

II.

HIS BITTER SHAME.

The Free Kirk people were very proud of their vestry because the Established Church had none, and because it was reasonably supposed to be the smallest in Scotland. When the minister, who touched five feet eleven, and the beadle, who was three inches taller, assembled for the procession, with the precentor, a man of fair proportions, there was no waste ground in that room, and any messenger from the church door had to be selected with judgment. "Step up, Archie, man, tae the vestry," Burnbrae would say to the one undersized man in Drumtochty, "and tell the minister no tae forget the Jews. Ye can birse [push] in fine, but it wud beat me to get by the door. It's a bonnie bit room, but three fook stannin' makes it contrakit for another man."

It was eight feet by eight, and consisted largely of two doors and a fireplace, and its chief glory was a portrait of Dr. Chalmers, whose face, dimly seen in the light of the lamp, was a charter of authority, and raised the proceedings to the level of history. Lockers on either side of the mantel-piece contained the church library, which abounded in the lives of

Scottish worthies, and was never lightly disturbed. Where there was neither grate nor door, a narrow board ran along the wall, on which it was simply a point of honor to seat the twelve deacons, who met once a month to raise the Sustentation Fund by modest, heroic sacrifices of hard-working people, and to keep the slates on the church roof in winter. When they had nothing else to do, they talked about the stove which "came out in '43," and, when it was in good humor, would raise the temperature in winter one degree above freezing. Seating the court was a work of art, and could only be achieved by the repression of the smaller men, who looked out from the loop-holes of retreat, the projection of bigger men on to their neighbors' knees, and the absolute elimination of Archie Moncur, whose voice made motions on temperance from the lowest depths. Netherton was always the twelfth man to arrive, and nothing could be done till he was safely settled. Only some six inches were reserved at the end of the bench, and he was a full sitter, but he had discovered a trick of sitting sideways and screwing his leg against the opposite wall, that secured the court as well as himself in their places on the principle of a compressed spring. When this operation was completed, Burnbrae used to say to the minister, who sat in the middle on a cane chair before the tiniest of tables—the living was small, and the ministers never grew fat till they left—

"We're fine and comfortable noo, Moder-

ator, and ye can begin business as sune as ye like."

As there were only six elders they could sit in state, besides leaving a vacant space for any penitents who came to confess their sins and receive absolution, or some catechumen who wished to be admitted to the Sacrament. Carmichael used to say that a meeting of Session affected his imagination, and would have made an interior for Rembrandt. On one side of the table sat the men who represented the piety of the district, and were supposed to be "far ben" in the Divine fellowship, and on the other some young girl in her loneliness, who wrung her handkerchief in terror of this dreaded spiritual court, and hoped within her heart that no elder would ask her "effectual calling" from the Shorter Catechism; while the little lamp, hanging from the ceiling and swinging gently in the wind that had free access from every airt, cast a fitful light on the fresh, tearful face of the girl and the hard, weather-beaten countenances of the elders, composed into a serious gravity not untouched by tenderness. They were little else than laboring men, but no one was elected to that court unless he had given pledges of godliness, and they bore themselves as men who had the charge of souls.

The little Sanhedrim had within it the school of Hillel, which was swayed by mercy, and its Rabbi was Burnbrae; and the school of Shammai, whose rule was inflexible justice, and its Rabbi was Lachlan Campbell. Burnbrae was

a big-hearted man, with a fatherly manner, and had a genius for dealing with "young communicants."

"Weel, Jessie, we're awfu' pleased tae think yer gaein' forrit, and the Dominie wes tellin' me juist last week that ye did yir work at schule graund, and knew yir Bible frae end tae end.

"It 'll be no easy to speir [ask] the like o' you questions, but ye mind Abraham, Jessie."

"Ou, ay!" and Jessie is all alert, although she is afraid to look up.

"What was the name o' his wife, noo?"

"Sarah, an' their son was Isaac."

"That's richt, and what about Isaac's wife?"

"Isaac mairrit Rebecca, and they had twa sons, Jacob and Esau," and the girl takes a shy glance at the honest elder, and begins to feel at home.

"Domsie wesna far wrang, a' see, but it's no possible ye cud tell us the names o' Jacob's sons; it's maybe no fair tae ask sich a teuch question," knowing all the while that this was a test case of Domsie's.

When Jessie reached Benjamin, Burnbrae could not contain himself.

"It's nae use trying to stick Jessie wi' the Bible, neebers; we'll see what she can dae wi' the Carritches [Catechism]. Yir no the lassie that said the questions frae beginning tae end wi' twa mistak's, are ye?"

