

## A HIGHLAND MYSTIC.

### I.

#### WHAT EYE HATH NOT SEEN.

Strange ministers who came to assist at the Free Kirk Sacrament were much impressed with the elders, and never forgot the transfiguration of Donald Menzies, which used to begin about the middle of the "action" sermon, and was completed at the singing of the last Psalm. Once there was no glory, because the minister, being still young, expounded a new theory of the atonement of German manufacture, and Donald's face was piteous to behold. It haunted the minister for months, and brought to confusion a promising course of sermons on the contribution of Hegel to Christian thought. Donald never laid the blame of such calamities on the preacher, but accepted them as a just judgment on his blindness of heart.

"We hef had the open vision," Donald explained to his friend Lachlan Campbell, who distributed the responsibility in another fashion, "and we would not see—so the veil hass fallen."

Donald sat before the pulpit and filled the hearts of nervous probationers with dismay,

not because his face was critical, but because it seemed non-conducting, upon which their best passages would break like spray against a rock. It was by nature the dullest you ever saw, with hair descending low upon the forehead, and preposterous whiskers dominating everything that remained, except a heavy mouth and brown, lack-lustre eyes. For a while Donald crouched in the corner of the pew, his head sunk on his breast, a very picture of utter hopelessness. But as the Evangel began to play round his heart, he would fix the preacher with rapid, wistful glances, as of one who had awaked, but hardly dared believe such things could be true. Suddenly a sigh pervaded six pews, a kind of gentle breath of penitence, faith, love, and hope mingled together like the incense of the sanctuary, and Donald lifted up his head. His eyes are now aflame, and those sullen lips are refining into curves of tenderness. From the manse pew I watched keenly, for at any moment a wonderful sight may be seen. A radiant smile will pass from his lips to his eyes and spread over his face, as when the sun shines on a fallow field and the rough furrows melt into warmth and beauty. Donald's gaze is now fixed on a window above the preacher's head, for on these great days that window is to him as the gate of heaven. All I could see would be a bit of blue, and the fretted sunlight through the swaying branches of an old plane tree. But Donald has seen his Lord hanging upon the Cross for him, and the New Jerusalem descend.

ing like a bride adorned for her husband, more plainly than if Perugino's great Crucifixion, with the kneeling saints, and Angelico's Outer Court of Heaven, with the dancing angels, had been hung in our little Free Kirk. When he went down the aisle with the flagon in the Sacrament, he walked as one in a dream, and wist not that his face shone.

There was an interval after the Sacrament, when the stranger was sent to his room with light refreshments, to prepare himself for the evening, and the elders dined with the minister. Before the introduction of the Highlanders conversation had an easy play within recognized limits, and was always opened by Burnbrae, who had come out in '43, and was understood to have read the Confession of Faith.

"Ye gave us a grawnd discoorse this mornin', sir, baith instructive and edifyin'; we were juist sayin', comin' up the gairden, that ye were never heard to mair advantage."

The minister was much relieved, because he had not been hopeful during the week, and was still dissatisfied, as he explained at length, with the passage on the Colossian heresy.

When these doubts had been cleared up Burnbrae did his best by the minister upstairs, who had submitted himself to the severe test of table addresses.

"Yon wer verra suitable words at the second table; he's a speeritually minded man, Maister Cosh, and has the richt sough."

Or at the worst, then Burnbrae's courage had failed:

"Maister McKittrick had a fine text afore the table. I aye like tae see a man gang tae the Song o' Solomon on the Sacrament Sabbath. A' mind Dr. Guthrie on that verra subject twenty years syne."

Having paid its religious dues, conversation was now allowed some freedom, and it was wonderful how many things could be touched on, always from a sacramental standpoint.

"We've been awfu' favored wi' weather the day, and ought to be thankfu'. Gin it hads on like this I wudna say but th'ill be a gude hairst. That's a fine puckle aits ye hae in the laigh park, Burnbrae."

"A've seen waur; they're fillin' no that bad. I wes juist thinkin' as I cam to the Kirk that there wes aits in that field the Sacrament after the Disruption."

"Did ye notice that Rachel Skene sat in her seat through the tables? Says I, 'Are ye no gain forrit, Mistress Skene, or hae ye lost yir token?' 'Na, na,' says she, 'ma token's safe in ma handkerchief; but I cudna get to Kirk yesterday, and I never went forrit without ma Saiturday yet, and I'm no to begin noo.'"

