

JAMPHLIN' JAMIE

CHAPTER I

Is it not an absurdity to describe the person and fortunes of a creature like this? *Cui bono?* Well; I do admit that he is somewhat grotesque, such goodness as is of him being mostly hidden away in one of the unclean crannies which are the lurking-places—the homes—of so many of our race. But if you, O reader, find delightful occupation, and wise reflection, and much insight into creative goodness and what not, while contemplating drops of stagnant water through a microscope; if you find that employment not only rational, but enjoyable and profitable, may I not be allowed my poor pleasure in tracing the disjuncted life-ways of this poor specimen of humanity? Surely no human life is lived wholly in vain, if man is in any degree that special *protégé* of Heaven which you and I are fain to believe him.

Jamphlin' Jamie! I see him almost every summer evening, when I go forth to seek health and pleasure in the sunshine modified by vesperian south wind, for my favourite walk is out beyond the lane where his bothy stands. He is now a squatly-built man, strong enough of bone and sinew, five feet five inches in height, and well enough to look upon, saving for his tawny, unwashed skin, and saving also his legs, and his mode of progression with them. His unwashed griminess he shares with his neighbours. His speciality lies in his legs, which are slightly bent below the knee and have the feet turned,

also outward, at an angle approximate to 90° . Furthermore, his feet are flat and ungainly, although not by any means to the extent of deformity. Yet the first glance at these limbs of his impresses you with a certain conviction that his mode of walking must be peculiar. In fact, it is peculiar. He drags his feet along rather than lifts them, as if they were heavily weighted with a boot loosely fitting enough to drop off if the foot were raised in the ordinary way. Hence his name 'Jamphlin' Jamie.'

He is bullet-headed, with a large square face, rude nose, and large mouth, having thin, projected lips. His eyes are not bad, and there is a large look in his face of simplicity and good-heartedness—perhaps, large-heartedness. Like many good-hearted folk, he is garrulous, and fain to speak a wisdom which is not in him. Therefore he quotes Scripture largely; and brings to his hearer's assurance anon and ever the allegation that 'he was weel brought up himsel.' However he may have been trained, this I know that his heart is right; and much I honour his simple heart and nature. Strong-headed, clear-headed I cannot maintain him to be; indeed, his intellect seems mostly seated in his heart. Honest, loyal, and laborious, I esteem him, and my esteem takes a quality of reverence for him when I remember his generosity, his self-denying temperance, his desire to conform to God's will and way. Yet can I not hide from myself, nor from you, O reader, the many incongruities that his weak head works out in the character of the untrained man; how his self-esteem has led him into false positions, and how not seldom he has sustained his simple faith with texts misinterpreted, and guided a good life, a sincere life, on a misconstruction of what is written. Indeed, goodness and nonsense are so inextricably bound up in him that I reverence and also I laugh. No doubt his grotesque exterior has much to do with this confusion of regard and laughter. I saw him last night in

the lane, 'forenent' his cottage, dandling and tossing about his youngest bairn, in a way that was alarming enough, while he grotesquely capered and leaped about on those limbs of his. At length, he got the child's legs twisted round his neck, leaping in the absurdest style, to the manifest danger of the boy, till the women, squatted at their doors in the evening sunshine, cried, 'See till the gomeril! He'll be the death o' the bairn! Rin, Betsey, for hersel'!

Just then I approached, and Jamie drew towards me. 'Nursing, Jamie?'

'Ay; jist daffin' a bit wi' the bairnie!'

'Quite jolly?'

'Ay, ay, jolly enuch? The nicht's gude; the wife's makin' suppar, which is better; an' the weans are a' brawly, which is best o' a'. Happy is the man that hath his quiver feel o' them! Am no ashaimed i' the gate! What for shud I be?'

Thereupon from the door of Jamie's habitation emerged a little shock head of red hair, followed by a body scantily clothed, bare-legged and bare-footed, the eldest of Jamie's quiverful, as I knew. The urchin advanced a step or two into the lane and then shouted, 'Jamie, Bell's ca'in' ye in for yer mait.'

'The Lord's gude! suppar is ready!' said Jamie piously, starting towards the door.

'But, Jamie,' said I, thoughtlessly interfering where I ought not, 'how do you let the bairns call your wife and you "Jamie" and "Bell"? You should train them to respect you, I think.'

'Deed ye're richt, 'deed ye're richt, man! Am no mindin' things a' times! I wus weel brocht up masel'!' and incontinently he smote the shock head a great skelp with his palm, saying, 'Children, obey your parents, for that is weel-plaisin'!' and he followed the astonished and screeching youngster into the cottage.

You see that the life of Jamphlin' Jamie is not with-

out its wellsprings of pleasure. His husbandhood, his fatherhood, are to this humble man as much, nay, more, than the proud nuptials and alliances of lords, and these, with labour, are the main facts of his existence. To me his pleasure in them seems as worthy of contemplation as the serene and polished gracefulness of the home-life of grandees, who know but little, as I fear, of the poor man's soul-contentment evidenced in that brief speech: 'The Lord's gude! Suppar is ready!' That happy acquiescence which we call contentment is mainly the fountain of the poor man's pleasure in life.

Jamie was twelve years of age when first I knew him. Then he was, as was right and fitting, under tutors and governors in the shape of his natural guardians, undergoing, as I presume, that upbringing which he ceases not to pronounce excellent. Goodness knows, its excellence was hard to discover; for his father was 'Cobbler Howden,' whose name was a bye-word in the village, and his ways a stumbling-block and reproach to it. For the 'Cobbler' had in early days been prominent before the people as a Sunday-school teacher, a young man powerful in praise and prayer. But he had fallen from his first estate, so far and so long, that his reprobation was forgotten in his habitual and notorious drunkenness and idleness. He would not work. He said working hurt him. And, indeed, poor man, his was a condition of misery as well as sin. He was afflicted with some disorder which made sitting and stooping, such as he must be subjected to in following his craft, irritating and painful. This made him also crave relief from the whisky stoup, which, you know, will give relief only on condition that you suffer still further enhancement of your cravings, when the measure is emptied. It was only on rare days, however, that the poor man could get a dram, for his distaste of labour or incapacity for it had this result, it checked his indulgence. He had long ago so proved himself unworthy of reliance that nobody

would trust him even with a pair of shoes to sole. The magnitude of the job prevented him from beginning it. It was his utmost effort to clout rudely an old shoe while its owner sat by him with the two or three coppers of ready fee. His longest sitting was induced by the promise of a dram at noon. Such was the male parent of my poor friend, Jamie.

What goodness could there be in the training of a sire like that? Excellence is much a matter of opinion, I would observe, and wholly contingent on the point of view. And without doubt the inner life of the most besotted and worthless of idlers, must have in it some redeeming qualities, not sufficient I dare say to atone for faults persisted in from day to day, but enough to make companionship in the misery he courts and entails bearable for those who suffer with him. Cobbler Howden was indeed a sad scamp and bad father, yet he was not wholly bad. How often he sat down at his hungry hearth, wringing his hands and bemoaning his fate, it were bootless to recount; bootless all the more that usually he would blame Heaven or Hell or things in general for having 'welted' body and life of him so that it was hard to live. It was sad, even solemn, sometimes to hear him cry out to his young son to 'tak' warnin' o' me, a broken-down puir sinner, wha forshook the Lord an' His ways tae wallow in ma ain unrighteousness, until ma ain misdeeds hae left me bare an' nakit, meeserable an' stairvin', wi' ye, puir tentless loun, an' yer stairvin' toothless grannie.' Sad too, was it at times for the youth to hear this father cry out of the happiness of her, his mother, who lay quietly resting in the kirk-yard, undisturbed by the sins or sufferings of him whose early piety and promise had won her maiden love. Chiefly the boy knew his father's care of him by the random cuffs and whacks which for slender causes were freely bestowed.

