

III.

IN MARGET'S GARDEN.

The cart track to Whinnie Knowe was commanded by a gable window, and Whinnie boasted that Marget had never been token unawares. Tramps finding every door locked, and no sign of life anywhere, used to express their mind in the "close," and return by the way they came, while ladies from Kildrummie, fearful lest they should put Mrs. Howe out, were met at the garden gate by Marget in her Sabbath dress, and brought into a set tea as if they had been invited weeks before.

Whinnie gloried most in the discomfiture of the Tory agent, who had vainly hoped to coerce him in the stack-yard without Marget's presence, as her intellectual contempt for the Conservative party knew no bounds.

"Sall she saw him slip aff the road afore the last stile, and wheep roond the fit o' the gairden wa' like a tod [fox] aifter the chickens.

"It's a het day, Maister Anderson,' says Marget frae the gairden, lookin' doon on him as calm as ye like. 'Yir surely no gaein' to pass oor hoose without a gless o' milk?'

"Wud ye believe it, he wes that upset he left without sayin' 'vote,' and Drumsheugh telt

me next market that his langidge aifterwards cudna be printed."

When George came home for the last time, Marget went back and forward all afternoon from his bedroom to the window, and hid herself beneath the laburnum to see his face as the cart stood before the stile. It told her plain what she had feared, and Marget passed through her Gethsemane with the gold blossoms falling on her face. When their eyes met, and before she helped him down, mother and son understood.

"Ye mind what I told ye, o' the Greek mothers, the day I left. Weel, I wud hae liked to have carried my shield, but it wasna to be, so I've come home on it." As they went slowly up the garden walk, "I've got my degree, a double first, mathematics and classics."

"Ye've been a gude soldier, George, and faithfu'."

"Unto death, a'm dootin', mother."

"Na," said Marget, "unto life."

Drumtochy was not a heartening place in sickness, and Marget, who did not think our thoughts, endured much consolation at her neighbour's hands. It is said that in cities visitors congratulate a patient on his good looks, and deluge his family with instances of recovery. This would have seemed to us shallow and unfeeling, besides being a 'temptin' o' Providence," which might not have intended to go to extremities, but on a challenge of this kind had no alternative. Sickness was regarded

as a distinction tempered with judgment, and favoured people found it difficult to be humble. I always thought more of Peter MacIntosh, when the mysterious "tribble" that needed the Perth doctor made no difference in his manner, and he passed his snuff box across the seat before the long prayer as usual, but in this indifference to privileges Peter was exceptional.

You could never meet Kirsty Stewart on equal terms, although she was quite affable to anyone who knew his place.

"Ay," she said, on my respectful allusion to her experience, "a've seen mair than most. It doesna become me to boast, but tho' I say it as sudna, I hae buried a' my ain fouk."

Kirsty had a "way" in sick visitin', consisting in a certain cadence of the voice and arrangement of the face, which was felt to be soothing and complimentary.

"Yir aboot again, a'm glad to see," to me after my accident, "but yir no dune wi' that leg; na, na, Jeems—that was ma second son—scrapit his shin aince, tho' no so bad as ye've dune, a'm hearing [for I had denied Kirsty the courtesy of an inspection]. It's sax year syne noo, and he got up and wes traivellin' fell hearty like yersel'. But he be to good dwam [sicken] in the end of the year, and sougheed awa' in the spring. Ay, ay, when arribble comes ye never ken hoo it'll end. A' thocht I wud come up and speir for ye. A body needs comfort gin he's sober [ill]."

When I found George wrapped in his plaid

beside the brier bush, whose roses were no whiter than his cheeks, Kirsty was already installed as comforter in the parlour, and her drone came through the open window.

