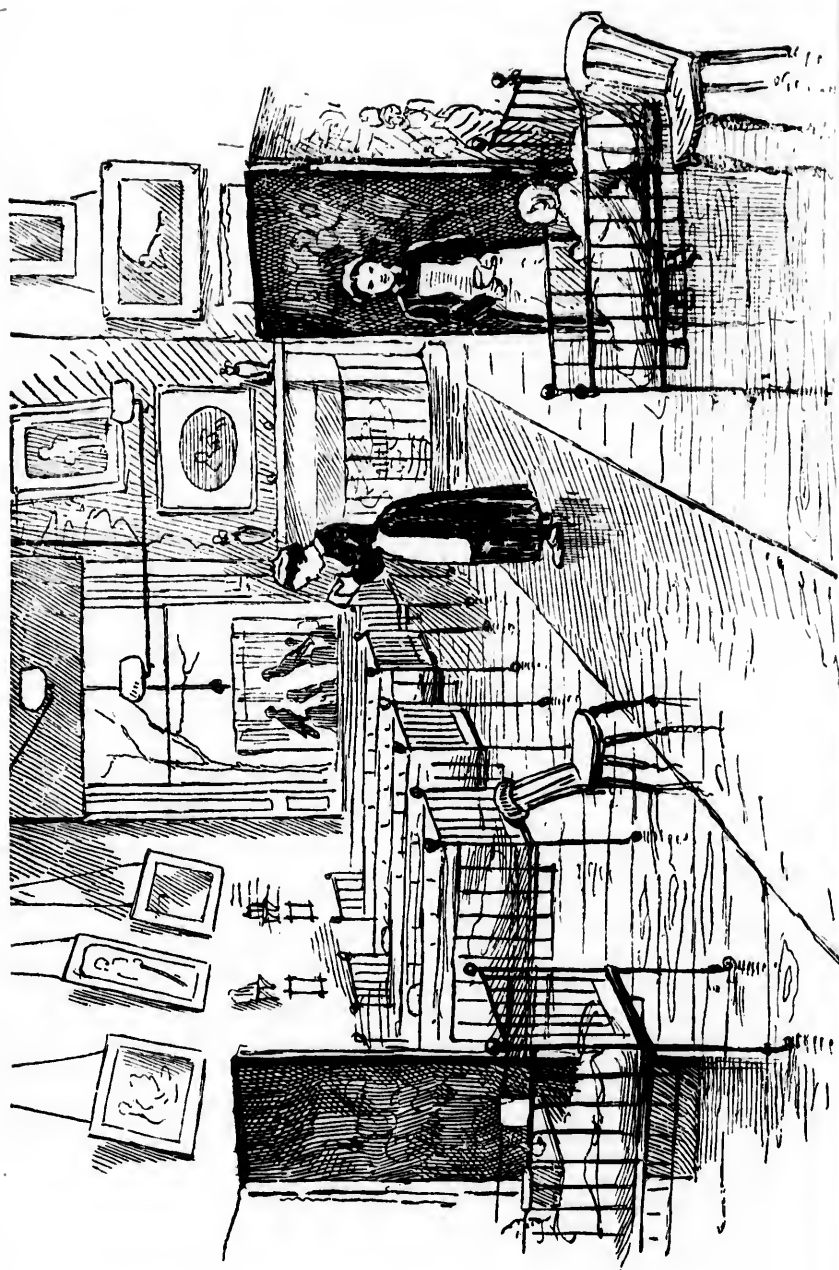


THOMAS DRYBURGH'S DREAM.





TORONTO, CANADA

WILLIAM BRIGGS

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ILLIAM BRIGGS,
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THOMAS DRYBURGH'S DREAM.

CHAPTER I.

MARY DERRICK'S HOME.

IT was a poor, little place, possessing few enough of the attributes of home. An attic twelve feet square, with a sloping roof and white-washed walls, from which the winter rains had stripped much of the plaster, a broken, moth-eaten floor, and a narrow chimney so near the roof that the light could stream in and the rains descend upon the low grate in which, on a cold, October afternoon, a feeble spark of fire dimly burned : such was Mary Derrick's home. She was sitting in the little window in the fading light, bending over a coarse garment, sewing as for dear life. It was such a sweet face upon which the pale October light lingered, and an attractive one still, in spite of the sad lines and curves, which could not have been planted there by the hand of Time, for

she was still very young, little more than a girl, one might have said, though the badge of wifehood glittered on her left hand. Though she had been in sore straits sometimes, Mary Derrick had clung fast to her wedding-ring, the only thing left to remind her of that brief but happy dream from which death had so cruelly awakened her. Yet not quite the only thing; there was another and a dearer link to the happy past, something which was the blessing, and yet the keenest care of Mary Derrick's life. In one corner of the little room there was a low flock bed, on which, covered tenderly up by an old faded plaid, lay a little child. The curly hair lay in bright, golden ringlets on the brow which was much whiter than the pillow upon which it rested,—for linen washed and dried in the grimy atmosphere of the Undergate was not quite so pure as the driven snow. It was a sweet wee face, but one looked in vain for the chubby, rosy fulness which, to my thinking, is the chief loveliness of childhood. The cheeks were sharply outlined, the pretty mouth drawn a little at the lips, and the closed eyes encircled by great purple shadows, which were very pitiful to see, and the breath came from between the parted lips in short gasps, followed at times by a low moan, which seemed to indicate that the sleeper suffered uneasiness or pain. When such a sound would break the dreary stillness, the anxious mother would look

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fearfully round, and press her hand to her heart as if she too suffered, then would bend to her work again, with the shadow deepening in her sweet, sad eyes.