Jamie's mother was dead, dead so long that his

father's rare outcry but faintly woke an echo and no aching in the boy's heart. He was not sensitive, and, at any rate, the event was old, and he was young; and thus it was sorrowful to him only because at mention of her dead daughter, old grannie would 'croon and greet' by the cold ingle, and, in her toothless, palsied way, wish she too was 'wi' Abbrawhaum.'

And no wonder was it that she thus wished and longed, for toilsome and cheerless and weary was the way that she traversed, cowering and soul-crushed, wending her way to her cold home—the grave. Mainly, she was the stay of this poor household, for the Parochial Board paid her one shilling per week, and the law, and the degradation of it, notwithstanding, she would put on her old, old cloak, with its plain hood and its fluted shoulder-plaits, that old black cloak that 'was a gude black cloak what time her man died, thritty-five years syn', and underneath it she would string to her her 'meal pock' and wander forth to beg, to beg for this wretched son-in-law, and the boy, her grandson. Thus it was that the 'puir chiel laddie' was mostly fed. There was a day, long since, when 'the auld wife beggar' did not think that she should come to this, when bright eyes flashed from a fair and rosy face dimpled with the smiles of youth, and life was fresh, and fain to anticipate, and no thought was of cold poverty, or of old age back-bent and grimy, or of the grave. Which one of us can forecast his future? Thank God that, the present evil being enough for the day, we have not anticipation of, and cannot reckon the ailments and the evils beyond.

But solely in the tutelage of this old woman was there any foundation in fact for Jamie's assertion that he was well brought up. Indeed, she was esteemed 'a godly auld womman,' and had in reverence, perhaps a superstitious reverence for age and poverty, by the families th commiseration she excited, whose alms she carried
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away to the gaunt garret, her home. There was a spirit of gentle meekness in her approaches and her solicitations, a sweet-voiced thankfulness in her acknowledgments, a quiet fervour in the blessings besought for her benefactors, that begot the notion that she was near to the heart and eye of the Highest, was fed with rich things from His table, although thus, in her sun-greened covering and in lowliness, she begged for the bread that perisheth that she and hers might live their allotted span of living misery.

Her profession of godliness was in truth no cloak for hypocrisy. The grinding of poverty, the death after death of those whose lives bound her to life and helped to make life tolerable for her, were enough and more than enough to drive any soul from the sadness of the present for hope and comfort in the life unseen. And in proportion to the present desolateness, there being no loving eye to pity, no tender hand to help—for even when most considerate of her, still the hand of charity was cold to feel—her eye the more strained through the mist that enveloped her poor life, seeking the face of Him, whose pity is everlasting for the poor and the needy.

She would speak much to the boy, her grandchild, our Jamphlin' Jamie, of the things that concern the life to come, too much perhaps for best effect, ever speaking of the water and the bread of life, while she gave him his sup of porridge made from the gleanings in her wallet, or satisfied his hunger in the afternoon with the cold potatoes carried by her from distant farm-houses. Too much she may have talked of the future she lived and longed for, for boyhood will eat its porridge or potato, nor be much troubled by the accidents of how they came or how they are eaten, not feeling much the mendicancy which procures them, nor valuing greatly the spoon even of silver wherewith they may be supped. And as for the world to come, boyhood mostly has a nearer boundary of thought. 'Whan am big I'll wark

for ye, grannie, an' for puir faither !' The near-lying field of the life that is was enough for the material hopes of this boy of poverty.

He was a pale-faced boy, whose appearance gave you an impression that he had suffered injury of the spine, that the diverging feet of him and 'shochlin' gait of him had thence resulted. But I do not think he had any tendency to spine disease. His thin white face and feebleness were amply accounted for, by the many hard days of cold, and by many scanty meals irregularly given him, barely sustaining the boy-life of him. Perhaps, too, his vital force was weakened by the unhealthy knowledge of his father's wayward life, by the daily listening to his complaints that would take no cognisance of the grandmother's sources of comfort, for he would hourly say that God and the Bible were the inventions of the priests, that there was no Providence to rule and reign, and he was ready to curse and die, while, meantime, he longed, terribly longed for a dram. 'Grannie' was mostly silent before the father, only now and again lifting up her voice to maintain that the 'Lord reigneth,' so that the man's soul might not be required at her hand. It was chiefly during the father's wanderings from the garret that she spoke to the pale-faced boy of the things of God. As for Jamie's shuffling gait and out-turned feet, they had more natural explanation in the facts of his upbringing than in any actual physical ailment. The father could provide him no clothes, would not work for the procurement of clothes or shoes for the boy. Thus to cover his nakedness and to shield his feet from winter snows, the grandmother had to beg odd cast-off garments and old worn-out shoes. The shoes she got were not only dilapidated but heavy and large, and thus I think his weak limbs were twisted into the incongruous shapes that are permanent to them now.

He had never been to school. His sire could not afford the penny a week needed to pay for education,

would make no effort to provide it. If he had a penny, it went all too speedily for a 'glass,' for these were the good times, still bemoaned by some, when a gill of whisky was sold for threepence. But the old grandmother had taught the boy the A, B, C, and in a desultory way, of summer evenings, had coached him up to words of four letters. It was her great ambition that he should be able to read the Testament 'afore she was called'; but the work had been late of beginning, and now he was twelve years old, and earnestly longing to 'git awa tae herd or tae dae onything,' bent on deserting the old grandame who so cared for him.

Why linger over his aspirations to quit the garret and go out to the hill-sides and green fields, and to do such work as he was fit for to make certain of his food? He did go out, and he found the world by no means unpleasant and the people of it kindly disposed. If they were not solicitous about the welfare of louns such as he, at least they were ready to accord them full measure of fair play, specially willing that if they worked they should also eat, yea, eat abundantly. And this boy, being earnest of mind and willing in his service, won more readily, in respect of his grotesque limbs and their scanty covering, that consideration of the farmer-mind which was laudably satisfied in cramming him with food. He ran about all summer barefooted, and became strong on his coarse but full fare, so that he boasted, 'Ye maunna jeer at me! I can loup as far as black Bob, the horseman, an' that's mair nor twa three can dae.' Jeer at him, of course, some thick-witted ploughman would; but, notwithstanding, swiftly fled the summer days, and the days of autumn, too, until the grain sheaves were all in the stack-yard, and the cattle beasts were free to wander from the hill pasture to the stubble fields and to feed and straggle at their wills over the length and breadth of the farm.

Then it was time for the boy to depart. But he had

no disposition to go, having but cold thoughts of the garret of his childhood in the village six miles away. Twice he had visited it in this eight months' absence, and twice had one of its inmates come to him—first his grandmother. She came with old cloak and wallet, 'tae speir aifter the loun,' to beg a blessing for him and his employers, and for herself to carry away such portion of meal or other food as they might bestow. They sent her away not empty, but being hard of mind and full of comfort, they valued not much the blessing she entreated, and lightly esteemed her in the entreaty. Poor Jamie saw and felt nought but pleasure in the old woman's visit, and thought not at all that, in the eyes of his fellow-servants, men and maidens, it affected his position. Yet, no doubt, it did affect him, establishing 'the auld beggar wife's oye' in their eyes as an object for contemptuous pity. What mattered that, since, if possible, they were kinder than before?

Again, when the yellow grain was nodding to the sickle and the boy's term was drawing nigh, his father sought him on the outlying pasture, where the speckled cows straggled with their followers in listless fulness in the autumn afternoon. Although he came not with smiles and words of cheerful thanksgiving for the finding of his boy safe and well, yet was the boy glad to see him, and was happy the while that they sat together on the hill-side in the sunshine, while the father asked questions about the ways of the place and about his master. It was but a brief interview. 'Cam' wi' me tae the maister?' said the sire, ending it.