"Ay, ay, Marget, sae it's come to this. Weel, we daurna complain, ye ken. Be thankfu' ye haena lost your man and five sons, besides twa sisters and a brither, no to mention cousins. That wud be somethin to speak aboot, and Losh keep's, there's nae saying but he micht hang on a whilie. Ay, ay, it's a sair blow aifter a' that wes in the papers. I wes feared when I heard o' the papers; 'Lat weel alane,' says I to the Dominie; 'ye 'ill bring a judgment on the laddie wi' yir blawin'.' But ye micht as weel hae spoken to the hills. Domsie's a thrann body at the best, and he was clean infatuat' wi' George. Ay, ay, it's an awfu' lesson, Marget, no to mak' idols o' our bairns, for that's naethin' else than provokin' the Almichty."

It was at this point that Marget gave way and scandalized Drumtochty, which held that obtrusive prosperity was an irresistible provocation to the higher powers, and that a skilful deprecation of our children was a policy of safety.

"Did ye say the Almichty? I'm thinkin' that's ower grand a name for your God, Kirsty. What wud ye think o' a faither that brocht hame some bonnie thing frae the fair for ane o' his bairns, and when the puir bairn wes pleased wi' it, tore it oot o' his hand and flung it into the fire? Eh, woman, he wud be a

meeserable, cankered, jealous body. Kirsty, wumman, when the Almichty sees a mither bound up in her laddie, I toll ye He is sair pleased in His heaven, for mind ye hoo He loved His ain Son. Besides, a'm judgin' that nane o' us can love anither withoot lovin' Him, or hurt anither withoot hurtin' Him.

"Oh, I ken weel that George is gaein' to leave us; but it's no because the Almichty is jealous o' him or me, no likely. It cam' to me last nicht that He needs my laddie for some grand wark in the ither world, and that's hoo George has his bukes brocht oot tae the garden and studies a' the day. He wants to be ready for his kingdom, just as he trachled in the bit schule o' Drumtochty for Edinboro'. I hoped he would hae been a minister o' Christ's Gospel here, but he 'ill be judge over many cities yonder. A'm no denyin', Kirsty, that it's a trial, but I hae licht on it, and naethin' but gude thochts o' the Almichty."

Drumtochty understood that Kirsty had dealty faithfully with Marget for pride and presumption, but all we heard was, "Losh keep us a'."

When Marget came out and sat down beside her son, her face was shining. Then she saw the open window.

"I didna ken."

"Never mind, mither, there's nae secrets atween us, and it gar'd my heart leap to hear ye speak up like yon for God, and to know yir content. Div ye mind the nicht I called for

ye, mother, and ye gave me the Gospel about God?"

Marget slipped her hand into George's, and he let his head rest on her shoulder. The likeness flashed upon me in that moment, the earnest deep-set gray eyes, the clean-cut firm jaw, and the tender mobile lips, that blend of apparent austerity and underlying romance that make the pathos of a Scottish face.

"There had been a Revival man here," George explained to me, "and he was preaching on hell. As it grew dark a candle was lighted, and I can still see his face as in a picture, a hard-visaged man. He looked down at us laddies in the front, and asked us if we knew what hell was like. By this time we were that terrified none of us could speak, but I whispered 'No.'"

"Then he rolled up a piece of paper and held it in the flame, and we saw it burn and glow and shrivel up and fall in black dust.

"Think," said he, and he leaned over the desk, and spoke in a gruesome whisper which made the cold run down our backs, 'that yon paper was your finger, one finger only of your hand, and it burned like that for ever and ever, and think of your hand and your arm and your whole body all on fire, never to go out.' We shuddered that you might have heard the form creak. 'That is hell, and that is where ony laddie will go who does not repent and believe.'

"It was like Dante's Inferno, and I dared not take my eyes off his face. He blew out

the candle, and we crept to the door trembling, not able to say one word.

"That night I could not sleep, for I thought I might be in the fire before morning. It was harvest time, and the moon was filling the room with cold, clear light. From my bed I could see the stooks standing in rows upon the field, and it seemed like the judgment day.