"She was aye a richt-thinkin' woman, Rachel, there's nae mistake o' that; a' wonder hoo her son is gettin' on wi' that fairm he's takin'; a' doot it's rack-rented."

It was an honest, satisfying conversation, and reminded one of the parish of Drumtochty, being both *quoad sacra* and *quoad civilia*.

When the Highlanders came in, Burnbrae was deposed after one encounter, and the min-

ister was reduced to a state of timid suggestion. There were days when they would not speak one word, and were understood to be lost in meditation; on others they broke in on any conversation that was going from levels beyond the imagination of Drumtochty. Had this happened in the Auld Manse, Drumsheugh would have taken for granted that Donald was "feeling sober" (ill), and recommended the bottle which cured him of "a hoast" (cough) in the fifties. But the Free Kirk had been taught that the Highlanders were unapproachable in spiritual attainments, and even Burnbrae took his discipline meekly.

"It wes a mercy the mune changed last week, Maister Menzies, or a'm thinkin' it had been a weet sacrament."

Donald came out of a maze, where he had been wandering in great peace.

"I wass not hearing that the moon had anything to do in the matter. Oh, no, but he wass bound hand and foot by a mighty man."

"Wha was bund? A'm no juist followin' ye, Maister Menzies."

"The Prince of the power of the air. Oh, yes, and he shalt not be loosed till the occasion be over. I hef had a sign." After which, conversation on the weather languished.

Perhaps the minister fared worse in an attempt to extract a certificate of efficiency from Lachlan Campbell in favor of a rhetorical young preacher.

"A fery nice speaker, and well pleased with himself. But I would be thinking, when he

wass giving his images. Oh, yes, I would be thinking. There was a laddie feeshing in the burn before my house, and a fery pretty laddie he wass. He had a rod and a string, and he threw his line peautiful. It wass a great peety he had no hook, for it iss a want, and you do not catch many fish without a hook. But I shall be glad that you are pleased, sir, and all the elders."

These were only passing incidents, and left no trace, but the rebuke Donald gave to Burnbrae will be told while an elder lives. One of the last of the old mystical school, which trace their descent from Samuel Rutherford, had described the great mystery of our Faith with such insight and pathos that Donald had stood by the table weeping gently, and found himself afterward in the manse, he knew not how.

The silence was more than could be borne, and his former responsibility fell on Burnbrae.

"It wes wonnerful, and I canna mind hearing the like o' yon at the tables; but I wass sorry to see the Doctor sae failed. He wes bent twa fad; a' doot it's a titch o' rheumatism, or maybe lumbago."

Johannine men are subject to sudden flashes of anger and Donald blazed.

"Bent down with rheumatism, iss that what you say? Oh, yes, it will be rheumatism. Hass the sight of your eyes left you, and hef you no discernment? Did ye not see that he wass bowed to the very table with the power of the Word? for it wass a fire in his bones, and he wass baptized with the Holy Ghost!"

When the elders gathered in the vestry, the minister asked what time the preacher might have for his evening sermon, and Donald again burst forth:

"I am told that in towns the Gospel goes by minutes, like the trains at the station; but there is no time-table here, for we shall wait till the sun goes down to hear all things God will be sending by His servant."

Good memories differ about the text that Sacrament evening, and the length of the sermon, but all hold as a treasure forever what happened when the book was closed. The people were hushed into a quiet that might be felt, and the old man, swayed by the spirit of the Prophets, began to repeat the blessings and curses in the Bible between Genesis and Revelation, and after each pair he cried with heart-piercing voice, "Choose this day which ye will take," till Donald could contain himself no longer.

"Here iss the man who hass deserved all the curses, and here iss the man who chooses all the blessings."

Our fathers had no turn for sensation, but they had an unerring sense of a spiritual situation. The preacher paused for five seconds, while no man could breathe, and then lifting up his hand to Heaven he said, with an indescribable authority and tenderness, "The Lord fulfil the desire of your heart both in this world and that which is to come."

Then the congregation sang, after the ancient custom of our parts,

"Now blessed be the Lord our God,  
The God of Israel,"

and Donald's face was one glory, because he saw in the soft evening light of the upper window the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

It was after this that the Free Kirk minister occupied six months in proving that Moses did not write Deuteronomy, and Lachlan was trying for the same period to have the minister removed from Drumtochty. Donald, deprived by one stroke of both his friends, fell back on me, and told me many things I loved to hear, although they were beyond my comprehension.