'I daurna,' said the herd. 'Gin ma back wus turned, ilka ane o' the beastes wad mak' for the stooks, for a' they be sae douse an' me afore them.'

So the father went his ways.

By and by, he strolled back again, and the farmer came from the steading to the cowherd on the hill-side when he had visited the reapers. 'Jamie,' said he, 'your

father seeks your pound fee. Are you willing that I shall give it to him?' Now, to the boy this pound had been for the six months of servitude a special and mysterious guerdon awaiting him. A pound! He had never so much as seen one, had no notion at all that it was no more than an uncleanly bit of paper such as is the ordinary currency of our fatherland. He had no special notion about it, but a pound worked for and won must be surely some large and bright and pleasure-giving thing. Therefore, it was sore to him that he was not to see it, not to handle it after all. Of course, if he had got it, he would have carried it home intact, and put it at the disposal of father or grannie. But not to see it at all was very hard, and so he replied not. 'Cam', tell me, Jamie,' quoth the farmer, kindly.

'Spake, ye little deevil!' said the father, seizing his shoulder and shaking him.

'Ay,' said the boy, gulping down his sorrow.

'You're willing then that I shall pay him?'

'Ay,' said the boy again; and seeing the branded cow disposed to wander to the stubble, as yet forbidden ground, he left the men there and set off to the erring one, both that he might gulp down his vexation and that he might do his duty. His father finally departed without speaking to him again. The boy saw him no more.

Cobbler Howden got the boy's pound note from the farmer. It was long, long years since his hand had held one before, and his heart leaped within him, and a wild elasticity seized his limbs as he actually ran from the farm with that treasure. He was well exhausted before he reached the little public-house at Easter Howe, into the dirty tap-room of which he entered. The room was unoccupied and he sat down, and there alone he had a great spiritual conflict with himself. The pound note was so precious that he was very loath to change it, and yet his soul cried lustily for a dram. If he had but one

penny! If he had, he could certainly have gone on at least to the village before converting the note into drink and coins less valued.

But having no penny, his better man gave way; and failing heart and flesh were invigorated with a dram. What, now, if all this copper 'change,' of little value save as commutable into drams, should undergo transmutation? Well, it was long since he had had a plentiful drink, and he resolved to quaff freely from the glad spring thus freely streaming for him. In the shades of evening, he staggered from the door of 'the public' and passed off upon the road into the darkness. Into the darkness truly, for when the morning light had come again, by the road-side, in the little tinkling brooklet called the Burn o' Howe, with scarcely half an inch of water on its pebbles, there lay his corpse, face down in the water. A shepherd, driving a score of lambs to the county town, was the first to find it, and the wretched father was buried, before the farm people, acting, no doubt, with the kindest of motives, told the boy that he was dead. So dull and leaden of head and heart was Jamie, that he scarcely wept for his loss. Perhaps humanity must needs be heavy and hard to move to evidence of emotion, when the cowherd is but twelve, and hardship and penury have mostly moulded his nature.

The farmer let him stay till Hallowe'en, and sooth to say, he had no eager craving for his 'home,' even when his heart faintly glowed at thoughts of his old grandmother. But at Hallowe'en he must depart, for it was not compatible with the farmer's notions of economy to feed even one mouth where service was not given in return. Thus the boy found his way back to the village, and taking advantage of a cart that also went thither, he carried with him a goodly sack of hazel nuts, collected in the autumn. On the advice of the grieve, he offered them for sale to the merchant and was made glad with

half-a-crown and an ounce of snuff. O, wonder of wealth and of snuff, it seemed, which he carried straightway to the garret, and gave all to her who best knew its value, specially esteeming the 'sneeshin,' titillating gift of the ragged orphan grandchild.

CHAPTER II

IT may be hard to believe, but still the truth was, that his rags and orphanage and all the misery concomitant sat lightly on Jamie, all excepting the old woman's never-ceasing exhortations and expositions. If there is much human misery, let us be glad to think that we, who do not suffer, looking on, see the signs and symptoms of distress much more distinctly and as more grievous than the sufferers feel them. Humanity is peculiar in this. When the lower creatures are writhed by pain, we may measure their evil case by the extent and frequency of contortion. So too when man is in corporeal agony. But as to how man bears his rags, or the dirt that seems unalienable from rags, your eye, or mine, O reader, is no safe criterion. We see the squalor and the tatters, and involve ourselves in them, with all our preconceptions of what the misery of them must be; forgetting that many an empty stomach is proximate to a brave heart, and many an old coat covers a back that will bend only to labour. Those treat emptiness and hunger with quiet contempt, strange for us to contemplate who are fed delicately; these feel no disgrace in rags, attaching no importance to purple or fine linen. Indeed, much of the hardship and evil of poverty has existence only in the misconception of the rich. Poverty has pain chiefly for those whose standard of comfort has been elevated and cultivated.

Thus the boy felt not his evil case so badly as the narrative of it might lead us to expect. Chief evil of his lot it was that he must believe that, just as his father before him certainly was, so he also might be a son of evil predestined to be damned eternally. Nay, even the fear of being damned might not have had serious effect on him, had it not been clothed with the assurance of such suffering as was most sensibly recognised in the conception of burning everlastingly. This was the great and terrible thing of life for him, pressed home with earnest urgency by the old crone, whose own mind was at rest in the happy assurance, that if in this life she was subjected to evil things, in the life to come perpetual blessings awaited her. With trembling steps Jamie followed her now to new exhibition of her lowliness, to nearer access, as no doubt she thought it, to the throne of the Highest.

Once and again in the lifetime of her son-in-law, she had adventured, in her black cloak, and in the spirit of piety and humility that she so much cultivated, to set herself up in the face of the congregation, to draw the eyes of the Christian people upon her, by mounting the pulpit stair and seating herself on the topmost step. But once and again that irreligious Cobbler had stopped repetition of this for the time, by swearing fearfully and threatening all manner of evils temporal both to her and himself. Now, that obstacle being removed, when the boy went with her to church, straightway she led him up the aisle and up the pulpit stair and set him down before the people. Indeed he did not relish it, for he thought that the eyes of all the people were on him; while very few thought of him or reckoned his being there at all, and certainly none but those whose opinion he need not have minded. Yet did the louns whom he encountered in the streets and at the corners of the way jeer at him as the 'pu'pit bird,' and ironically call him 'the parson,' and otherwise deride his elevation. Through

fear of the devil and his sense of the contumely, the boy was both commoved and perplexed. As too often happens, the devil being the more distant power, was less effective as a deterrent than the scoffs of the village imps. Perhaps, however, there was some truth in Jamie's own statement of the matter, that the 'deil,' in his rage for him as a victim, actually put into his heart a contempt for what he—the deil—could do, and stirred him 'tae flee the kirk an' tae desert his puir auld grannie.' By all that I know or that is known of the ways and wiles of the arch-enemy of mankind, Jamie's statement may be correct. This at least was the fact, that Jamie forsook his garret and grannie and fled next Sunday morning when he had supped his dry porridge.

Fled whither? Is not the world wide? No doubt of it; but why should we follow him in those days of wandering, confined wholly to Glenaldie or Howe or Langrig? Suffice it that he underwent many days of pinching cold, and had many strange bedfellows, although mostly his belly suffered not, before the day when, being seventeen years of age, he was engaged as a regular 'halfin',' at the farm of Lower Banks, in the parish last named. In the interval he had not wholly wrought for nought. When in the first winter, he found, at last, after much wandering, a resting-place and work, feeding nowt and howking turnips for their feeding, his fee was but a pair of shoes and his meals. But then summer came, and he remained to herd and do odd jobs for thirty shillings and his food. Now his wage was four pounds ten for the six months.