Although the little room was quiet, there was plenty of noise outside. It was Saturday afternoon, pay Saturday too, and the public-house at the corner, just below the attic window, was reaping its usual harvest. Groups of men, still in their working garb, stood lounging, pipes in mouths, at the "public" window, talking and laughing; sometimes the shrill angry voice of a woman demanding her share of the earnings made a variation—not, however, a very pleasant one; then there would be a burst of coarse laughter, and perhaps a few oaths as the dispute betwixt husband and wife waxed louder. The Undergate was not considered a very respectable locality, and it was only such as had lost respect for themselves who were content to abide in its unsavoury dwellings. It had been no little trial to Mary Derrick to come down so far, but necessity is a hard task-mistress, and house-room in the Undergate was cheaper than anywhere else in Dunleith. For that reason it commended itself to the young widow. But though she dwelt among the denizens of the Undergate she was not of their order, for she had seen better days. Ten o'clock rung presently from the belfry of the old parish kirk of St. Magdalene, and then Mary Derrick rose, and stirring the fire

very carefully lest a hungry flame should too quickly consume the precious fuel, set on the kettle. She was faint for lack of food, having tasted nothing since breakfast. Ere she sat down to her work again, she bent lingeringly over the child, thankful that she still slept; it was the only rest or comfort the suffering little one knew. A little, bursting sob broke from the mother's lips as she hastily turned away to the window, for it seemed to her that her darling had grown more wan and worn since yesterday, and that there was a look in the wee white face too closely resembling that which her father's face had so often worn towards the close of his long illness. There was not very much to be seen from the little garret window, only a vast net-work of roofs and high chimney-stalks, and away eastward the tall masts of the shipping in the docks. The red October sun was sinking to his rest on the western horizon, but only a very faint reflection of his farewell glory illumined the grey and foggy atmosphere of the Undergate. Mary Derrick looked out upon the dreary prospect, but saw none of it. Ah, no! Her yearning eyes saw only at that moment a grey rambling old house, standing among shadowing elm trees, whose boughs rustled in solemn unison with the rush of the wimpling burnie which turned the old mill wheel. In these old trees the rooks had had their habitation for generations; and in the quaint

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country garden the same sweet old flowers had bloomed summer after summer, seeming only to grow more fragrant and beautiful as the years went by. Oh, for a breath of that pure, sweet, bracing air! Oh, for a glint of the silver flowing stream! Oh, to hear once more the cawing of the rooks, and the music of the old mill wheel!

A low and somewhat hesitating knock at the door interrupted the widow's reverie. She stepped back and cautiously inquired who the intruder was ere she turned the key in the lock.

"It is Mrs. West. My husband is the minister of St. Magdalene," replied a sweet, kind voice. "Won't you allow me to come in?"

Mary Derrick hesitated a moment. Hitherto she had kept her door resolutely closed against the Bible-women and the district visitors, for she was proud in the midst of her poverty, and would not make exhibition or trade of her circumstances, as too many of her neighbours did without scruple. But the voice was gentle and winning, and it was long since she had spoken in confidence or sympathy to one of her own sex. After that brief hesitation she turned the key, and, opening the door, signed the visitor to come in. Then she relocked the door and turned to look at the intruder. She was quite a young lady, and her face was one of the sweetest Mary Derrick had ever seen—not only because of its natural

beauty, though that was very marked, but because of quietly the sweet spirit of loving-kindness which shone in the deep the earnest eyes, and played upon every feature. "I She glanced compassionately round the poor little maid Mary Derrick's room, and her eyes grew dim.

"Won't you tell me your name?" she said gently. "I have tried your door several times, but have never been able to gain admittance. I concluded that the room was unoccupied, until a woman down stairs told me you lived here."

"I heard you, at least, I heard the knocking," replied Mary Derrick, with just a little touch of defiance in her tone; "but I didn't open'd on purpose. Although I'm poor, I've never needed, nor taken, charity."

Mrs. West's eyes were troubled a little as she answered, "It was not to offer charity I came, but to speak a kind word, or help you a little if I could. Is this your little baby? oh, what a lovely child!"

As she spoke Mrs. West set down the basket she carried, and stepped over to the side of the bed, whither Mary Derrick felt impelled to follow her.

"She does not look strong, poor little thing," said the minister's wife, gently. "I love babies. I have two of my own, you see," she added, with a swift bright smile. "Have you had a doctor to see her recently?"

"No; but I ken what's the matter. Her father died no' lang ago. It's jist a dwining' like his. She'll slip awa' sune." Mary Derrick spoke quite

but because quietly, but there was a dreary ring of despair and which shone in hopeless misery in her voice.

every feature "I would not be quite so certain about that," the poor little said Mrs. West, speaking cheerfully. "It is wonderful what a little skill and good nursing can do. We she said gently must see what can be done for your dear little one. mes, but have Now, don't look at me like that! You must not be I concluded so wilfully proud; though I like you all the better woman down or it. I won't offer anything except on the understanding that you will repay it when you can," she locking," replied added, with a little humorous smile which was like a of defiance in her lash of sunlight on her face. She knew so well the ose. Although proud, patient nature with which she had to deal; en, charity." young though she was, Adelaide West was an unerring judge of human nature.

a little as she "But it is our duty and privilege, as children of ty I came, but the same Father, to help and comfort one another;" little if I could he went on, quietly. "But, we will arrange about vely child!" the basket she baby afterwards; come now, tell me a little about e of the bed ourself. It is not out of curiosity I ask, believe follow her. ne, but because, when I know more of your circumstances I can help you better, you know. It is out tle thing," said of gratitude for my own great happiness that I try babies. I have to a little for the Master; and you will help me n a swift bright o do it, will you not?" her recently?

c. Her father Mary Derrick looked wonderingly for a moment inin' like his nto the sweet, earnest face, and then dropping her k spoke quite head on her hands, burst into tears.



CHAPTER II.

SYMPATHY.

VERY wisely Mrs. West allowed that healing stream to have freest vent. She guessed how long the natural feelings had been pent in Mary Derrick's sad breast, and knowing that she had touched the heart of the lonely widow, she was content to wait till word could come.

"I beg pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Derrick at length, speaking in trembling, apologetic tones ; "but I couldna help it. It is so long since a body spoke a kind word to me. I didna ken I was so weak."

"Hush, hush! Don't excuse yourself, I pray. I am glad to see these tears," said Mrs. West quickly. "I can guess how very lonely and sad your life must be. It must be a terrible thing to be a widow."

"Ay, is it," said Mary quietly. "Mair terrible yet when the guidman was a' the freen' a woman's body had in the warld."



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"You have neither father nor mother, then? You are an orphan?" said the minister's wife quietly.

"Yes, I am an orphan," said Mary Derrick briefly; and then there was a momentary silence. She did not intend to communicate very much of her personal history evidently, but Mrs. West had respect for her reticence, because it showed that her womanly pride and reserve had survived the change in her circumstances.