Yes, she was, and dared him to come on, for Jessie had forgotten the minister and all the Session.

"The elders wud like tae hear 'What is the Lord's Supper?'"

"That's it; and, Jessie, ma woman, gie's the 'worthy receiving.'"

Jessie achieves another triumph, and is now ready for anything.

"Ye hae the Word weel stored in yir mind, lassie, and ye maun keep it in yir life, and dinna forget that Christ's a gude Maister."

"A'll dae ma best," and Jessie declared that Burnbrae had been as kind as if she had been "his ain bairn," and that she "wasna feared ava." But her trial is not over; the worst is to come.

Lachlan began where Burnbrae ended, and very soon had Jessie on the rack.

"How old will you be?"

"Auchteen next Martinmas."

"And why will you be coming to the Sacrament?"

"Ma mither thocht it was time," with a threatening of tears as she looked at the face in the corner.

"Ye will maybe tell the Session what hass been your 'lawwork' and how long ye haf been at Sinai."

"A' dinna ken what yir askin'. I was never oot o' Drumtochty," and Jessie breaks down utterly.

"A' dinna think, Moderator, we ocht tae ask sic questions," broke in Burnbrae, who could not see a little one put to confusion; "an' I canna mind them in the Gospels. There's ae commandment Jessie keeps weel, as a' can

testeefy, and that's the fifth, for there's no a better dochter in Drumtochty. A' move, Moderator, she get her token; dinna greet, puir woman, for ye've dune weel, and the Session's rael satisfied."

"It wass Dr. John's mark I wass trying the girl by," explained Lachlan after Jessie had gone away comforted. "And it iss a goot mark, oh, yes! and very searching."

"Ye will maybe not know what it iss, Moderator," and Lachlan regarded the minister with austere superiority, for it was the winter of the feud.

No, he did not, nor any of the Session, being all douce Scotchmen, except Donald Menzies, who was at home fighting the devil.

"It iss broken bones, and Dr. John did preach three hours upon it at Auchindarroch Fast, and there wass not many went to the Sacrament on that occasion.

"Broken bones iss a fine mark to begin with, and the next will be doubts. But there iss a deeper," continued Lachlan, warming to his subject, "oh, yes! far deeper, and I heard of it when I wass North for the sheep, and I will not be forgetting that day with Janet Macfarlane.

"I knew she wass a professor, and I wass looking for her marks. But it wass not for me to hef been searching her; it wass that woman that should hef been trying me."

A profound silence wrapt the Session.

"'Janet,' I said, 'hef ye had many doubts?'"

"'Doubts, Lachlan? was that what you

asked? I hef had desertions, and one will be for six months.'

"So I saw she wass far beyond me, for I dare not be speaking about desertions."

Two minutes after the minister pronounced the benediction, and no one had offered any remark in the interval.

It seemed to the elders that Lachlan dealt hardly with young people and those that had gone astray, but they learned one evening that his justice had at least no partiality. Burnbrae said afterward that Lachlan "looked like a ghaist comin' in at the door," but he sat in silence in the shadow, and no one marked the agony on his face till the end.

"If that iss all the business, Moderator, I hef to bring a case of discipline before the Session, and ask them to do their duty. It iss known to me that a young woman who hass been a member of this church hass left her home and gone into the far country. There will be no use in summoning her to appear before the Session, for she will never be seen again in this parish. I move that she be cut off from the roll, and her name iss"—and Lachlan's voice broke, but in an instant he recovered himself—"her name iss Flora Campbell."

Carmichael confessed to me that he was stricken dumb, and that Lachlan's ashen face held him with an awful fascination.

It was Burnbrae that first found a voice, and showed that night the fine delicacy of heart that may be hidden behind a plain exterior.

"Moderator, this is a terrible calamity that hes befaen oor brither, and a'm feelin' as if a' hed lost a bairn o' my ane, for a sweeter lassie didna cross oor kirk door. Nane o' us want tae know what hes happened or where she hes gane, and no a word o' this wull cross oor lips. Her faither's dune mair than cud be expectit o' mortal man, and noo we have oor duty. It's no the way o' this Session tae cut aff ony member o' the flock at a stroke, and we 'ill no begin with Flora Campbell. A' move, Moderator, that her case be left tae her faither and yersel', and oor neebur may depend on it that Flora's name and his ain will be mentioned in oor prayers, ilka mornin' an' nicht, till the gude Shepherd o' the sheep brings her hame."

Burnbrae paused, and then, with tears in his voice—men do not weep in Drumtochty—"With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption."

The minister took the old man's arm and led him into the manse, and set him in the big chair by the study fire. "Thank God, Lachlan, we are friends now; tell me about it as if I were your son and Flora's brother."