And here it would be unfair were I to omit to mention, that the poor boy never got wages into hand of his but forthwith he repaired to the distant village, sought again the cheerless garret and the grandmother therein who still would prate and pray after the way that he had fled from, and to her he gave full half of his money, and 'an offering of sneeshin forbye.' It would almost

seem as if an instinct moved him, a good and happy instinct no doubt it must be, which fills many lowly hearts, to do and to find pleasure in doing the thing which must most accord with the Will of the great Ruler of Mankind, who will have mercy rather than sacrifice, but who esteems loving acts of mercy most in the self-sacrifice of the actor.

It was greatly to Jamie's advantage, that he now 'took on service,' or was engaged, at Lower Banks. Mackenzie, the farmer, was an elderly man, an elder also of the church in Langrig, while, at the same time, he was reputed one of the best farmers in the Strath. He was a tall and powerful man, 'a fine judge' of horse or beast, and ready to vaunt his skill in this particular. He said that he generally selected a beast by its eye. He was famous also for his skilful and willing servants, and, possibly, he chose them also by their eyes. Indeed, judged by any other organ or point of him, poor Jamie could scarcely have been selected. Mr. Mackenzie, although he had a powerful frame, had but a weak and wheezing voice; yet it was his supreme delight to exercise it twice a day (seed-time and harvest always excepted) in family devotion, to which all the unmarried servants were gathered, so that he had quite a little congregation. On Sunday evenings also he would examine them in their knowledge of the Shorter Catechism, and hear them read long passages of the Gospels, 'verse about.' Wherein consisted the advantage of this to Jamie, who had at earlier stages of his life fled from the like? It lay in this, that the farmer finding that Jamie was in the bonds of ignorance, committed it to the charge of his son to instruct him in reading and writing.

Jamie's attainments in these high arts have never brought him much gain, the standard to which he attained being but lowly. It was still a good thing for him to learn, saving, as it did, his after life from the disgrace of being unable to read his Bible in his house-

hold, the doing of which in these his maturer years is both matter of faith and duty with him, matter of pleasure and solace also now that he is the stem of many branches. Like every good thing the acquisition of the power to read was painful and laborious; not the less so that while his brother yokels were daffing and chaffing or lazily smoking after supper, at half-past six he must grudgingly go from them, taunted by them as the 'skule boy,' and grind at his letters and pot hooks for a full hour each evening.

In this service he remained for two years, until he was nineteen, still serving in the capacity of halfling, with only a halfling's fee. His occasion of quitting it is worthy of record. It was that dread November when our soldiers were dying in the wintry snows of the Crimea and many homes were filled with mourning, homes in every corner of the land. Even our distant Strath was not without its mourners, and one of the victims was a nephew of farmer Mackenzie, a smart sergeant in a Highland Regiment. There were four lads, all much of the same age as Jamie, on this farm of Lower Banks and on the adjoining farm of Kilgrew, and these four with Jamie meeting over the bothy fire at night, each with his terrible legend of the battlefield and of the protracted siege, then and there made up their minds not to engage for farm service after the term of Martinmas approaching, but forthwith on the term day to start right away for Inverwick to seek the service of their Queen and country. Truth to say, Jamie had some hesitation about this. 'Gudesakes! what'll grannie dae? What if I'll be kilt?'

'Ye lurdane! ye can only dee aince!' said one.

'Ye may be prood if they tak' a jamphlin' craitar lik' ye,' said another.

'Be sure they'll tak' him! They'll tak' us a', for they're gay straited for lads. Least if they kent Jamie's mettle wi' a pitchfork, they'd no keep a gun

frae him. He'll dae as weel's the lave o' us tae be shot at.'

So the matter was settled; and, on the term day, the five lads set forth, their humble hearts fired by a spirit as brave as ever Roman or Briton might boast of, as ready to step into breach or gap, death-made, as noblest heroes might be. And, on the way, they must needs pass through the village, and Jamie sought the garret and the old woman of his boyhood and bade them both adieu in that proud, peculiar spirit which must ever inspire the departing warrior, willingly going forth to encounter death and danger, certain of these, uncertain that he shall ever return.

The old woman was in sore distress, when she comprehended what the lad intended. 'Ye're demented! Shurely ye're possessed! A pair loun lik' ye tae gae raivin' an' murtherin' wi' guns an' swyords tae the wars! What will ye dae i' the wars? Tak' yer grannie's advice an' bide at hame.' But no; he was not to be turned from his lofty purpose, but he promised to fear the Lord in his warfare, 'an' tae kill naebody but Roosheans.' 'They wha tak' the swyord shall perish by the swyord.' What of that? he was ready for that issue. So with much crooning and many tears the old woman let him go, and proudly he marched forward to the town, with his comrades.

The little party sought their way to the recruiting station. It was late of the night, and they were foot-sore more or less all of them, for they had tramped nearly thirty long miles rendered miry and ill to walk by winter's rain. They had come, too, from afar without food by the way, and much of the way they had traversed after night-fall. Yet the little band, when the sergeant brought them in and set them in the flaring gaslight, bravely held up their heads and stood as erect as was permitted by their youth of toil and the bundle of clothing bound up in red cotton napkin which each of them carried in his hand. Jamie, you know, had the

additional difficulty of his legs. The sergeant praised the bold spirit of the volunteers, and kindly entreated them, providing them with supper and billets for the night, and the young soldiers soundly slept, their course of warfare being so far begun. Next day, to his intense chagrin, Jamie was rejected by the inspecting surgeon. 'If it haed na been that Jock Swanson was turned aff as weel as me, I'd hae drowndit masel, I declare! Tae be thocht nae worth powthar an' shot! gude sakes, it wus vera hummlin',' Jamie has said to me. 'It wus five year, an' the war wus a' over an' dead, afore I daured tae show ma face tae the folk that kent me afore. If they had taen me, wha kens what I micht be the day! Ane o' them is a giteral or some braw craitar lik' that noo, as am telt. But he's no married yet for a', while I hae a wife an' am a faither! 'The Lord guides us a' his ain gait; an' whan I seed that men sae lightly esteemed me,' said the poor fellow, 'I mindit what grannie said, an' I turned mair till the Lord. I wusna a hair the waur tae grannie, I ken.'

His next appearance amongst us was at the feeling market, in April, 1859. The village square was thronged, as it always is on such occasions, with a mass of rustics, men and girls, of all classes. It was mid-day when he arrived, for he had come from far. He wanted to hire his thews and sinews in the old Strath, from which the fear of ridicule had kept him so long an exile, pained and yearning for the places so well known of him. And it being mid-day, and he desirous to fee, he straightway mingled in the throng, hoping to engage himself before he sought out his grandmother.

The five or six years of his absence had wrought a great change on the throng. Whereas in former years he would have found in it scores of 'kent faces' to greet him and be greeted by him, scarcely one could he now recognise. Some of the employers of labour, the farmers, he did know, and 'his hairt wus gled' to see the

accustomed faces of them, and 'them sae brave an' stoot, sae muckle stooter than ere he gaed awa'.' But the youth were all changed, and the hiring women all changed, and there was not a soul to bid him welcome to Strath or village again. 'It wad hae been jist the same,' said he to himself, 'if I had shipped awa' tae the wars an' been kilt, like puir Jock Fairbairn. Ne'er a ane wad hae haid thought o' me i' the land whaur I wus born!' Being still disengaged at two o'clock, he went to seek his grandame.