"I was only a wee laddie, and I did what we all do in trouble, I cried for my mother.

"Ye hae na forgotten, mither, the fricht that was on me that nicht."

"Never," said Marget, "and never can; it's hard wark for me to keep frae hating that man, dead or alive. Geordie gripped me wi' baith his wee airms round my neck, and he cries over and over and over again, 'Is yon God?'"

"Ay, and ye kissed me, mither, and ye said (it's like yesterday), 'Yir safe with me,' and ye telt me that God might punish me to make me better if I was bad, but that he wud never torture ony puir soul, for that cud dae nae guid, and was the Devil's wark. Ye asked me:

"'Am I a guid mother tae ye?' and when I could dae naethin' but hold, ye said, 'Be sure God maun be a hantle kinder.'

"The truth came to me as with a flicker, and I cuddled down into my bed, and fell asleep in His love as in my mother's arms.

"Mither," and George lifted up his head, "that was my conversion, and, mither dear, I hae longed a' thro' thae college studies for the

day when ma mooth wud be opened wi' this evangel."

Marget's was an old-fashioned garden, with pinks and daisies and forget-me-nots, with sweet-scented wall-flower and thyme and moss roses, where nature had her way, and gracious thoughts could visit one without any jarring note. As George's voice softened to the close, I caught her saying, "His servants shall see His face," and the peace of Paradise fell upon us in the shadow of death.

The night before the end George was carried out to his corner, and Domsie, whose heart was nigh unto the breaking, sat with him the afternoon. They used to fight the College battle over again, with their favourite classics beside them, but this time none of them spoke of books. Marget was moving about the garden, and she told me that George looked at Domsie wistfully, as if he had something to say and knew not how to do it.

After a while he took a book from below his pillow, and began, like one thinking over his words:

"Maister Jamieson, ye hae been a guid freend tae me, the best I ever hed aifter my mither and father. Wull ye tak' this buik for a keep-sake o' yir grateful scholar? I's a Latin 'Imitation,' Dominie, and it's bonnie printin'. Ye mind hoo ye gave me yir ain Vergil, and said he was a kind o' Pagan sanct. Noo, here is my sanct, and div ye ken I've often thoct Vergil saw His day afar off, and was glad.

Wull ye read it, Dominie, for my sake, and

maybe ye 'ill come to see—" and George could not find words for more.

But Domsie understood. "Ma laddie, ma laddie, that I luv better than onythin' on earth, I'll read it till I die, and, George, I'll tell ye what livin' man doesna ken. When I was your verra age I had a cruel trial, and ma heart was turned frae faith. The classics hae been my Bible, though I said naethin' to ony man against Christ. He aye seemed beyond man, and noo the veesion o' Him has come to me in this gairden. Laddie, ye hae dune far mair for me than I ever did for you. Wull ye mak' a prayer for yir auld dominie afore we part?"

There was a thrush singing in the birches and a sound of bees in the air, when George prayed in a low, soft voice, with a little break in it:

"Lord Jesus, remember my dear maister, for he's been a kind freend to me and mony a puir laddie in Drumtochty. Bind up his sair heart and give him licht at eventide, and may the maister and his scholars meet some mornin' where the schule never skails, in the kingdom o' oor Father."

Twice Domsie said Amen, and it seemed as the voice of another man, and then he kissed George upon the forehead; but what they said Marget did not wish to hear.

When he passed out at the garden gate, the westering sun was shining golden, and the face of Domsie was like unto that of a little child.

IV.

A SCHOLAR'S FUNERAL.

