of pleasurable emotion. He was scarce out of earshot, so incomprehensible are the antics of lovers, when he commenced to whistle a psalm tune to unreasonably quick time. The leafy hollows of Endrick wood were vocal with the liquid notes of a wooing blackbird, but the grey lark of love in his own welkin was drowning all other sounds with palpitating melody. Further on he put his right hand on the top of a double-barred gate, and leaped over with the agility of joyous health. Before him, at the other side of the field, stood Coultarmains. The old steading, with the fleecy column of smoke above the kitchen chimney, and sheltered by the protecting arm of a bourtree hedge, seemed already to smile with the radiant presence of Bell.

CHAPTER XX

FATEFUL INTELLIGENCE

On the morning of the day on which Isaac Kilgour and Janet Izet entered their humble dwelling on the glebe land as man and wife, Richard Cowie, dressed in his Sunday clothes, drove through the village on his way to Airtoun. His object was to induce Mr. Sibbald and Dr. Congalton's trustees to revert to the arrangement which, a few months before, his wife had instructed him to decline. For days he had been irresolute about the journey. He had even confided his doubts to the smith, who agreed with him that the plan could not now be carried through in Mr. Congalton's absence; but Mrs. Cowie held that a majority of the "daers" was sufficient to settle the matter, and the stronger will at length prevailed. No one, however, was prepared for the news which Windy-yett brought

back with him in the evening. He blurted it out in a sentence, as his steaming horse paused for an instant at the smithy door. The candle-maker was at a funeral in a neighbouring parish, and was not there to hear; then he extended it more respectfully to Mr. Lonen, whom he saw on the other side of the hedge, as the horse zig-zagged leisurely up the brae. "It's most mortal a'-thegether," the smith had exclaimed, striking his thigh. The school-master struck his spade deeply into the earth as a specific mark of exclamation; uttered some phrases of academic horror, and ran out the back way to convey the news to the manse. Disregarding the ruts in the loaning, Cowie sped on to Windy-yett at a pace reckless of springs and wheels, and casting the reins to the "orra" man, jumped to the ground and made hurriedly for his own door.

"Lord keep us, Ritchie, have ye been drinking?" cried his wife, whose portly presence entirely filled the space he essayed to enter, casting her eyes the while from his feet to his flushed face.

"Congalton's droont," he exclaimed, disregarding the unjust insinuation.

"Droont," she reiterated, her human heart getting the better of all selfish considerations. "Lord preserve us, Ritchie Cowie, are ye telling the truth? Puir man! How cam ye by sic news?"

"Weel, ye see, when I gangs owre to Airtoun I finds Mr. Sibbald in a bonny wye. He was gaun oot in a gey hurry. 'Excuse me,' says he, 'tell your business to my clerk, for I have just received news of poor Congalton's death.' 'Death!' quoth I, but before the word had richt left my tongue he was roun' the corner."

"Save us — and did you tell your business to the clerk?"

"Na, no likely. I said I had come to speir for Mr. Congalton, but his maister had directed me to him for particlars."

"My sang! that was wisely dune — ye never did a better thing. Weel?"

"'Oh!' says he, 'there's no particlars. The telegram cam frae the newspaper office only an hour syne — here it is — "Congalton drowned, letter and newspaper following with fuller news."'"

"And wi' that ye left?"

"Wi' that I left," he said.

Mrs. Cowie returned to the dairy to make up the butter, and her husband retired to divest himself of his Sunday clothes. Her feelings were so mixed that she did not care just then to reveal them even to her husband. Nan Pinkerton's forecast of news from the sea had proved true. She tossed and slapped the butter into prints mechanically. Her mind reverted to their last interview after his daughter's death. He was pale and thoughtful, but "ceevil spoken by-ord'nar." She remembered how he was dressed, and how the bonny diamond ring on his finger sent glints of light through the room as he moved his hand. "That too would gang to the bottom wi' him; maybe his body would yet be found" — she was thinking half aloud — "but thae heathen black folk would never send hame a valuable thing like that. Droont!" she said audibly, "puir man; and Bell micht have been a widow. I was gey headstrong to get her married to a gentleman, but I'll never mislippen Providence again."

The sad news soon found its way to every ear in Kilspindie. The smith went across and told it to the candle-maker on his return.

Tinny Walker, seeing the solemn crack and the long faces from his corner window, left his soldering-bolt in the fire and hurried to the Brig-end. Jimsy Waugh heard it when he came over from Millend for threepence worth of dips. M'Aull the twister, and William Caughie were busy setting a new web, when Mrs. Caughie, who had been "owre the gate strauchtin Nancy Beedam's hindmost bairn," came in and told them something was "gaun through hauns" at the Brig-end. And so the neighbours gathered, "speired," and, for a space, speculated, then hurried homeward to break the monotony of their uneventful lives with this fateful news.

"That'll be gey sair bit to the pair on the kirk brae," Zedie Lawson remarked to his wife when they had mastered composure.

"Ser' them richt," she replied unfeelingly; "them that could belittle their ain relations. They were unco big aboot their allooance, but they'll maybe no carry sic a high head noo." These remarks referred to Isaac Kilgour and his wife. Mrs. Lawson being the senior, wished to see her sister married "wice-like under her ain roof." Isaac, however, did not like her officious interference. He bore it for a time, but kept

his own counsel till the banns were proclaimed. Mrs. Lawson believed in a Friday's marriage. She would draw upon Janet's savings for such "needfu' cleeding" as Zedie and she required, and make an appropriate feast. Isaac never let on, but secured the services of the carrier and his sister, went up to the manse on the Tuesday, and returned with his wife to their own small house on the brae for a "touzie tea."