He found his way to the old garret, but the door was shut. He raised the latch and entered as of old, for the door had no lock. Everything was as last he had seen it; indeed, as it had been when, a boy, he had cowered beside the hearth, cheerless then as now. He sat down on the wee bit stool on which long ago he used to rest, and, perhaps he was weary and dejected, he covered his face with his hands and began to cry. He has told me, 'I didna ken what for I wus greetin'. But there wus the auld bed whaur faither an' me sleepit, an' there wus grannie's muckle pouch, frae which she aft tuk' the grainie meal for ma parritch an' me a witless bairn, an' it a' cam' upon me, an' I cudna but cry, for I felt masel' lane an' deeslate i' the land.' He sat there, and had his cry out; and, as the old woman came not, he went forth again to the throng. He 'didna ken the bairnies that war playin' on the stair. Ilka thing wus sae chainged. It was guid tae ken the Lord wadna chainge!'

But before the day had gone much further, he was engaged as a ploughman at the Bught, and had met his grandmother, soliciting halfpence, as it was her nature to do, and he made her poor old heart glad with the news of his return to her neighbourhood. It seems that he had regularly sent her, by divers channels, two pounds each half year, so that with the parish dole she should have been above want, certainly in no need to beg halfpence; but I dare say custom goes far to make nature in

all things. It materially helped Jamie to an engagement that he was not—as so many of the Strath lads then were—a militia-man.

At Whitsunday he went home to the Bught, and found himself very comfortable. He was lodged in the bothy, a scantily-furnished room in the farm-steading, sitting-room and bed-room for him and three other 'lads.' It was swept and garnished for them by Meg Bruce, one of the field-women, who cooked their victuals and made their beds. Each man, you know, got an allowance of oatmeal and of milk, to be hained, or wasted, or sold, as he liked.

Naturally, at nights and at meal times, there was more or less chaffing among the men; and naturally, too, Meg Bruce often bore a share in it, and so came soon to know the dispositions of the men. She must have seen that Jamie was a prudent, sensible, saving chiel; and, for some reason which I know not, she cultivated his good opinion by sparing his meal-bag. In making the men's messes she always went to his bag last, and took but a scrim handful. He was, no doubt, the eldest of the party, and therefore entitled to the greater consideration. It afterwards became evident that Meg was one of those facile women that lay themselves out for pleasing every male creature around them, each man after his own heart. It was long before Jamie discovered this, so he was very gracious to the lass. Indeed, each hind of them found, or fancied that he found, his own advantage in her, so that amid the chaffing there was no ill-will.

Jamie being a kindly creature, having in him much of a womanly nature, would show his appreciation of Miss Meg's worth by helping her in her duties. He would shake up his own 'chaff-sack,' and arrange the blankets of his bed, to save her trouble. He would rake out the peat ashes and heap on new fuel on the hearth while dressing; would even fetch in 'a fraught' of water; all which the younger men thought it was most derogatory

for manhood to do. Of course they would have it that he was actuated by stronger motives than mere courtesy. But, in all innocence and kindness, he boldly persisted in his acts of grace and service to her, until the open jeers and rude talk of his companions, who alleged that she was no Susannah, that they had certain knowledge of her depravity and licence, compelled Jamie 'tae tak' tent wha he wus servin'. Indeed, of himself he never would have found out that she was aught else than the purest of maidens, even although she was little careful for concealment; 'but when the lads wud threep she wus a bad ane, and alleige that I holped her for the lik', then I beit tae see tae ma ain karacktar, that it wus nae 'filed through ma ain saftness o' hairt.' In fact, Jamie felt compelled, by the men's talk, to change his demeanour to the damsel before the harvest work had set in. Henceforth, being unable to strike the just mean for his communications, seeing that he believed 'she wus a bad ane,' he was barely civil, greatly dreading contact with her in the slightest matters; so that his altered behaviour was as much the subject of comment in the bothy as his kindnesses were before. However, Meg was to leave at the term of Martinmas. 'She gied notice hersel'; and Jamie made up his mind to abide at the Bught.

His employer, Mr. Masson, tacksman of the Bught, had certainly no desire to lose the man, for Jamie was a model ploughman in his way. He was practically a teetotaller, drinking no strong drinks of any kind; and, what was rarer in a ploughman, he used no tobacco. He was 'honest as steel,' and might be trusted to return with his horses in the best order, however distant the expedition on which he was despatched. Then, too, he had that great guarantee for good behaviour, a few pounds in the Inverwick savings bank. Indeed, having been for some years past full ploughman, with his £7 or £7 : 10s. of half year's wage and his food provided for him, and his lodgings also, he was, as all prudent, unmarried

ploughmen ought to be, in a position to save something, notwithstanding his contributions to 'grannie.' Besides, Jamie had a high religious tendency, very unusual in his class. He never absented himself 'frae the kirk his ain end o' the Lord's day.' It was his great delight to present himself 'in the kirk loft' in his best clothes—'gude blacks'—full twenty minutes before service began, although he had to walk three miles to it. There he sat, distinguished by the huge stand-up collar of indifferently-white cotton, stiffly starched, extending round neck and ears to his nose, very happy truly. At psalm-singing he roared lustily, to the discomposure certainly of all the worshippers in 'the loft.' No wonder he was chary of 'filing' a character such as this.

And Jamie set up for respectability in another way, in one, too, which quite as clearly established his good heart and right notions. His grandmother was getting old and frail; but, for all his help of her, she would not cease her itinerant calls for eleemosynary aid, and Jamie deemed himself aggrieved thereby. So the good fellow, after many ineffectual appeals and remonstrances, told her that he would increase his givings to her to five pounds in the year, and that unless she ceased to go about, he would give her nothing, and would see her no more. In vain she argued that he might yet 'tak' it intil his heid tae gae for a sodger, an' git kilt; that 'he micht tak' thocht tae mairry, an' nae be able tae help her at a.' Jamie was inexorable, and she had to promise and to keep her word.

A terrible trial awaited Jamie while staying at the Bught, touching all his better nature and aspirations. 'It wus shreuly o' the deil,' he says, for he has a firm faith in that potentate. 'He be it be litten tae pit forth his han' an' touch me on the sairest pints; but I kent what tae dae.'

'What was that, Jamie?'

'Och, sir! I took me tae ma twa knees. No lik' that

bletherin auld man o' Uz, who yarned lang screeds till his Maker, tho' they're gran' readin'. I didna dae lik' that; but, kenning better, I made lang prayers, and, praise be till Him, He pulled me through.'

The trial came when the March winds were drying the leas, and the ploughmen were all busy with the work of spring. That Meg Bruce brought forth a man-child at the village, and it was bruited abroad that 'she was faitherin' it on Jamphlin' Jamie.' Where was all his respectability, and his church-going, and psalm-singing now? It was a terrible calamity to be thus unjustly calumniated. No wonder that the poor fellow took to his knees. The jeers and scoffs of the horsemen were indeed hard to bear. Harder still the mild, semi-jocular insinuation that 'there is aye some water whaur the stirkie drowns.' And the poor fellow could not even pray within doors. Since he had come to the Bught, he had, every night before bed-time, been in the way of going out to the stable, 'tae commend himsel' tae the Lord,' which, in peace, he could not have done in the bothy. Now the men would torment him thereanent, alleging that 'Meg wus dootless the compawnyan o' his deevoshuns!' Well, well, he must now pray all the more earnestly to be delivered from this scandalous wrong. I need not say, that in an unfounded scandal like this, the fear and horror of the innocent man were out of proportion to the evil. It quickly blew itself away.