Drumtochty never acquitted itself with credit at a marriage, having no natural aptitude for gaiety, and being haunted with anxiety lest any "hicht" should end in a "howe," but the parish had a genius for funerals. It was long mentioned with a just sense of merit that an English undertaker, chancing on a "beerial" with us, had no limits to his admiration. He had been disheartened to despair all his life by the ghastly efforts of chirpy little Southerners to look solemn on occasions, but his dreams were satisfied at the sight of men like Drumsheugh and Hillocks in their Sabbath blacks. Nature lent an initial advantage in face, but it was an instinct in the blood that brought our manner to perfection, and nothing could be more awful than a group of those austere figures, each man gazing into vacancy without a trace of expression, and refusing to recognize his nearest neighbour by word or look. Drumtochty gave itself to a "beerial" with chastened satisfaction, partly because it lay near to the sorrow of things, and partly because there was nothing of speculation in it. "Ye can hae little rael plesure in a merrige," explained our

gravedigger, in whom the serious side had been perhaps abnormally developed, "for ye never ken hoo it will end; but there's nae risk about a 'beerial.'"

It came with a shock upon townsmen that the ceremony began with a "service o' speerits," and that an attempt of the Free Kirk minister to replace this by the reading of Scripture was resisted as an "innovation." Yet everyone admitted that the seriousness of Drumtochty pervaded and sanctified this function. A tray of glasses was placed on a table with great solemnity by the "wricht," who made no sign and invited none. You might have supposed that the circumstance had escaped the notice of the company, so abstracted and unconscious was their manner, had it not been that two graven images a minute later are standing at the table.

"Ye 'ill taste, Tammas," with settled melancholy.

"Na, na; I've nae incleenation the day; it's an awfu' dispensation, this, Jeems. She wud be barely saxty."

"Ay, ay, but we maun keep up the body sae lang as we're here, Tammas."

"Weel, puttin' it that way, a'm not sayin' but yir richt," yielding unwillingly to the force of circumstance.

"We're here the day and there the morn, Tammas. She wes a fine wumman—Mistress Stirton—a weel-livin' wumman: this 'ill be a blend, a'm thinkin'."

"She slippit aff sudden in the end; a'm

judgin' it's frae the Muirtown grocer; but a body canna discreeminate on a day like this."

Before the glasses are empty all idea of drinking is dissipated, and one has a vague impression that he is at church.

It was George Howe's funeral that broke the custom and closed the "service." When I came into the garden where the neighbors were gathered, the "wricht" was removing his tray, and not a glass had been touched. Then I knew that Drumtochty had a sense of the fitness of things, and was stirred to its depths.

"Ye saw the wricht carry in his tray," said Drumsheugh, as we went home from the kirkyard. "Weel, yon's the last sicht o't ye'll get, or a'm no Drumsheugh. I've nae objection masel' to a neebur tastin' at a funeral, a' the mair if he's come frae the upper end o' the pairish, and ye ken I dinna hold wi' thae teetotal fouk. A'm ower auld in the horn to change noo. But there's times and seasons, as the Gude Buik says, and it wud hae been an awfu' like business tae luik at a gless in Marget's gairden, and puir Domsie standing in ahent the brier bush as if he cud never lift his heid again. Ye may get shairper fouk in the uptak', but ye'll no get a pairish with better feelin's. It 'ill be a kind o' sateesfaction tae Marget when she hears o't. She was aye against tastin', and a'm judgin' her tribble has ended it at beerials."

"Man, it was hard on some o' yon lads the day, but there wesna ane o' them made a mudge. I keepit my eye on Posty, but he

never lookit the way it wes. He's a drouthy body, but he hes his feelin's, hes Posty."

Before the Doctor began the prayer, Whinnie took me up to the room.

"There's twa o' Geordie's College freends with Marget, grand scholars a'm telt, and there's anither I canna weel mak' oot. He's terrible cast doon, and Marget speaks as if she kent him."

It was a low-roofed room, with a box bed and some pieces of humble furniture, fit only for a laboring man. But the choice treasures of Greece and Rome lay on the table, and on a shelf beside the bed College prizes and medals, while everywhere were the roses he loved. His peasant mother stood beside the body of her scholar son, whose hopes and thoughts she had shared, and through the window came the bleating of distant sheep. I was the idyl of Scottish University life.