"Ye hae a kind face an' a kind heart, mem," said Mary presently, "so I'll tell ye my bit story; though ye are the first ane wha has heard it frae my lips sin' I came to Dunleith. Ye'll no ken a bit bonny clachan about twenty miles sooth frae here, ca'd Balwhinnie?"

"I have heard of the place, though I have never been there," replied Mrs. West.

"Weel, I was born an' brocht up about a mile frae it, at the Girmel Meal Mill, whaur my faither was born an' brocht up afore me, an' mony o' his forbears afore him," said Mary Derrick, with a dreamy look in her shadowed eyes, telling that her thoughts had wandered far from her present surroundings. "Dryburgh o' the meal mill is a weel-kent name in that country-side; an' it's weel kent yet, I suppose, though I hinna heard muckle about the place for lang. I was an only lassie, an' my mither deed when I was born. I had ae brither,

Tammas by name, wha was ten years aulder than me. My mither never had but the twa bairns, an I hae whiles thocht it was a peety I didna dee wi her; but that's jist when my heart gets gey faur doon, ye ken, an' a' the warld looks dark. My faither was a hard man, for the Dryburghs were aye misers, hardly just wi' greed, so I hadna a very blithe time o' it when I was a bairn, an' lang afore I was oot o' my teens I was keepin' the hoose weighed doon wi' the care o' garrin' a wee pickled gang a lang way, when neebors' bairns o' my age were playin' thirsels on the green. So it made me auld afore my time. When I was saxteen my faither deed suddenly, an' left nae wull; so, by the law, the mill an' what bawbees there were belonged to Tam. They telt me I couldna claim a ha'penny but I wasna carin' much then, for I didna ken wha a pooer money is in the warld, nor hoo impossible it is to get on withoot it. My faither had been a hard man, sweer to part wi' a bawbee even to pay a just debt, but my brither was ten degrees waur. He wad hardly eat hissel', nor let ithe folk eat, an' mony a bickerin' we had. There wasna muckle love lost atween us, for besides bein' so much aulder, Tam was a soor, queer, morose man, wi' a kittle temper it wasna very easy to put up wi. I was different again, for though I had a hot enough temper tae, I was blythe an' cheery, like what

aulder than mither was in her young days afore the spirit was
 va bairns, an grund oot o' her by years of oppression. I wad
 lidna dee wi hae ta'en up gladly wi' young folk, but they were
 gets gey fau shy o' comin' to the Girnle, for Tam didna show
 s dark. My them muckle kindness. But though he could keep
 rghs were ay folk awa' wi' his soor looks and snappy words, he
 hadna a very couldna prevent me gaun oot, sair though he tried
 an' lang afore it, an' mony a happy nicht I spent under a neebor's
 n' the hoose roof, when 'Tam was sittin' nrrsin' his ill-temper in
 a wee pickl the dreary cauld kitchen at the Girnle. Mony a
 ns o' my ag body advised me to leave him, and seek service some
 o it made m other gate, whaur I wad be baith better paid and
 sixteen m better treated; but somehow I never could mak' up
 ll; so, by the my mind to leave the auld place. Ye see, I kent
 were belonge every stick and stane about it, an' I whiles thocht
 n a ha'penny I couldna sleep without the noise o' the burnie in
 dna ken wha my ears in the nicht time when the wheel was
 too impossibl quate.

er had been "So things gaed on for a year or twa, until ae
 wbee even t hairst time, at a maiden, I met my ain guidman,
 s ten degree Stephen Derrick." A quick sob broke from Mary's
 nor let ithe lips as she uttered the dear name which was
 There was engraved on her heart in letters of gold.

bein' so muc He was an English lad, as ye may hae guessed
 ose man, wi frae his name, an' was an orphan like mysel'. He
 o put up wi was a clerk here in Dunleith, but hadna been strong
 a hot enoug for a lang time, an' as he had saved a wee pickle
 like what m bawbees, had cam' oot to the hills for a breath o'

caller air to mak' him strong for the winter in this dreary toon. He was bidin' at the inn in the clachan, an' as his bright cheery way won a'boddy's heart, he was sune acquaint roond aboot, an' was aye welcome at the fireside, for, though I say it, he could tell a story an' sing a sang wi' onybody, and he played the fiddle like a professional. I saw him for the first time at the maiden at Leerie Law, an' he crackit a heap to me, an' we danced thegither mair nor aince, and syne he took me hame to the Girnel. Weel, I needna say muckle mair aboot it, ye hae been coortit yersel', an' ye ken hoo the thing gaed on. But ye canna ken what a precious glint o' sunshine my love was to me, for my life was that lanesome that whiles my heart was like to break for the things ithir lasses had in plenty. So when Stephen gaed back to Dunleith, he took wi' him my plighted troth. As sune as he had made a pickle to plenish a bit hoosie I was ready to come.

"Stephen spak' to Tam afore he gaed awa', but he said very little. The frank, fearless way which made a'boddy like him seemed to hae an effect even on my brither. He only said ae thing. He askit him if he kent that I had nae tocher, nor a bawbee I could ca' my ain, an' telt him that as he was a puir man he could gi'e me naething. Guid forgi'e him for the lee, for he had hunders in the bank, the half o' which was mine by richt, though the law said no