"It wass not always so with me as it iss this day, for I once had no ear for God's voice, and my eyes were holden that I saw not the spiritual world. But sore sickness came upon me, and I wass nigh unto death, and my soul awoke within me and began to cry like a child for its mother. All my days I had lived on Loch Tay, and now I thought of the other country into which I would hef to be going, where I had no nest, and my soul would be driven to and fro in the darkness as a bird on the moor of Rannoch.

"Janet sent for the minister, and he wass fery kind, and he spoke about my sickness and my farm, and I said nothing. For I wass hoping he would tell me what I wass to do for my soul. But he began upon the sheep market at Amulree, and I knew he wass also in the dark.

After he left I turned my face to the wall and wept.

"Next morning wass the Sabbath, and I said to Janet:

"Wrap me in my plaid, and put me in a cart, and take me to Aberfeldy.' 'And what will ye be doing at Aberfeldy? and you will die on the road.' 'There iss,' said I, 'a man there who knows the way of the soul, and it iss better to die with my face to the light.'

"They set me in a corner of the church where I wass thinking no man could see me, and I cried in my heart without ceasing, 'Lord, send me—send me a word from Thy mouth.'

"When the minister came into the pulpit he gave me a strange look, and this wass his text, 'Loose him and let him go.'

"As he preached I knew I wass Lazarus, with the darkness of the grave around me, and my soul straitly bound. I could do nothing, but I wass longing with all my strength.

"Then the minister stopped, and he said:

"There is a man in this church, and he will know himself who it iss. When I came in this morning I saw a shadow on his face, and I knew not whether it wass the wing of the Angel of Life or the Angel of Death passing over him, but the Lord has made it plain to me, and I see the silver feathers of the Angel of the Covenant, and this shall be a sign unto that man, 'Loose him and let him go.'

"While he wass still speaking I felt my soul carried out into the light of God's face, and my grave-clothes were taken off one by one as

Janet would unwind my plaid, and I stood a living man before Christ.

"It wass a sweet June day as we drove home, and I lay in sunshine, and every bird that sang, and the burnies by the roadside, and the rustling of the birch leaves in the wind—oh, yes! and the sound of the horse's feet were saying, 'Loose him and let him go.'

"Loch Tay looked black angry as we came by its side in the morning, and I said to Janet:

"It iss the Dead Sea, and I shall be as Sodom and Gomorrah;' but in the evening it wass as a sea of glass mingled with fire, and I heard the song of Moses and the Lamb sweeping over the Loch, but this wass still the sweetest word to me, 'Loose him and let him go.' "

## II.

## AGAINST PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS.

The powers of darkness had been making a dead set upon Donald all winter, and toward spring he began to lose hope. He came to the Cottage once a week with news from the seat of war, and I could distinguish three zones of depression. Within the first he bewailed his inveterate attachment to this world, and his absolute indifference to spiritual things, and was content to describe himself as Achan. The sign that he had entered the second was a recurring reference to apostasy, and then you had the melancholy satisfaction of meeting the living representative of Simon Peter. When he passed into the last zone of the Purgatorio, Donald was beyond speech, and simply allowed one to gather from allusions to thirty pieces of silver that he was Judas Iscariot.

So long as it was only Achan or Simon Peter that came to sit with me, one was not gravely concerned, but Judas Iscariot meant that Donald had entered the Valley of the Shadow.

He made a spirited rally at the winter Sacrament, and distinguished himself greatly on the evening of the Fast day. Being asked to pray, as a recognition of comparative cheerfulness,

Donald continued for five and twenty minutes, and unfolded the works of the Devil in such minute and vivid detail that Burnbrae talks about it to this day, and Lachlan Campbell, although an expert in this department, confessed astonishment. It was a mighty wrestle, and it was perhaps natural that Donald should groan heavily at regular intervals, and acquaint the meeting how the conflict went, but the younger people were much shaken, and the edification, even of the serious, was not without reserve.

While Donald still lingered on the field of battle to gather the spoils and guard against any sudden return of the enemy, the elders had a hurried consultation in the vestry, and Burnbrae put the position with admirable force.

"Naebody can deny that it wes a maist extraordinary prayer, and it passes me hoo he ken sae muckle aboot the Deevil. In fac' it's a preevilege tae hae sic an experienced hand among us, and I wudna offend Donald Menzies for onything. But yon groanin' wes a wee thingie discomposin', and when he said, kind o' confidential, 'He's losing his grup,' ma ain fouk cudna keep their coontenance. Weel, I wes thinkin' that the best plan wud be for Maister Campbell juist tae give a bit advice and tell Donald that we're thankfu' to hear him at the meeting, and mighty lifted wi' his peteetions, but it wud be an obleegation gin he wud leave oot the groans and tell us aifter wards what wes gaen' on, maybe in the Session."