But the event was not fruitless of results in the life of the poor man. 'Aifter an' a', the Lord haed, nae doot, a purpose in it.' And Jamie thought he saw the purpose. Here was he slinking out to his Master, not daring or caring to acknowledge Him openly. That was bad. He should have a family altar to compass. Next, and more, the Lord had said, 'It is not good for man to be alone.' 'Heich! it's His command, and I'll seek for a guid wife o' ma ain, an' nae mair be defenceless afore the fausehood o' ilka randy jaud.'

CHAPTER III

BEHOLD, then, James Howden intent on matrimony. I do not mean to say that there was any singularity in his intent. But there was a specialty in his resolution to wed preceding the finding of any special woman to take him for her husband, of any special woman whom he desired to wed. For, although the world is tolerably well stocked with maidens, choice enough, and all more or less disposed to become wives and mothers, still, if you, O masculinè reader, set out of worldly purpose, or, as in this instance, moved by what you esteem the divine will, depend upon it you shall have much difficulty in choosing; and, having chosen, shall have greater difficulty in impetrating the consent of the elected fair one. Nor can I forbear remarking it as strange in such a person as our friend Jamie, that he should conceive it to be for his edification, to go abroad staring at every woman, and thinking in his heart what manner of wife she might make? Jamie, however, was acting on no poor human mode or counsel. He was simply disposed to obey the behests of God and nature, having found, or fancied that he had found, it was evil for man to be alone.

He went about the matter in a more matter-of-fact way than might have been anticipated. First of all, he gave notice that he was to leave the Bught. It was hard to abide the jests of the ploughmen, who only persisted in them the more that they perceived he was

galled, and winced under their wicked wit. Then he told his grandmother that he proposed to take a house in the village, where she should live with him. He would seek farm service close to his home. If he failed to find it, he should turn to day-labour for one season at least. Grannie, however, refused to quit her old garret. She had lived there through many years of sorrow; there she would abide the coming of eternal peace. But he was welcome to come to the garret, if he listed; and this he finally did. He was fortunate in finding an engagement with Mr. Morris, of the Lowes; and at Whitsunday he set to and whitewashed the old garret, and set his chest in it. I fear the whitewash was not laid on artistically. It adhered but indifferently to the walls, while it had strong propensity to attach itself to all other objects—as Jamie's Sunday coat, back and elbows of it, too often testified. Being thus settled, he next addressed himself to the great object to which this settlement was simply preliminary.

What sort of woman would you expect Jamie to affect? He himself made no secret either of his resolution to be no longer the 'defenceless airchin'-stock o' wicked limmers,' or of the sort of wife he would have. The great and essential characteristic desiderated was this excellent one,—'She maun be God-fearing.' I am disposed to think that when he fixed on the quality indispensable, he had in his view at least one woman who possessed it. Indeed, if that was the case, it was only conformable to right reason in the premises, for who would vow to wed a single virtue without some assurance that the blind, the maimed, or the halt did not alone possess it? However that may be, towards the end of June, Mr. James Howden made a formal tender of his heart and person to Mrs. Janet Beaton, housekeeper to Mr. James Sweet, residenter in the village, and was contumeliously rejected. This is Jamie's own account of his luckless wooing—

'Mistress Beaton wus, as I thocht, a vera pious woman, wha served the Lord nicht as weel's day, for she aye frequented prayer meetin's an' the lik', an' frae the first ma hairt wus set upon her, for I considered her ways an' her saul's ways wad mainly be lik' ma ain. Gudeness kens I wus far astray, but nae maitter. Noo, she was weel come-through by me, but oor grieve, tae whom I spake o' ma' thochts, telt me, an' he was a man o' muckle judgment baith o' folk an' caattle, she'd be a' the mair likely tae tak' a man. In trowth, he uphaudd ma feeble han's and waverin' knees i' the business an' garr'd me gang through wi' it, else I dinna think I'd hae dune it o' masel' whan the push cam'. Ye see I didna ken her muckle, nae mair nor till see her at the kirk, but whan I made up ma mind tae tak' a wife, I kind o' ways drew up till her. Sae I spake till her on the road frae the kirk ane Sunday. She wus gaein' along brawly in her black gown, for she wus aye weel buskit, and says I, "Wus na yon a godly discoorse, mam?" Jist tae brak' the ice I said it, an' I mind her answer quite weel. Says she, "Young man, I think ye're i' the way o' seekin'. Tak' comfort. Them that seek'll find." Noo, that sayin' dumfoondered me clean, for I thocht she haed fun' oot' an' read the secret thochts o' ma hairt, sae that I haedna ane word o' answer for her.

'Weel, whan I made up ma mind that it was tae be her I wus for, an' whan I wus settled at the Lowes, aifter the term, coming hame at aucht o'clock, I gaed tae the meetin's tae, an' I lat her ken hoo airnest a man I wus, an' I kent she saw it, for she wad aye be look-lookin' at me at the singin'. I thocht she took notice o' me by ordinair. Sae when I haed been gaein' reglar till the vestry for sax week or sae, I felt mooved tae spake till her o' the pint that consarned me maistly, an' mairover, the grieve thocht it wad be richt tae strike while the iron wus het. Weel, I did it. Aifter ae meetin', whan she wus at her maister's back dure, I stepped up till her

an' says I, "I' the name o' the Lord, may I hae speech wi' ye, mistress?" Says she, "What about? Step in, young man." And she turnit the key i' the dure an' showed me intil her kitchen; an' ma certies, it wus a braw, clean plaice, a' swept an' garnished, an' I noticed that e'en the handles o' the water pails, under the dresser, was shinin', lik' oor siller-mounted harness. I thocht, if it pleased the Lord, hoo weel she wad keep a hoose o' her ain, whan she did yon for hire. Sae still thinkin', I sat down be the fire, and says she, "What is it?" Noo, ye ken, it ne'er wad dae tae say, coorse an' plain, tae her, "Wull ye be ma wife?" Sae I gaed roon' the bush a bit. Says I solemnly, "Mistress Beaton, we're commandit tae mairry an' nae till burn." Wi' that says she tae me, vera fierce and wild, "Wha daur say that am' burnin'?" Says I, quite doucely, "Hoot, wumman! It's i' the word! Whasae rinneth may read. There's but twa states o' us i' the buik, the mairried an' the burnin'. Noo, ye're nae wedded." Wi' that she flung up i' the awflest rage, an' caaed me ilka name but a sawnt, an' ordered me forth that instant, while I cudna see whaur I wus wrang, for ma words were a' truth an' soberness. Sae I tried to pit it calmly afore her. Says I, "Beg yer pardan, ye're *nae* mairried, an' it is written 'It is better'"—but I hardly gat time tae finish the words, whan "Be off, ye impident fella," she howled, an' while I wus sittin innocent on the chayre, feelin' ma haid for composure, she up wi' a bucket o' water an' let drave at me, an' soused me neck an' crap, an' then truly I fled awa', sair droukit ye may believe. Weel, weel, for a', it may be wus gude I missed her, for lang aifter I heerd bad an' ugly haivers o' hersel' an' her maister, Sweet; an' nae doot it's a' for the best.'

After this ludicrous termination of his first love-dream, Jamie went many days mazed and wondering. So bewildered was he, so stunned by the action of the 'God-fearing' woman, that it was some days before he could

betake himself to his dévotions, in which his old grandmother was now the interested participant, many days before even his daily labour became to him what it used to be. The grieve, in vain, sought to explain the rude result by the fact of some idiosyncrasy of Mrs. Beaton, alleging that some women went mad at the bare thought of matrimony. Jamie could not console himself with any such belief. Who next was he to adventure on? The grieve was curious to know that, but Jamie, 'wi' that flea i' his lug,' could listen to no suggestion for his connubial happiness. 'There's mony lasses wad hae ye, man, Jamie, real fair-faured queans, if ye jist said the word tae them. For instance, there's Bell Fraser.' But at mention of Bell Fraser, Jamie would get up and stalk off with as much dignity as his shambling legs allowed him to assume.