Zedie sat for a minute with his mouth pursed as if whistling a tune, not yet having forgot the slight that had been put on them.

"Yes," he said, "cock them up wi' an allooance. They canna think that we'll be vexed for them, for they did a real illset thing."

A copy of the London paper came in due course. The notice of the striking event it contained was copied into the local weekly newspaper. It told that the brig *Minerva*, of Panama, sailed from that port on Sunday, February 28, under the command of Captain Pierre de Linkskie, with a cargo of oil and canvas for Callao. Her burthen was about 114 tons. The crew consisted of seven persons, including the captain and his son, a boy twelve years old. She also carried a passenger named Congalton,

a representative of an English newspaper. At three o'clock on the Monday morning, a week after their departure, they were forced to heave to in a gale of wind. Lying under close-reefed maintop-sail, and balanced reefed mainsail, a heavy sea struck the vessel and she suddenly capsized, turning completely over bottom up. The only person on deck at the time was the mate, named Bradford, who was instantly engulphed in the ocean, but on coming to the surface he was fortunate in getting on some floating wreckage. Supporting himself in the lee of the wreck, he passed the night and most of the next day, when in the afternoon a small coasting steamer hove in sight, and he was taken on board. They passed a hawser to the *Minerva* and took her in tow, but during the next night the gale freshened, the tow-line had to be cut, and the wreck was left to the mercy of the sea.

"Mr. Congalton," continued the *Despatch*, "whose untimely fate we regret to announce, was one of the most reliable and energetic of journalists. His experiences as our war correspondent were recently given to the world in book form. He went out to Peru as our special

commissioner to watch over events in connection with the rupture between the Spanish Government and the South American Republic, and landed safely at Colon, but missing the mail steamer at Panama he evidently took passage on board the ill-fated *Minerva*. He was a man of kindly nature, infinite resource, and unbounded courage."

The candle-maker and the carrier got the local weekly between them at a reduced rate, when it was four days old. Zedie Lawson borrowed it and read the account of the incident to his wife. After the wedding she had made up her mind never to darken her sister's door again, but the resolve gave way — not on the side of magnanimity.

"I'll step owre this meenent," she said, "and read this to the pensheners." She went out and had gone as far as the manse when something occurred that altered her intention, so she stepped up and called on Mrs. Caughie instead.

Mrs. Caughie was a tall woman with a stoop in the shoulders. She was reckoned very "skilly in weans' troubles," could "greet" with the best, and was indispensable when there was a death in the house. In the main she was a helpful

woman to the neighbours. Her manner was funereal, and she spoke with a "sneevel." Mrs. Caughie occupied a higher platform than Babby Lawson, because her husband was an elder and Zedie Lawson was not. The latter, moreover, was but a gingham weaver, while William wove gauze. Still, Babby Lawson had the assurance to go into any society when she had news to tell. The incident that had diverted the latter from her purpose was that as she went round by the kirk, the governess, dressed in mourning, alighted from a carriage that had driven her to the manse brae, and "sailed doon" to her sister's bothie.

"Dressed in mournings, said ye?" inquired Mrs. Caughie, with so much interest that she upset the cog on her lap into which she was grating potatoes to make starch for her husband's linen.

"Ay, dressed in mournings," she replied.

"Was it deep?"

"No dead deep — a black gown, a bonnet wi' a bit crape, and a black veil."

"Did ye no follow and get the news — she'd have something to tell?"

"I didna need nae news; the paper here tells a' that's ever likely to be kent."

"Ay, woman, William was reading that. It's a sad story. To think he hadna an hour to mak' peace wi' 's Maker. It's said he never darkened a kirk door, and that he wrote godless stories and things on the Sabbath day. It's like a judgment, but there's maybe some private message; the governess wouldna drive a' the way here for nothing. Ye should have followed in, woman; but I suppose you're no great wi' your sister. Did she no speir ye to the marriage?" Mrs. Caughie had heard Lexy McLennan's version of that story, but wanted to get it from the other side.

"Marriage!" she replied, in a tone that showed how strong her feelings were, "did ever ye ken the like o't? To think that they should march up to the manse wi' the carrier and his sister, when they had the hoose o' a near relation to get married in — I feel black affrontit." Mrs. Caughie's knotted fingers were busy with the grater. "I'm tauld it was that dour ettercap Isaac, but, my certie, he'll no carry sic a high head, noo that the allooance is stopped."

"Isaac's a queer craitur, and has wyes o' his ain," was Mrs. Caughie's guarded reply.

"What are ye saying aboot Isaac?" inquired the gauze weaver, coming in with stealthy step, his thin nose shining like a cameo under the pinch of the fresh wind.

"We were just talking aboot the deplorable end o' his late maister, and aboot his and Janet's allooance being stopped."

"Allooance," he reiterated, "they're better off than ever. Miss Hazlet has been owre to Kilspindie wi' a message from Mr. Sibbald to say that Mr. Congalton has pensioned them baith for life in his will."

Mrs. Caughie gazed at her husband with a doubtful, questioning look.

"But, William, didna the minister tell ye the doctor's siller would gang to the Cowies if he dee't?"

"So he did, but the man had siller o' his ain." William pushed the horn specs above his eyebrows, walked to the ben part of the house, and settled down to his loom. Was he, an elder of the kirk, going to "palaver wi' a backsliding clypin' woman like Babby Lawson — no like."