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Stephen spak' up, an' said it was me he wanted, an'
nae tocher or bawbees, at which Tam gied a bit soor
laugh, which made my lad's cheek burn; but for my
sake he held his peace. I dinna ken what it was,
but a' that winter I had a miserable time o'd. It
took me a' my time to pit up wi' my brither, he was
that snappy and ill-tempered, an' nearer than ever.
I whiles telt him we wad sune no get saut to oor
kail. He was aye flingin' oot a bit sly reproach at
me tae, tellin' me that efter a' he had dune for me,
I was ready enough to leave him, an' gang aff wi' the
first man that speired my price. But the well o'
happiness in my ain heart keepit me frae bein' sae
sair hurt wi' his sneers; and so the winter wore awa',
and in the simmer time I was mairret. We had nae
merry-makin', nor naething. Stephen jist cam' oot
ae Saturday, an' we gaed to the manse, an' went frae
there to the station, man and wife. Tam wadna
come, an' the witnesses were the minister's maid an'
Mrs. Semple hersel', and she was greetin' when she
wrote doon her name. I ken it was oot o' sympathy
for me, an' she kissed me after I was made a wife, for
my mither's sake she said, and the minister gied me
a new five-pound note, to buy something for the
hoose. So I was blithe an' happy as a queen. My
brither's greed was the talk o' the toon, but what did
I care though he gied me naething for my years o'
faithful service? He wad hae my account to

settle wi' a Higher Power, so I left him to his ain conscience, an' I can honestly say I never uttered a hard word against him, though I was whiles sairly tempted. Weel, we set up hoose in a bonnie wee cottage oot o' the toon, and though there wasna muckle in't, and though we had to coont every shillin' afore we spent it, we were as happy as the day was lang. Happy! I never kent afore hoo bricht the sun could shine, nor what a bonnie warld I lived in, till love cast a glamour ower it a'. I micht tell ye something aboot my man, only I daurna trust my tongue. Ye hae a man o' yer ain, an' if ye lo'e him, ye'll ken what I thought o' mine. Maybe we were ower happy, an' maybe had he been spared I micht hae forgotten that there was onything beyond this life; an' so he was ta'en awa'. It was about three years efter we were mairret, and Tibbie, there, was just a sax-month bairn when I began to notice first that my man wasna weel. I canna linger on it, mem, ye'll understand, I think, without muckle tellin'. He ailed for aboot a year; but aye workit awa' for my sake an' for Tibbie's; but at last he lay doon, an' for a twelvemonth I was the bread-winner for him, an' me, an' the bairn; an' syne he was ta'en awa'. He left me wi' words o' hope an' comfort, mem," continued Mary Derrick, when she was again able to speak. "He telt me God wad tak' care o' me an' the bairn, until we

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should meet again ; an' though whiles I hae been very near despairin', I hae never lost grip o' his last words. Efter it was a' past, I cam' into the toon, and workit on for the bairn an' mysel',—an' until thae hard times cam', I could aye mak' bite an' sup for us baith. But, as the time gaed by, work got scarcer an' scarcer, an' I've come doon by degrees, till I had to flit here, an' I think it's the air o' the Undergate that's killin' my bairn. Ye see she's no lang for this warld, an' maybe when she's ta'en awa' the Almighty'll hear my prayer, an' let me slip awa' up beside my treasures."

Mary Derrick ceased speaking, and kept her eyes fixed on the fire, as if her thoughts were still with the past. The hard, bitter, miserable expression had gone from her face, leaving it so sweet and gentle that Adelaide West was struck by its beauty. Ay, verily, sympathy is good for the human soul !

"I need not say I am sorry for you, you must know it," said Mrs. West, laying a kind hand on the widow's shoulder. "I thank you for telling me your story. And now, will you allow me to make a suggestion ? I cannot think, with you, that your little girl is really so hopelessly ill. It seems to me that she only requires good food, and good nursing, and purer air to make her well. Have you ever heard of the Children's Hospital in Dunleith, Mrs. Derrick ?"

'I hae heard o' sic' places, whaur they experiment on puir folk," replied Mary Derrick, quickly. "But I wad never gang there mysel', nor let my bairn gang."

Mrs. West smiled a little. Mary Derrick had all a country woman's vague dislike and distrust of the public institutions of a large town—an aversion which nothing but actual experience of their boundless benefits can dispel.

"I do assure you, you are quite mistaken," she said gently: "I know a great deal about the Children's Hospital, and I would willingly and gladly send an ailing baby of my own to it, if I had not the means or the power to make it well at home. I could procure an order for your baby's admission, if you will let her go. She would be treated with the utmost care and tenderness, and would have the advantage of the best medical skill."

Still Mary Derrick shook her head. "I had my mind made up afore ye cam', to write to my brither, an' ask him to let me come oot to the mill for a week or twa. I could work for my meat, as I did afore, an' the fresh winds that blaw round the Girnelt wad mak' my darlin' weel."

"And suppose your brother should not answer your letter, or refuse to allow you to come?"

Mary Derrick glanced towards the child, beginning to stir a little in its broken slumber, and a quick sob broke from her lips. It was answer sufficient.

"Let us make a little arrangement, Mrs. Derrick," said the minister's wife. "If you have no answer from your brother within a week, come to the manse, and I will take you to see the Children's Hospital, so that you can be satisfied before you trust your child within its walls."

Mary Derrick raised grateful wet eyes to the kind face, and that eloquent look touched Adelaide West to the very heart.

"There are some kind hearts left yet in this weary world," said the widow brokenly. "I'll dae as ye say, an' may the Lord bless ye, mem, ye are ane o' His very ain." So the agreement was made, and Adelaide West went her way to her own happy home, her heart as light as air, because of the sunshine she had infused into a life so much less blessed than hers.





CHAPTER III.

THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.



I AM afraid Mrs. Derrick must have heard from her brother, Robert, or she would surely have called before now," said Mrs. West to her husband one morning, about ten days after her visit to the dreary garret in the Undergate.

"It is quite possible that the man may have repented of his harshness, and gladly acceded to her request, dear," replied the minister, rather absently; for his mind was occupied by the plan of his discourse for the following Sabbath morning.

"I do hope so, and yet I scarcely think it," said Mrs. West with a slight sigh. "Flossie, dear, make less noise, or I must send you to the nursery. Papa is busy, my pets."

"Never mind, dear. Let them have their frolic, they don't disturb me," said the minister, with an indulgent smile at the two tiny fair-haired girlies playing bo-peep behind the draught-screen.

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The popular minister of St. Magdalene's Church never studied better than when his wife and little ones were in the room beside him, and was seldom too busy or too deeply engrossed to attend to them. He was almost boyish still in his love of fun and frolic, and yet there was not in all Dunleith a more earnest, hardworking, self-denying minister of the Gospel, nor one whose labours were more abundantly blessed.

"Please, ma'am, there's a woman in the dining-room wishing to see you," said a servant's voice in the doorway. "She bade me tell you her name was Mary Derrick."

Mrs. West instantly sprang up.