Bell Fraser was a village girl, or rather woman, for she was twenty-nine years of age. As rough a woman she was as any field squad in the Strath or county could exhibit, but withal a hard-working, willing woman. She was comely, too, after the manner of comeliness in her class, which implies large bones and well-developed muscles, suitable for the labour which won her bread. But, chiefly, Bell was distinguished for her ready speech, 'her jaw,' as her comrades termed it, and for her pronounced opinions on the subject of matrimony, in favour of it, I mean. It 'wus weel kent what kind o' hussey she wus. She'll hae a man (husband) wi' fair means or foul, or she'll hang hersel' wi' a man's gairtars if better canna be made o' it.' Indeed, her deportment towards the opposite sex was not regulated, to any degree worth mentioning, by womanly delicacy. Jamie's view of the scriptural text, as quoted so unhappily to Mrs. Beaton, might have entire applicability to her. I am sorry to have to say that she feared not God while thus she regarded man.

Now, this Bell Fraser having been for years a field

worker at the Lowes, had early and rather warmly assailed my friend Mr. James Howden on his advent there. To this I doubt not that Jamie's own garrulity contributed, for before he had been twenty-four hours on the farm, he had himself made wholly known the proud contents of his savings bank book, and a little of the secret desires and objects of his life. Therefore Bell set upon him as quite 'a suitable chiel tae mak' her a man,' and at the steading, in her rough way, she got her arms round his neck, to the sad defilement of his starched shirt collar, for she was not cleanly, and while he struggled to get away, she dragged him along and shouted to the men and maidens to witness her happiness and her triumph. Verily a mad wench she was, who thus became to the soul of Jamie a sore distress and persecution. 'Oot o' the fryin' pan intae the fire,' said he, sorrowfully. 'I 'scapit frae the Bught frae evil tongues. Noo, am compassed about wi' bulls o' Bashan, monsters o' a' iniquity, wha shurely will devoor me, 'less the Lord send deliverance.'

Bell lived in the village main street, a few doors off from Jamie's garret, so that she menaced his repute for godliness and his fair fame generally, not at the farmstead only, but on the highway, yea, even in the village street. Thus was he fearfully tormented. But it was only for a season, for when Bell saw that she made no impression on him favourable to her own ends, she ceased to bother him, although still from time to time she showed readiness 'tae fa' tae't again.'

Such was not at all the sort of woman that Jamie would select—far from it. But it took some time after his first most complete discomfiture before he could bring his thoughts to any serious consideration of the subject. I believe that it was his grandmother who first shed light on the darkness and difficulty that had settled down on his matrimonial mind. At least so I gather from his confused talk. 'Says grannie tae me, "Ma days canna

be lang noo," (they war shortar, puir boddy, than she thocht), "an' I'd lik' tae see ye settled, laddie, afore the call comes. Jest tak' ye ony bonny queanie oot o' a clean nest, ony ane ye lik', yersel', an' I'll be weel pleasit." She wus a kind soul was grannie, rest her.'

So Jamie became possessed with the conception 'o' a bonny, bonny bit lassay oot o' a clean nest—jist o' dacent paurentage, ye ken.' That would satisfy his longing soul. And up and down the village he went, and round about, 'glowering' for the commodity he wanted, and it was not long before that wag, the grieve, knew his thoughts and intents of heart. 'Noo, Jamie, winna that ane dae ye? I guess she'd shoot ye fine,' the grieve would shout, each chit of a lassie they chanced to pass as they drove their carts along. My belief is that the pursuit of matrimony in such modes must have been injurious to the poor fellow's frame of mind and growth in grace.

At last they settled it 'atween himsel' an' the grieve,' that bonny Annie Dallas, at Lowestoft, a pendicle of the estate and barony of the Lowes, was the girl whose love would assure him happiness. And having settled it, the grieve left Jamie to follow up his suit in his own way, secure of this, I suppose, that, whichever way he chose to follow it up, he would make a mess of it. Annie was the daughter of a farmer who farmed the Toft, a little holding of some sixty acres, a pretty, little, sun-browned maid, and as good every whit as bonny, her father's solace and comfort, his grieve, his dairy-woman, his all. Such a girl, perforce of her beauty and her goodness, had many followers, who strove hard to win her smiles and her love. It was no uncommon sight to see half a dozen ploughs going on the Toft in a late season, each sturdy young fellow who guided one moved to aid the farmer for the sake of 'bonnie Nanny.' I am sure you will concur in this with me—the selection was excellent, however desperate the hope.

Yet Jamie's first approach, although indirect, was not inartistic. I suspect it was suggested by the grievance. It was the means of introducing him to the household. You know it never would have done to march up to the Toft, in such mode as Jamie could march, and proclaim that he came for 'Annie.' Was it not written, 'Be ye wise as serpents'? In his attendance at the vestry prayer-meetings, Jamie had been constituted a collector 'for the haythin,' and a tin box, sealed up, having a slit to receive 'the collection,' had been entrusted to him. Who or what was 'the haythin' Jamie knew not. It might be 'the puir deil' for aught he knew, for the term to him signified only badness in general. What 'the haythin' was or were to do with the box and the money, when he or they got it, nowise concerned his soul. But, the box being now gravid with Jamie's own weekly pence, was turned to account as a reason for calling at the Toft, Mr. Dallas being a church member, and like most men of his class and years, putting much value on due observation of ordinances.

To the Toft then Jamie hied on a Saturday evening in golden August, when the soft south wind was fanning the fiery heat of the red sun, which was making the grain glow yellow in its glare. He found the old farmer sauntering by the beech hedge which fenced his break of barley, speculating on the earliest date at which he should summon his friends and hired people to cut it down. Jamie saluted him gravely, congratulating him on the security of the promise 'There shall aye be seed-time an' hairst.' Then he bluntly to his errand; 'He was colleckin' for the haythin.' 'What haythin?' 'Oo, ay; the minister's haythin;' which with the production of the box, was accepted as complete and satisfactory explanation. The farmer would contribute, and bade Jamie step to the house with him. At the house there were Annie and two young farmer lads, and supper was spread forth awaiting the father's return, for in

such houses, where, with inmates such as the pretty girl, visitors might be expected, the Saturday supper was the gala-feast of the week. James Howden, with frank hospitality, was invited to sit down and share it, and the farmer gave him sixpence, the sweet daughter a silver groat, dropping the coins into that box for the 'haythin.'

The head of the house was earnest in entreating a blessing on the meal, of which he and his daughter and the three strangers then partook; and thereafter, while Annie and the young farmers were gone from the room, the farmer and James Howden conversed pleasantly of crops and feeding stuffs, and of the potato disease, which that year had shown itself badly in the Strath. Throughout the conversation, James bore himself not only with fair good sense, but with pious observation also, specially marked in reference to the potato blight, which 'was jist ae judgment on a stiff-neckit an' rebellious generation, an' was tae be steyed only by hoomiliawshun an' prayar.' And he dilated on the exceeding efficacy of prayer in all things. In fact the old man thought his discourse 'highly improving.'