George's friends were characteristic men, each of his own type, and could only have met in the commonwealth of letters. One was of an ancient Scottish house which had fought for Mary against the Lords of the Congregation, followed Prince Charlie to Culloden, and were High Church and Tory to the last drop of their blood. Ludovic Gordon left Harrow with the reputation of a classic, and had expected to be first at Edinboro'. It was Gordon, in fact, that Domsie feared in the great war, but he proved second to Marget's son, and being of the breed of Prince Jonathan, which is the same the world over, he came to love our David

as his own soul. The other, a dark little man, with a quick, fiery eye, was a western Celt, who had worried his way from a fishing croft in Barra to be an easy first in philosophy at Edinboro', and George and Ronald Maclean were as brothers, because there is nothing so different as Scottish and Highland blood.

"Maister Gordon," said Marget, "this is George's Homer, and he bade me tell you that he coonted yir freendship ain o' the gifts o' God."

For a brief space Gordon was silent, and, when he spoke, his voice sounded strange in that room.

"Your son was the finest scholar of my time, and a very perfect gentleman. He was also my true friend, and I pray God to console his mother." And Ludovic Gordon bowed low over Marget's worn hand as if she had been a queen.

Marget lifted Plato, and it seemed to me that day as if the dignity of our Lady of Sorrows had fallen upon her.

"This is the buik George chose for you, Maister Maclean, for he aye said to me ye hed been a prophet and shown him mony deep things."

The tears sprang to the Celt's eyes.

"It wass like him to make all other men better than himself," with the soft, sad Highland accent; "and a proud woman you are to hef been his mother."

The third man waited at the window till the scholars left, and then I saw he was none

of that kind, but one who had been a slave of sin and now was free.

"Andra Chaumers, George wished ye tae hev his Bible, and he expecks ye tae keep the tryst."

"God helping me, I will," said Chalmers, hoarsely; and from the garden ascended a voice, "O God, who art a very present help in trouble."

The Doctor's funeral prayer was one of the glories of the parish, compelling even the Free Kirk to reluctant admiration, although they hinted that its excellence was rather of the letter than the spirit, and regarded its indiscriminate charity with suspicion. It opened with a series of extracts from the Psalms, relieved by two excursions into the minor prophets, and led up to a sonorous recitation of the problem of immortality from Job, with its triumphant solution in the peroration of the fifteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians. Drumtochty men held their breath till the Doctor reached the crest of the hill (Hillocks disgraced himself once by dropping his staff at the very moment when the Doctor was passing from Job to Paul), and then we relaxed while the Doctor descended to local detail. It was understood that it took twenty years to bring the body of this prayer to perfection, and any change would have been detected and re-sented.

The Doctor made a good start, and had already sighted Job, when he was carried out of his course by a sudden current, and began to

speak to God about Marget and her son, after a very simple fashion that brought a lump to the throat, till at last, as I imagine, the sight of the laddie working at his Greek in the study of a winter night came up before him, and the remnants of the great prayer melted like an iceberg in the Gulf Stream.

"Lord, hae peety upon us, for we a' loved him, and we were a' prood o' him."

After the Doctor said "Amen" with majesty, one used to look at his neighbor, and the other would shut his eyes and shake his head, meaning "There's no use asking me, for it simply can't be better done by living man." This time no one remembered his neighbor, because every eye was fixed on the Doctor. Drumtochty was identifying its new minister.

"It may be that I hef judged him hardly," said Lachlan Campbell, one of the Free Kirk Highlanders, and our St. Dominic. "I shall never again deny that the root of the matter is in the man, although much choked with the tarès of worldliness and Arminianism."

"He is a goot man, Lachlan," replied Donald Menzies, another Celt, and he was our St. Francis, "for every one that loveth is born of God."