"How curious, Robert, when we were just speaking of her! Yes, Ellen, I will be down directly. Now, my darlings," she added to the children, "don't be too noisy while mamma is gone. Robert, will you come down in a little and see Mrs. Derrick? I am sure you will be interested in her."

"Yes, send Ellen when you wish me, and I will come," responded the minister readily, and his wife left the room.

When she entered the dining-room, what was her astonishment to see not only Mary Derrick herself, but her child, closely wrapped in an old plaid, and tightly clasped in her arms. She was also much struck by the change in the widow's face. It was even more

pale and haggard, and there was a wildness in the eye, which seemed to indicate some unusual agitation of mind. "My poor Mrs. Derrick! How could you bring baby out on such a bitter morning?" exclaimed Mrs. West. "We were just talking of you, and wondering whether you had gone home to your brother's. Come over to the fire, your lips are quite blue with cold."

"No. I'll no sit doon," said Mary Derrick hurriedly. "You were richt, an' I was wrang. It was a vain hope to think that there wad be a spark o' pity in my brother's heart. My bairn seems to be waur, I think she's gaun to dee. She can hardly get her breath; so I cam', because you are the only freen' I hae in the wide warld, to see if ye wad tell me whaur that place is that ye telt me aboot. She micht be warmer and better there, and dee easier, for I hinna haen a fire in my garret since the day afore yesterday."

Mrs. West looked inexpressibly shocked.

"You ought to have come before now, but we will lose no time. It may not yet be too late to save your child's life," she said quickly. "Sit down at the fire, while I send for a cab and get on my bonnet. I will go with you myself."

Mary Derrick looked the thanks she could not utter, and obeying the kind invitation to rest herself by the fire, she drew nearer to the grateful warmth;

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Mrs. West looked into the study on her way to her dressing-room, and while she hastily threw on her outer garments, her husband went down to speak a word of hope and comfort to the forlorn and stricken heart downstairs. By the time Mrs. West was ready the cab was at the door, and the two women, so differently placed, and yet drawn together by the common bond of motherhood and Christian sympathy, took their seats and drove away in silence. It was half-an-hour's ride to the hospital, which stood at the other side of the town, beyond its busy thoroughfares, on the slope of a gentle eminence facing the winding river. It was surrounded on every hand by the trees, which had taken so kindly to the soil that they made quite a shelter and shade for the house which had been a home indeed to many a poor child in Dunleith. It was a plain, substantial building, studded by many long, wide windows, upon which the wintry sun shone brilliantly, as if anxious to bestow all his light and heat upon the Children's Home. A plain, iron gateway gave entrance to a wide gravelled path, which swept round to the front door; but there was a stretch of grass sloping down to the river's bank, which was wonderfully green for November, and which was

actually dotted here and there with sturly, pink-lipped gowans, which had not yet succumbed to the icy touch of King Frost.

Mrs. West was well-known to the attendants at the Children's Hospital, and though it was not the usual hour for visitors, she and her charges were at once admitted and conducted to the matron's room. With what keenness did Mary Derrick's eyes dwell upon the sweet, kind face of the motherly woman in whose care her darling was about to be left!

"We are quite full, I fear, Mrs. West," said the matron, in a quiet, pleasant voice, which had a ring of refinement in it. "But if you will wait one minute, I will inquire. I think one of the little ones leaves to-day, and I should not like to refuse *you*."

Mrs. West nodded and smiled. The matron left the room, but was not absent many minutes. "Yes, we can take the baby in. Let me see her, if you please," she said, stepping towards the mother and the child. Without hesitation Mary Derrick unwound her shawl, and showed the wasted little form and the pale, worn face of her little Tibbie.

"Poor, wee thing!" said the matron with motherly kindness. "She looks very poorly, but we will do our best for her."

Then she stepped to the bell-rope and rang, a summons which was immediately answered by a

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pleasant-faced nurse attired in a soft grey gown, a white apron, and dainty muslin cap.

"Here is another charge for you, nurse," said the matron. "Doctor Hamilton has not gone, has he?"

"No, ma'am."

"Ah, then, let him see her. Are they getting the cot in the west ward ready?"

"Yes, ma'am, it is quite ready."

"That is good. Take baby with you."

Mary Derrick bit her lip till it bled, so great was the wrench at giving her darling up into strange hands. It almost seemed like desertion, she thought; and yet these kind faces, and the whole air of the place inspired her confidence.

"You can see your little one thrice a-week. The visiting hours are from two to six," said the matron kindly. "You had better leave your address, however, and if the child should grow any worse we will send for you at once."

"Mrs. Derrick lives at present in the Undergate, but it is likely she will remove from there," said the minister's wife. "To-morrow is a visiting day, I think, so she may be able to give you her address then."

"Very well; now I must bid you good morning, Mrs. West," said the matron smiling. "I am so busy I would need two heads and ever so many pairs of hands. Christmas will be upon us before we

know where we are, and before we are half ready for it."

"Good morning; but may I crave another favour?" said Mrs. West. "I think Mrs. Derrick would go away happy if she could see the place where her baby is. Would it be too much trouble?"

"None at all," said the matron pleasantly. "If you will just sit down for a few minutes, I will send a nurse to show you the west ward."

"Hoo d'ye ken a body's thochts sae weel?" asked Mary Derrick tremulously, the moment she was left alone with her kind friend.

"I am a mother myself," was Adelaide West's answer. Then a little silence fell upon them, and the sunbeams stole in at the window and danced merrily on the walls and floor as if quite pleased with their morning's work. In a few minutes another nurse, just as comely and pleasant as the one who had taken away poor wee Tibbie, entered the room and asked them to accompany her, which they did, up a long flight of spotlessly clean stairs, and along a wide corridor, where one would look in vain for any blemish or speck of dust; and at the end of which the nurse opened a door and motioned them to enter. It was a large, light, pleasant place, with a large fire burning at either end, and there was an air of comfort, of luxury even, about it which would strike a stranger at once. The delicately tinted walls were



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adorned by illuminated texts and brightly coloured pictures, and draught-screens, covered with gay pictures, stood about wherever there was likely to be a draught, not only fulfilling a useful function, but adding to the brightness and comfort of the place. There were other things too, rocking-horses and swinging chairs, dainty little stools, and restful lounges for the convalescent to enjoy, but it was at none of these things Mary Derrick looked, although they were all included in the first glance she cast about her. Now her attention was riveted by the rows of dainty little cots, each with its childish inmate, some lying still under the cosy bright coverings, and others sitting up among snowy pillows, playing with a toy or looking at a picture book. It was all so different from anything she could have imagined that she stood quite still, with an expression of absolute wonder on her face. "You will not be afraid to leave your little Tibbie here, I think," said the sweet voice of Adelaide West. "Isn't it a nice bright place?"