Lachlan accepted his commission with quite unusual diffidence, and offered a very free translation on the way home.

"It was a mercy to hef you at the meeting this night, Donald Menzies, for I saw that Satan had come in great strength, and it iss not every man that can withstand him. But you will not be ignorant of his devices; oh, no! you will be knowing them fery well. Satan had not much to say before the prayer was done, and I will not be expecting to see him again at this occasion. It was the elders said, 'Donald Menzies has trampled Satan under foot.' Oh, yes! and fery glad men they were, for it iss not given to them. But I would be thinking, iss it good to let the Devil hear you groaning in the battle, and I would be wishing that you had kept all your groans and given them to me on the road."

"Iss it the groans you are not liking?" retorted Donald, stung by this unexpected criticism. "And what iss wrong with groaning? But I hef the Scripture, and I will not be caring what you say, Lachlan Campbell."

"If you hef a warrant for groaning, it iss this man that will be glad to hear it, for I am not remembering that passage."

"Maybe you hef not read 'Maketh intercession with groanings,' but it iss a fery good Scripture, and it iss in my Bible."

"All Scripture iss good, Donald Menzies, but it iss not lawful to divide Scripture, and it will read in my Bible, 'groanings which can-

not be uttered,' and I wass saying this would be the best way with your groans."

Donald came in to tell me how this companion in arms had treated him, and was still sore.

"He iss in the bondage of the letter these days, for he will be always talking about Moses with the minister, and I am not hearing that iss good for the soul."

If even Lachlan could not attain to Donald, it was perhaps no discredit that the Drumtochty mind was at times hopelessly perplexed.

"He's a gude cratur and terrible gifted in prayer," Netherton explained to Burnbrae after a prayer-meeting, when Donald had temporarily abandoned Satan and given himself to autobiography, "but yon wesna a verra ceevil way to speak aboot his faither and mither."

"A' doot yir imaginin', Netherton. Donald never mentioned his fouk the nicht, and it's no likely he wud in the prayer-meeting."

"There's nae imaginin' aboot it; a' heard him wi' ma ain ears say twice, 'My father was an Amorite, and my mother a Hittite.' I'll take my aith on it. Noo, a' dinna ken Donald's forbears masel', for he's frae Tayside, but supposin' they were as bad as bad cud be, it's no for him to blacken his ain blood, and him an Elder."

"Toots, Netherton, yir aff it a' thegither. Div ye no see yon's Bible langidge oot o' a Prophet, or maybe Kings, and Donald wes usin't in a feegurative capaucity?"

"Feegurative or no feegurative, Burnbrae, it disna maitter; it's a peectifu' job howking [dig-

ging] thro' the Bible for ill words tae misca yir fouk wi' afore the public."

Burnbrae gave up the contest in despair, feeling himself that Old Testament allusions were risky, and that Donald's quotation was less than felicitous.

Donald's prayers were not known outside the Free Kirk circle, but his encounters with the evil one were public property, and caused a general shudder. Drumtochty was never sure who might not be listening, and considered that it was safer not to meddle with certain nameless people. But Donald waged an open warfare in every corner of the parish, in the Kirk, by the wayside, in his house, on the road to market, and was ready to give any one the benefit of his experiences.

"Donald Menzies is in yonder," said Hillocks, pointing to the smithy, whose fire sent fitful gleams across the dark road, "and he's carryin' on maist fearsome. Ye wud think tae hear him speak that auld Horrie wes gaein' louse in the parish; it sent a grue [shiver] doon ma back. Faigs, it's no cannie to be muckle wi' the body, for the Deil and Donald seem never separate. Hear him noo; hear him!"

"Oh, yes," said Donald, addressing the smith and two horror-stricken ploughmen, "I hef seen him, and he hass withstood me on the road. It wass late, and I was thinking on the shepherd and the sheep, and Satan will come out from the wood below Hillocks' farm-house ["Gude preserve us," from Hillocks] and say, "That word is not for you, Donald Menzies."

But I wass strong that night, and I said, 'Neither shall any pluck them out of my hand,' and he will not wait long after that, oh, no! and I did not follow him into the wood."

The smith relieved by the conclusion of the tale, blew a mighty blast, and the fire burst into a red blaze, throwing into relief the black figure of the smith and the white faces of the ploughmen; glancing from the teeth of harrows, and the blades of scythes, and the cruel knives of reaping machines, and from instruments with triple prongs; and lighting up with a hideous glare the black sooty recesses of the smithy.