Suddenly Miss Dallas returned with her young friends, and the books were brought and the farmer read a chapter. They sang no psalm, which was certainly a defect in their simple devotions. There was at least one of the little band of worshippers who would have delighted to 'bawl in Bangor.' Yet for him there was consolation, for, the chapter ended, Mr. Dallas asked James 'tae engage,' and the request was complied with. Habituated to pray, indeed having 'a gift' therein, he prayed fervently and feelingly, from his simple heart. But then he had no dread of 'vain repetitions' and was unconscionably prolix, keeping them on their knees for the longer part of an hour. To have an audience was a rare thing for him, and such an audience, comprising the object of his ambitious

affection, was surely enough to spur a man to the utmost and highest exercise of his gifts. 'Heich, friend,' said Dallas, 'ye didna spair yersel.' But bonny Annie was evidently displeased, for she whipt out of the room without the slightest acknowledgment of James's excellence. However, the exercise had greatly gratified James himself, and to Mr. Dallas he protested that he 'haed ne'er afore felt sic' sweetness in it,' spoke so much of his delight that the old man said, 'Weel, wha kens but ye may jine wi' us in a coming time?' Instantly said Jamie, 'I'll come neist Saturday;' which was more than Mr. Dallas intended.

Jamie went home carrying his box for 'the haythin' in his hand as a most precious thing. He held it at arm's length before him, in the moonlight, as he trudged along. His soul was full of pleasant thoughts, very much in admiration of himself, wholly in admiration of Annie Dallas. 'Isn't she a bo-onny queanie?' he asked himself. 'Winna grannie be plaisit if I get the lik' o' her?' When, lo! on the road stood Bell Fraser. 'Stan', Jamie!' said she, 'whaur awa' hae ye been hawkin'? Whaur till are ye jamphlin' noo?' He was filled with horror of the rough woman, who, seeing he was not to obey her behest to stand, sprang upon him and his box to seize him by the collar. 'Haud awa', woman!' he shouted in horror, and springing aside he evaded her and fled homewards. She pursued him for a few paces only, although she rudely shouted her contempt after him as he fled.

Jamie was not devoid of sentiment. No sooner had he got home and poured out all his happy, hopeful feelings into the old grandmother's ear, than he set to work to extract the fourpenny piece of silver from the mission-box. To this end he inserted a knife-blade at the slit, by which he hoped to wile or guide the coin to and through the orifice. It was in vain. The little bit was so refractory that he never once caught sight even of its

rim, in the mass of coppers. 'Gae till yer bed, Jamie laddie. Whate'er are ye workin' lik' a gouk on the boxie for?' grumbled grannie from her blankets, under which she could not sleep for the rattling of the coppers in the box. Jamie explained that he wanted 'tae git oot the wee groat, tae pit a hole intil't for a keepsake till himsel'. Then she called him 'a fule gouk,' but still he persevered. He only succeeded in getting at the prize by cutting up the tin box with his knife. He was in a desperate frame when he did it, dreading that 'he might be ta'en up for robbery o' the haythin,' although he had honestly introduced four copper coins of his own to make up for the little one he desired to extract.

He went about next week in an excited way, and I fear that his loquacity concerning himself and his objects helped to frustrate his hopes. It must have been that those two young friends of Miss Dallas heard of his haiverings and his intent to repeat his visit on the following Saturday, for they were waiting for him. With wily speech they induced him to go to the cheese bench behind the barn, the most remote part of the steading, at night wholly unfrequented. There one of them held him in deceitful talk about doctrines, in close proximity to the cheese vat, until the other had opportunity of drawing the ends of Jamie's garments underneath the press cog, on which he quickly screwed down the hard granite block, and then removing the handle of the screw, came innocently to share in listening to Jamie. Suddenly they bade him 'good night.' He was saying softly, 'Losh, what's this?' as the scamps disappeared.

He found himself fixed securely in the press; and in the absence of the handle, and as the apparatus was at his back, he could not free himself. He saw that the lads had tricked him; and it was somewhat humiliating, 'certainly vera hummlin', for a man of his gifts and graces, to be fooled by 'twa sic louns.' His course was to sit quietly till the scamps came to release him. He

sat patiently, therefore, that he might not suffer disparagement in the eyes of the nymph of the Toft. But when he had sat under the moon for an hour alone, that orb went hid in a pile of black cloud, and a faint, hot breeze puffed over the corn fields, and, by and by, there was a fitful sheen, followed by a peal of distant thunder. Now, Jamie had a great dread of thunder, and it was time to bestir himself. Slowly it dawned on him that he might free himself by simply putting off his coat; and this he did, but to find that the ample seat of his breeches had been cunningly involved in the bite of the vat. All his instincts forbade him 'tae pairt wi' his breeks,' even if it had been convenient to do so, which, from his position on the bench, it was not. So he endued himself with his coat again, and sat still.

Down came the pelting thunder-rain on Jamie's 'Sawbath claes.' In dire dismay, he lifted up his voice and roared at intervals, for long unheard and unheeded. But at last he was heard, and then followed the fierce barking of many dogs, and the brutes all rushed as if to worry the vociferous intruder. Then the protracted trial and terror culminated. Bound to his seat, drenched to the skin, amid the darkness made appalling by an occasional flash and distant roar of heaven's artillery, Jamie was absolutely upset by the onset of the curs. 'Am bewitched, am bewitched! Am gi'en ower tae the auld ane!' he roared, in mental prostration. At length one of the farm lassies, who just a week before had suffered from Jamie's exercises, called off the dogs and relieved him, but not before one wicked terrier had fixed its teeth in Jamie's leg. The bite was not much to speak of, but for a month it left Jamie in lively fear that 'he wus gaen mad,' or 'boun' tae gae mad.' Thus ended his courting at the Toft.

November found him single and defenceless still, beginning, through the ignominy of his disappointments, to guess that love or the happiness of matrimony did

not come for mere whistling ; at least, that he was not the man to whistle it to his hand. And still the desire to wed grew upon him. He became low of spirits, stooped more of shoulders, more jamphlin' and awkward of gait. But the whole conditions of his life were suddenly changed. His old grandmother, having gone forth to wander, from the which all his remonstrances could not deter her wholly, was found by him one wet night, drenched with rain, as she had often been, and also shivering and sick. She lay in bed next day, Jamie thinking not much of her ailing. On the second day she was dead. But while the body lay still unburied, Jamie found himself ill, as he had never found himself before, and lay down trembling, unable to pay the last duties to her dust. Speedily it became known that he had 'the fevvar,' and the neighbours forsook him and fled.

Not one could Dr. Blake get for love or money to undertake to nurse this lonely and despised lad. Then it was that Bell Fraser, with all a woman's humanity, and all the heroism that humanity evokes, with not one prompting, I can assure you, save that humanity, stood in the breach between death and Jamie, nursed him through his protracted illness, even while she knew that he disliked her presence. While thus ministering to him, she was refused admittance to her own home, and had to lodge in the fever-burdened room, shunned by all. No wonder it was, that by the time when Jamie, weak and emaciated, was able to sit up once more, poor Bell lay down, fever-stricken, on the bed he had vacated. Now it was his turn to nurse and tend her ; and in that nursing, Jamie was drawn very closely and sympathetically towards her, and a new chord was found in his nature which had vibrated never before. Its vibration gave him true human delight. Bell became Mrs. Howden at Whitsunday following when Jamie came to occupy his cottage in the lane.

His husbandhood, his fatherhood, and, after his lights, God's service, are more to Jamie than power or wealth or honour of men. Ask him how he fares. He will answer you that he is well, and lives in comfort. He has no high standard to consult. 'There's a gey wheen o' us, God bless us a'; but, ye see, the bairns gaither moss for the pig's bed, an' we mak' a hantle o' dung, an' aye set a great length o' taties, an' that brings us ane meal a day shure.' So in the summer evening, his day of farm work over, his work and duties manfully performed, he disports himself with his little ones, and has much humble happiness in his life. I dare say his 'better half,' Mrs. Bell, dominates over him, but he does not feel it greatly. He sometimes is concerned for her. 'She's o' the warld, warldly; nae lik' me, seekin' grace frae on high. May the Lord send it till her in a gude time.' And Amen, say I.