"I wish I had kenned o'd afore; I wish I had brocht Tibbie here lang syne," said Mary Derrick almost in a whisper. "What a sicht! but I didna ken."

"Step this way, and I'll show you the cot where your child will lie," said the nurse presently, and Mary Derrick followed the slight figure up the long ward, looking from side to side upon the little child-

ren, with all her heart in her eyes. In the very sunniest, cosiest corner of that sunny cosy place stood a little empty bed, with the clean snowy sheets folded over the bright quilt, waiting for its occupant.

"Here is the nurse bringing Tibbie," said Mrs. West, touching Mary Derrick's arm. They had taken away the old plaid and the poor thin garments which had been the bairn's scanty coverings, and when the nurse unrolled her from the blanket, the eager mother saw a fair fragile little form clad in a bright pink flannel gown, and looking for all the world like a snowdrop, so pure and pale was her face.

She smiled, and tried to clap her baby hands languidly at sight of her mother, who stood by, while the nurse with kind, deft hands placed her in the little cot, laying her golden head on the snowy pillow, and tucking the clothes snugly round her.

"Doctor Hamilton has looked at her," the nurse said, nodding pleasantly, "and he thinks we will bring her round in a while. It is just good nursing and nourishing food she requires, and she will get them all here."

Mary Derrick's eyes were blinded by a rush of tears. She turned swiftly, and after bending to kiss her darling's blue-veined brow, knelt by the side of the cot and hid her face.

Those standing by turned away for a little, knowing that her head was bowed in grateful prayer.



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CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRNEL MEAL MILL.



HOW it rained, to be sure! Not a gentle, refreshing shower, which is rather pleasant than otherwise, but a fierce resistless blast dashing noisily against the window-panes, and battering the poor sodden leaves into the muddy ground; swelling mountain torrent and wimpling burnie, and turning the mill stream into a raging flood. The bare boughs of the willows and alders growing on its banks bent before the blast until they dipped in the angry tide, and some of the older branches broke, and were carried off on its foam-flaked breast, away, away, to the distant sea. Then what a wailing the wild winter wind made round the grey old house! It would shriek and moan through the unshuttered casements, and then creep stealthily along the empty corridors and long dark passages with a strange eerie noise, enough to call up terrifying visions of wraiths, and warlocks, and witches, and other uncanny things which love to be

abroad on a windy night. It was such a big, rambling, roomy building the house at the Gernel Meal Mill, just such a house as would need a pack of children to fill it with sunshine and healthy happy din, but alas! it was empty, and sad, and desolate, tenanted by one solitary, miserable, human being. He need not have been miserable, no, nor solitary, for he had the wherewithal to make himself and others happy, only greed of gold held him in its relentless thrall. There he sat by the smouldering kitchen fire, a thin, spare, almost attenuated figure, clad in coarse, poor garments, and shivering in the chill and dreary atmosphere of the great gloomy place. The miller's kitchen need not have been a gloomy place either, for if only a pile of blazing logs had crackled in the wide chimney, and a cheerful lamp replaced the wretched dip candle feebly flickering on the mantel, it would have been a bright, cheery, pleasant place, as it had once been long ago. The plates in the big plate rack behind the dresser were thick with dust, the tins and brasses dim and yellow for want of polishing, the smooth stone flags dingy with the dirt of years, cobwebs hung in graceful but not lovely festoons from the oaken rafters, the whole place had an air of neglect and decay painful to see. The only cheerful or companionable thing in the miller's kitchen was the old eight-day clock ticking solemnly in its corner, where its pendu-

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lum had wagged for nigh a hundred years, and whose wise old face and faithful voice never ceased to warn Thomas Dryburgh of the flight of time.

The miller was leaning back in the high-backed old-fashioned arm-chair, which claimed equal antiquity with the clock, and his elbows rested on its well-polished arms, while his lean fingers were touching each other at the tips, and his small eyes fixed meditatively on the fire. Thomas Dryburgh was thinking of what? He was not an ugly man, not even plain; but the face which might have been so pleasant to look upon, and which nature intended to be so, was disfigured by many lines, and hard, cruel curves, which age had not planted there. The mouth looked as if it had never learned to smile, there were no gracious kindly curves in the cheeks or about the firm resolute chin, and the eyes had a furtive, restless gleam in their depths, which seemed to indicate that their owner was not satisfied, and that he was always looking and hoping for more than he had.

Presently he lifted the candle from the mantel, set it on the little deal table by the side of the chair, and took out a well-thumbed and very dirty pocket-book, in which he proceeded to make some calculations.

"Thirteen acres in the Well Park, fower-an'-twenty in the Haugh, besides seeven at the hoose, an' the gairden grund that's near an acre itsel'," he muttered

to himself. "I'se warrant there'll be five-an'-forty acres if there's a pole, besides three kye an' fifty hens, an' a' the hoose gear, but then there's the wuman hersel'!"

The latter part of the above speech Thomas Dryburgh uttered with a prodigious sigh, and again sank back in his chair to further meditate upon the subject which had been engrossing his attention for some time back, and which he had very nearly settled to his satisfaction. The acres to which he had so lovingly and longingly referred just marched with his own lands at the mill, and for years Thomas Dryburgh had coveted his neighbour's possessions, and longed to add them to his own. But then, as he regretfully remarked, there was the woman herself, and the only way to obtain possession of her desirable belongings was to take her to the bargain! Truly no wonder the idea should cause Thomas the deepest thought! And yet she was a comely, pleasant, lovable enough dame, who had had no lack of lovers in her youth, nor in her prime either, but who for some reason or other had elected to remain single up to this present time, when she was now somewhat past middle life.