"Keep's a'," whispered Hillocks, clutching my arm, "it's a little better than the ill place. I wish to gudeness I wes safe in ma ain hoose."

These were only indecisive skirmishes, for one evening Donald came to my den with despair written on every feature, and I knew that fighting had begun at the center, and that he was worsted.

It was half an hour before he became articulate, during which time he sighed as if the end of all things had come, and I caught the word scapegoat twice; but at last he told me that he had resigned his eldership, and would absent himself in future from the Free Kirk.

"It hass been a weary winter when minister and people hef gone into captivity, and on Sabbath the word wass taken altogether from the minister's mouth, and he spake a language which we understood not [it was the first of three sermons on the Hexateuch, and had

treated of the Jehovistic and Elohistic documents with much learning], and I will be asking all the way back, 'Iss it I?' 'Iss it I?'

"Oh, yes! and when I opened my Bible this iss the word I will see, 'That thou doest, do quickly,' and I knew it wass my sins that had brought great judgments on the people, and turned the minister into a man of stammering lips and another tongue.

"It wass a mercy that the roof did not fall and bury all the people with me; but we will not be tempting the Almighty, for I hef gone outside, and now there will be peace and blessing."

When we left the lighted room and stood on the doorstep, Donald pointed to the darkness. "There is no star, and you will be remembering what John saw when the door opened and Judas went out. 'It wass night'—oh, yes! it iss night for me, but it will be light for them."

As weeks went past, and Donald was seen neither at Kirk nor market, my heart went out to the lonely man in his soul conflict, and, although there was no help in me, I went to ask how it fared with him. After the foot-path disentangled itself from the pine woods and crossed the burn by two fir trees nailed together, it climbed a steep ascent to Donald's house, but I had barely touched the foot when I saw him descending, his head in the air, and his face shining. Before any words passed, I knew that the battle had been fought and won.

"It wass last night, and I will be coming to tell you. Satan hass gone like darkness when the sun ariseth, and I hef been delivered."

There are stories one cannot hear sitting, and so we paced the meadow below, rich in primroses, with a sloping bank of gorse behind us and the pines before us, and the water breaking over the stones at our feet.

"It is three weeks since I saw you, and all that time I hef been wandering on the hill by day and lying in the barn at night, for it wass not good to be with people, and Satan wass always saying to me, Judas went to 'his own place.' My dog will lay his head on my knee and be sorry for me, and the dumb animals will be looking at me out of their great eyes, and be moaning.

"The lads are goot singers, and there wass always a sound of Psalms on the farm, oh, yes, and it wass pleasant to come from the market and hear the Psalms at the foot of the hill. It wass like going up to Jerusalem. But there would be no Psalms these days, for the lads could not sing when their father's soul wass going down into the pit.

"Oh, no, and there wass no prayer last night, but I told the lads to go to bed, and I lay down before the fire to wrestle once more before I perished.

"Janet will offer this word and the other, and I will be trying them all, but Satan wass tearing them away as quick as I could speak, and he always said, 'his own place.'

" 'There iss no hope for me,' I cried, 'but it iss a mercy that you and the lads will be safe in the City, and maybe the Lord will let me see you all through the gate.' And that wass lifting me, but then I will hear 'his own place,' 'his own place,' and my heart began to fail, and I wass nigh to despair.

"Then I heard a voice, oh, yes, as plain as you are hearing me, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.' It wass like a gleam from the Mercy-seat, but I would be waiting to see whether Satan had any answer, and my heart wass standing still. But there wass no word from him, not one word. Then I leaped to my feet and cried, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' and I will look round, and there wass no one to be seen but Janet in her chair, with the tears on her cheeks, and sne wass saying, 'Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

"The lads were not sleeping fery sound when their father wass fighting for his life, oh, no, and I am not saying but maybe they would be praying. It wass not fery long before they came down, and Hamish will be looking at my face, and then he will get the books, and this is the Psalm we sang:

" 'I love the Lord, because my voice  
And prayers He did hear.  
I, while I live, will call on Him,  
Who bowed to me His ear.

" 'God merciful and righteous is,  
Yea, gracious is our Lord;  
God saves the meek; I wass brought low.  
He did me help afford.' "

This wass the victory of Donald Menzies, and on reaching home I marked that the early roses were beginning to bloom over the door through which Donald had gone out into the darkness.