The father took a letter out of an inner pocket with a trembling hand, and this is what Carmichael read by the light of the lamp:

"DEAR FATHER: When this reaches you I will be in London, and not worthy to cross your door. Do not be always angry with me, and try to forgive me, for you will not be troubled any more by my dancing or dressing.

Do not think that I will be blaming you, for you have been a good father to me, and said what you would be considering right, but it is not easy for a man to understand a girl. Oh, if I had had my mother, then she would have understood me, and I would not have crossed you. Forget poor Flora's foolishness, but you will not forget her, and maybe you will still pray for me. Take care of the geraniums for my sake, and give milk to the lamb that you called after me. I will never see you again, in this world or the next, nor my mother . . . [here the letter was much blotted]. When I think that there will be no one to look after you, and have the fire burning for you on winter nights, I will be rising to come back. But it is too late, too late! Oh, the disgrace I will be bringing on you in the glen!

"Your unworthy daughter,
"FLORA CAMPBELL."

"This is a fiery trial, Lachlan, and I cannot even imagine what you are suffering. But do not despair, for that is not the letter of a bad girl. Perhaps she was impatient, and has been led astray. But Flora is good at heart, and you must not think she is gone forever."

Lachlan groaned, the first moan he had made, and then he tottered to his feet.

"You are fery kind, Maister Carmichael, and so wass Burnbrae, and I will be thankful to you all, but you do not understand. Oh, no! you do not understand." Lachlan caught hold of a chair and looked the minister in the face.

"She hass gone, and there will be no coming back. You would not take her name from the roll of the church, and I will not be meddling with that book. But I hef blotted out her name from my Bible, where her mother's name iss written and mine. She has wrought confusion in Israel and in an elder's house, and I . . . I hef no daughter. But I loved her; she nefer knew how I loved her, for her mother would be looking at me from her eyes."

The minister walked with Lachlan to the foot of the hill on which his cottage stood, and after they had shaken hands in silence, he watched the old man's figure in the cold moonlight till he disappeared into the forsaken home, where the fire had gone out on the hearth, and neither love nor hope was waiting for a broken heart.

The railway did not think it worth while to come to Drumtochty, and we were cut off from the lowlands by miles of forest, so our manners retained the fashion of the former age. Six elders, besides the minister, knew the tragedy of Flora Campbell, and never opened their lips. Mrs. MacFadyen, who was our newspaper, and understood her duty, refused to pry into this secret. The pity of the gien went out to Lachlan, but no one even looked a question as he sat alone in his pew or came down on a Saturday afternoon to the village shop for his week's provisions. London friends thought me foolish about my adopted home, but I asked them whether they could find such perfect good manners in Belgravia, and they were

silent. My Drumtochty neighbors would have played an awkward part in a drawing-room, but never have I seen in all my wanderings men and women of truer courtesy or tenderer heart.

"It gars ma hert greet tae see him," Mrs. MacFadyen said to me one day, "sae booted an' disjackit, him that wes that snod [tidy] and firm. His hair's turned white in a month, and he's awa' tae naething in his claites. But least said is sunest mended. It's no richt tae interfere wi' another's sorrow, an' it wad be an awfu' sin tae misca' a young lassie. We maun juist houp that Flora 'll sune come back, for if she disna Lachlan 'll no be lang wi's. He's sayin' naethin,' and a' respeck him for't; but onybody can see that his hert is breakin'."

We were helpless till Marget Howe met Lachlan in the shop and read his sorrow at a glance. She went home to Whinnie Knowe in great distress.

"It wes waesome tae see the auld mon githerin' his bit things wi' a shakin' hand, and speakin' tae me aboot the weather, and a' the time his eyes were sayin', 'Flora, Flora!'"

"Whar div ye think the young hizzie is, Marget?"

"Naebody needs tae know, Weelum, an' ye maunna speak that way, for whatever's come ower her, she's dear to Lachlan and tae God.

"It's laid on me tae veesit Lachlan, for a'm thinking oor Father didna comfort us without expeckin' that we wud comfort other fouk."

When Marget came round the corner of

Lachlan's cottage, she found Flora's plants laid out in the sun, and her father watering them on his knees. One was ready to die, and for it he had made a shelter with his plaid.

He was taken unawares, but in a minute he was leading Marget in with hospitable words.

"It iss kind of you to come to an old man's house, Mistress Howe, and it iss a fery warm day. You will not care for speerits, but I am fery goot at making tea."

Marget was not as other women, and she spoke at once.