"It wad be an awfu' expense," continued the miller, uttering his thoughts aloud. "An' weemen are extravagant cratures; but maybe I could suno break her in, an' it's a cosy biggin', an' she maun hao handers in the bank; I believe I'll risk it." Observe

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that Thomas did not take into account the possibility of Miss Thorburn refusing the honour of an alliance with him. Living in solitude, as he did, he had but little knowledge of the ways of women, and had a vague idea that any who remained unmarried, did so simply because they had never had a chance to set sail on the sea of matrimony. Taking up his pencil again, he proceeded to make a further calculation of Miss Thorburn's income and expenses, which proved so satisfactory that the shadow, but only the merest most ghostly shadow of a smile touched for a moment his long thin lips.

"Yes, I'll risk it," he repeated, firmly. "It'll mak' an' odds here tao, for it is goy an' lanesome at nights, an' she'll be a body to crack till; an' we'll let Leerie Law house, an' maybe the kye to some dairy body, an' there's plenty room for her bits o' furniture here."

Having thus settled the matter to his own satisfaction, Thomas Dryburgh felt somewhat inclined to go upon his courting errand there and then. But the night was wearing late, and the storm did not appear to be abating; and, besides, there was no need for such immediate haste.

"She micht think I'm ower keen, an' if she be like oither weemen-folk, she'll think muckle enough o' hersel'; as it is, I had best begin as I mean tao end."

With this wise reflection, the miller ventured to give the sickly-looking fire a careful poke, surprising it into a feeble flame ; then he leaped back in his chair again, and gave himself up to visions of the future, when the sony face of Nancy Thorburn should be nodding to him across the hearth ; sentimental thoughts which presently disappeared in calculations as to how he could work Leerie Law cheaply and to the best advantage. After a time, however, his mind began to revert to other and less pleasant themes, which would not be set aside. In place of Nancy Thorburn's comely face he saw another, that of a woman too, or rather a girl, sweet, and earnest, and wistful, lighted by two big grey eyes, which seemed to be looking with solemn pathos into his. It was the face of his sister Mary, the young sister he had so cruelly wronged, and so vivid was every feature that he almost started, thinking she was veritably before him in the flesh. But no, the kitchen was quite empty, unless it was peopled indeed by the shadows of the past, and there was no sound to be heard but the swaying of the elm boughs, and the wailing of the winter wind. Why should the pleading reproachful face rise up before him to-night, of all nights, when he had other and pleasanter things to dream of ? He grew quite irritated at length ; for instead of leaving him, these reproachful memories crowded thick and fast upon him, until he seemed to sit

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shivering and cowering among the phantoms of other days. Slowly he drew out his pocket-book once more, and took from it a folded sheet of paper, which he spread out upon his knee. It was against his will he opened it, against his will he read it, but he did not seem to be able to help himself. It was a poor, trembling scrawl, for the writer had never received much education ; but there was no mistaking its meaning, its terrible, heart-probing pathos. Thus it ran :—

“ 319 UNDERGATE,
DUNLEITH, 31st October, 18—.

“DEAR BROTHER,—I am in great distress, or I would not write to you. I am a widow now. Stephen died two years ago. Since then I have managed to work for myself and my little girl ; but work is scarce, and wages very low, and we have nothing but charity between us and want. My bairn is very ill, dying for want of the things I cannot give her. Will you let me come out to the Girnel to see if the fresh air would do her any good? I could work for my meat, and my lamb eats but little. If you would let me come, and would send a few shillings to pay my way, I would find some way to repay you. I know I am asking a great deal from you, especially after I married against your will. But I never rued my marriage, brother ; for I had one of the best of men. For the sake of any little happiness we ever had together in the Girnel, I implore you to grant my prayer.—I am, your distressed sister,

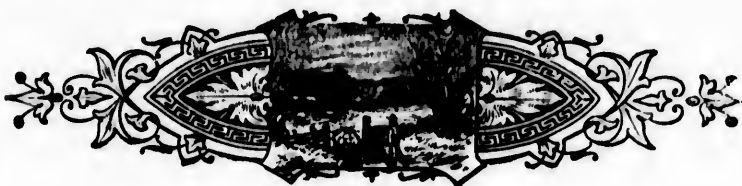
MARY DERRICK.”

Slowly and with unchanging face Thomas Dryburgh read and re-read these words, and each time they

seemed to irritate and annoy him more. At last he tossed the pitiful appeal into the fire, where it was consumed very slowly, as if the red embers were reluctant to destroy it. The upper half of the first sheet, with the address on it, fell from the grate to the fender, and the miller involuntarily stooped and picked it up. And he sat looking at it for a long time, with the same stolid, unfathomable expression on his face. "She's made her bed, an' she maun lie on't," he muttered to himself at last, thrusting the charred scrap of paper back to his pocket-book and rising heavily from his chair. "But if I get a' thing settled at Leerie Law I'll send her a pound, and maybe a bag o' meal."



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CHAPTER V.

THE MILLER'S WOOING.



MAY pit the bar i' the door, I believe, an' mak' mysel' comfortable for the nicht," said Nancy Thorburn to herself. "The bodies 'll never come for their milk in sic' a doon-poor." Suiting the action to the word Nancy went to the back door, peered out into the rainy darkness for a second, and then shut it, and slipped in the bolt. It was eight o'clock, her cows were milked, and the byre door carefully closed, and a wisp of straw pushed into the big key-hole, lest Mysie, her favourite quey, should catch cold, the hen-house was locked, and everything trig and snug for the night. Nancy's work was done till the dawn of another day. When she returned to the kitchen, she dropped into her big, chintz-covered easy-chair with a sigh of content. Well, it was a very snug fireside, and as to being a lonely one, Nancy Thorburn would never be lonely nor solitary so long as she had her work to do, and her sonsy cat, Jock,

to keep her company. There he sat on his favourite stool, big, sleek, complacent, lazily blinking at the dancing fire, the very picture of feline contentment and felicity. There was not a white hair on his coat, a fact of which he and his mistress were both proud. If Jock was sleek, and comfortable, and comely to look upon, so was his mistress, in her neat, well-fitting merino gown, black apron, and snowy neckerchief about her shoulders. Then what a pleasant face shone out beneath the little lace cap which Nancy had only adopted of late, because she was not so young as she once was, she would say, nor her hair quite so abundant as it had been twenty years ago. It would be exaggeration to say that Nancy Thorburn, or Miss Thorburn of Leerie Law, was a handsome woman, but she was one at whom you would feel inclined to look twice, because the first look gave you so much pleasure. She was what country folks term "braw." Her face was broad, and her cheeks ruddy, her dark eyes full of that happy light which is born of contentment and good-will, her whole expression kindliness itself. Nancy Thorburn's name was a household word in Balwhinnie, and Leerie Law the paradise of every bairn in the clachan, because from its hospitable door none were ever sent empty away. When anybody wanted a message sent to Leerie Law there were a score eager for the job; for Nancy's joking word and kindly

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smile gave double zest to the scone or the big slice of home-made cake of which she seemed to possess an inexhaustible store.