There was no hearse in Drumtochty, and we carried our dead by relays of four, who waded every stream unless more than knee deep, the rest following in straggling, picturesque procession over the moor and across the stepping stones. Before we started, Marget came out

and arranged George's white silken hood upon the coffin with roses in its folds.

She swept us into one brief flush of gratitude, from Domsie to Posty.

"Neeburs, ye were a' his freends, and he wanted ye tae ken hoo yir trust wes mickle help tae him in his battle."

There was a stir within us, and it came to birth in Drumsheugh of all men.

"Marget Hoo, this is no the day for mony words, but there's juist ae heart in Drumtochty, and it's sair."

No one spoke to Domsie as we went down the cart track, with the ripe corn standing on either side, but he beckoned Chalmers to walk with him.

"Ye hae heard him speak o' me, then, Maister Jamieson?"

"Ay, oftentimes, and he said once that ye were hard driven, but that ye had trampled Satan under yir feet."

"He didna tell ye all, for if it hadna been for George Howe I wudna been worth callin' a man this day. One night when he was workin' hard for his honors examination, and his disease was heavy upon him, puir fellow, he sought me oot where I was, and wouldna leave till I cam' wi' him.

"Go home," I said, "Howe; it's death for ye to be oot in this sleet and cold. Why not leave me to lie in the bed I hae made?"

"He took me by the arm into a passage. I see the gaslicht on his white face, and the shining o' his eyes.

"Because I have a mother——"

"Dominie, he pulled me oot o' hell."

"Me tae, Andra, but no your hell. Ye mind the Roman Triumph, when a general cam' hame wi' his spoils. Laddie, we're the captives that go with his chariot up the Capitol."

Donald Menzies was a man of moods, and the Doctor's prayer had loosed his imagination so that he saw visions.

"Look," said he, as we stood on a ridge, "I hef seen it before in the book of Joshua."

Below the bearers had crossed a burn on foot, and were ascending the slope where an open space of deep green was fringed with purple heather.

"The ark hass gone over Jordan, and George will have come into the Land of Promise."

The September sunshine glinted on the white silk George won with his blood, and fell like a benediction on the two figures that climbed the hard ascent close after the man they loved.

Strangers do not touch our dead in Drumtochty, but the eight of nearest blood lower the body into the grave. The order of precedence is keenly calculated, and the loss of a merited cord can never be forgiven. Marget had arranged everything with Whinnie, and all saw the fitness. His father took the head, and the feet [next in honor] he gave to Domsie.

"Ye maun dae it. Marget said ye were o' his ain bluid."

On the right side the cords were handed to the Doctor, Gordon, and myself; and on the left to Drumsheugh, Maclean, and Chalmers.

Domsie lifted the hood for Marget, but the roses he gently placed on George's name. Then with bent, uncovered heads, and in unbroken silence, we buried all that remained of our scholar.

We always waited till the grave was filled and the turf laid down, a trying quarter of an hour. Ah, me! the thud of the spade on your mother's grave! None gave any sign of what he felt save Drumsheugh, whose sordid slough had slipped off from a tender heart, and Chalmers, who went behind a tombstone and sobbed aloud. Not even Posty asked the reason so much as by a look, and Drumtochty, as it passed, made as though it did not see. But I marked that the Dominie took Chalmers home and walked all the way with him to Kildrummie station next morning. His friends erected a granite cross over George's grave, and it was left to Domsie to choose the inscription. There was a day when it would have been "Whom the gods love die young." Since then Domsie had seen the kingdom of God, and this is graven where the roses bloomed fresh every summer for twenty years till Marget was laid with her son:

GEORGE HOWE, M. A.,

Died September 22d, 1869,

Aged 21.

"They shall bring the glory and honor of the nations
into it."

It was a late November day when I went to see George's memorial, and the immortal hope was burning low in my heart; but as I stood before that cross, the sun struggled from behind a black watery bank of cloud, and picked out every letter of the Apocalypse in gold.