"Maister Campbell, ye will believe that I hev come in the love of God, and because we hev baith been afflickit. I had ae son, and he is gone; ye had a dochter, and she is gone. A' ken where George is, and am sateesfied. A' doot sairly yir sorrow is deeper than mine."

"Would to God that she wass lying in the kirkyard; but I will not speak of her. She iss not anything to me this day. See, I will show you what I hef done, for she hass been a black shame to her name."

He opened the Bible, and there was Flora's name scored with wavering strokes, but the ink had run as if it had been mingled with tears.

Marget's heart burned within her at the sight, and perhaps she could hardly make allowance for Lachlan's blood and theology.

"This is what ye hev dune, and ye let a woman see yir wark. Ye are an auld man, and in sore travail, but a' tell ye before God ye hae the greater shame. Juist twenty years

o' age this spring, and her mither dead! Nae woman to watch over her, and she wandered frae the fold, and a' ye can dae is to tak her oot o' yir Bible. Wae's me if oor Father had blotted out oor names frae the Book o' Life when we left His hoose. But He sent His ain Son to seek us, an' a weary road He cam. A' tell ye, a man wudna leave a sheep tae perish as ye hae cast aff yir ain bairn. Yir worse than Simon the Pharisee, for Mary was nae kin tae him. Puir Flora, tae hae sic a father!"

"Who will be telling you that I wass a Pharisee?" cried Lachlan, quivering in every limb, and grasping Marget's arm.

"Forgie me, Lachlan, forgie me! It wass the thocht o' the misguided lassie carried me, for a' didna come tae upbraid ye."

But Lachlan had sunk into a chair and had forgotten her.

"She hass the word, and God will hef smitten the pride of my heart, for it iss Simon that I am. I wass hard on my child, and I wass hard on the minister, and there wass none like me. The Lord has laid my name in the dust, and I will be angry with her. But she iss the scapegoat for my sins, and hass gone into the desert. God be merciful to me a sinner!" And then Marget understood no more, for the rest wass in Gaelic; but she heard Flora's name with another she took to be her mother's twined together.

So Marget knew it would be well with Lachlan yet, and she wrote this letter:

"MY DEAR LASSIE: Ye ken that I wess aye yir freend, and I am writing this tae say that yir father luves ye mair than ever, and is wearing oot his hert for the sicht o' yir face. Come back, or he'll dee thro' want o' his bairn. The glen is bright and bonny noo, for the purple heather is on the hills, and doon below the gowden corn, wi' bluebell and poppy flowers between. Naebody 'ill ask ye where ye've been, or onything else; there's no a bairn in the place that's no wearying tae see ye; and, Flora, lassie, if there will be sic gledness in oor wee glen when ye come hame, what think ye o' the joy in the Father's Hoose? Start the verra meenute that ye get this letter; yir father bids ye come, and I'm writing this in place o' yir mother.

"MARGET HOWE."

Marget went out to tend the flowers while Lachlan read the letter, and when he gave it back the address wass written in his own hand.

He went as far as the crest of the hill with Marget, and watched her on the way to the post-office till she wass only a speck upon the road.

When he entered his cottage the shadows werr beginning to fall, and he remembered it would soon be night.

"It iss in the dark that Flora will be coming, and she must know that her father iss waiting for her."

He cleaned and trimmed with anxious hand a lamp that wass kept for show, and had never

been used. Then he selected from his books Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," and "Coles on the Divine Sovereignty," and on them he laid the large family Bible out of which Flora's name had been blotted. This was the stand on which he sat the lamp in the window, and every night till Flora returned its light shone down the steep path that ascended to her home, like the Divine Love from the open door of our Father's House.

III.

LIKE AS A FATHER.

It was only by physical force and a free use of personalities that the Kildrummie passengers could be entrained at the Junction, and the Drumtochty men were always the last to capitulate.

They watched the main-line train that had brought them from Muirtown disappear in the distance, and then broke into groups to discuss the cattle sale at leisure, while Peter, the factotum of the little Kildrummie branch, drove his way through their midst with offensive pieces of luggage, and abused them by name without respect of persons.

"It's maist aggravatin', Drumsheugh, 'at ye'll stand there girm' at the prices, as if ye were a puir cottar body that had selt her ae coo, and us twal meenutes late. Man, get intae yer kerridge; he'll no be fat that buys frae you, a'll wager."

"Peter's in an awfu' feery-farry [excitement] the nicht, neeburs," Drumsheugh would respond, after a long pause; "ye wud think he wes a mail gaird tae hear him speak. Mind ye, a'm no gain' tae shove ahint if the engine sticks, for I hae na time. He needs a bit nip,"