"Ay, Jock, an' Thursday'll be Christmas day," said Nancy, after she had contemplated the glowing fire for a little. Jock cocked his left ear, but did not otherwise reply to his mistress's remark. "An' next Thursday'll be New Year, Jock," continued Nancy musingly. "My certy, ye'll hae tae ea canny that day, my man, for there's fower-and-twenty bairns comin' to their teas!" Jock cocked both ears at this, and languidly lifted his eyes to his mistress's face. She nodded at him, and was about to make another remark, when, in one of the pauses of the wind, there came a smart double knock to the front door. "Guid save us, wha can that be, at the front door tae? Jock, gie's a caun'le."

It was most amusing to hear Nancy addressing Jock just as if he were a maid-servant, and to observe the intelligent interest with which that well-trained animal listened. Jumping up, Nancy took a shining brass candlestick from the mantelpiece, lighted the candle, and proceeded "ben" the passage to the front door.

"Wha's there?" she asked cautiously, for she was a lone woman with no protector, except the big collie in his kennel in the close, and he was barking furiously as she spoke.

"It's me. Tammas Dryburgh, Miss Tho'burn," answered a man's voice.

"Tammas Dryburgh!" echoed Nancy. "Is there onything wrang at the Girnelt?"

"No. I want to see yersel', if ye please," replied Tammas.

"Weel, gang roond to the back door, an' I'll let ye in. Yer feet'll be a' weet, an' there's nae use makin' a needless dirtyin'," said Nancy calmly; and in some little astonishment she turned away and proceeded to unbar the kitchen door.

"It's surely a parteekler errand that brings ye to Leerie Law on sic a nicht, Maister Dryburgh," said Nancy, as the miller, in response to her invitation, stepped across the threshold. "Tak' aff yer coat, see, an' yer hat, an' hing them up there."

As regards her house, Nancy was a thorough old maid, it was a real grief to her to see a needless dirtyin', which was a favourite expression of hers. The miller obeyed, rubbed his feet well on the mat, and was then permitted to step into the bonnie, bright, heartsome kitchen, which was the cosiest corner in all the house at Leerie Law.

"Tak' the warm seat, Mr. Dryburgh," said Nancy cordially, for though she heartily disliked the miller, she could not be unkind to a living thing.

"No, I'm fine here," said the miller, and sat down in the arm-chair, in which Nancy's father,

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Mythe old David Thorburn, had been wont to sit before he left this world for a better. "What's the matter wi' the beast?" he asked, for at sight of him Jock fled from his stool, and with back and tail erect, was spitting at him from under the table. Nancy smiled. Jock was a wise cat, and a discriminating judge of human nature.

"Be quiet, Jock, like a man," she said shaking her finger at her pet. "Weel Tammas, this is an unco nicht. Ye wad hae a fell stravaig atween the Girnle an' Leerie Law."

"It was na that bad," replied the miller rather lamely, for somehow the thing which had seemed so easy and simple at the Girnle fireside, assumed a very different aspect here. An awkward silence ensued, Nancy waiting to be enlightened regarding the object of the miller's visit. She was greatly mystified, not only with the visit itself, to begin with, but with the appearance of the miller, who had not looked so wise-like for many a day. He had on a new suit of grey homespun, and actually a white collar, and a new necktie, and his beard was newly trimmed, and his hair nicely brushed. What on earth did it all mean?

"Ye've a cosy ingle-neuk here, Nancy," he said at length, feeling that he must make some kind of beginning.

"I hae nae reason to complain o'd Tammas," was Nancy's brief reply.

"Kin' o' lanesome though, is't no, for a wuman body bidin' her lane?" he pursued, gathering courage.

"Maybe for some weemen folk, but I'm never fashed that way; I hao my wark, an' plenty neebors when I want them. It's folks' ain blame, I'm thinkin', when they feel lanesome or discontented, there's aye something wrang wi' theirsels," said Nancy, looking the miller straight in the face, for she was speaking of him, as well as to him.

"Ay, ay, I believe ye 're richt," said the miller; and then there was another dead silence.

"Hoo's things gaun up by?" said Nancy at length.

"Middlin', jist middlin', I'm gettin' about tired o' my way o' dacin'," said the miller, feeling that this was a splendid opening.

Nancy nodded. "I'm gled to hear tell o'd. Ony word frae Mrs. Derriek this while?"

The miller grew red in the face. "No, at least no' this while," he said a trifle confusedly; for the dark eyes bent unflinchingly on his face seemed to read his inmost soul. "Ye 'll nae can guess, I suppose, what's brocht me hero the nicht, Nancy?" he said in desperation, for the conversation must be turned away from the subject of his sister.

"No, I'm jist waitin' to be telt. As ye're no a neeborly man for ordinar', I suppose ye want something, or ye wadua be here."

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"Ye are richt, Nancy, I dinna waste my time clashin' in folks' hooses, whatever be my fau'ts. Weel, I've been thinkin' twa three things ower this whilie, an' I canna see what way you should bide your lane in Leerio Law, and me my lane at the Girnol, when the twa pairts maich thegeither sae weel. What wad ye say to mak' a match o'd? I'm no a rich man, but I hae twa three bawbees for a rainy day, an' ye ken the Girnol's my ain. If ye'll gree, Nancy," he continued speaking faster and with greater eagerness as he warmed to his subject, "I'll mak' ye a canny man. I'm sure we could jog along fine thegeither, although we're baith ower and to mak' fules o' oorsels."

Nancy Thorburn first sank back in her chair in helpless astonishment, and then as he proceeded, and his meaning began actually to dawn upon her, she sat up very straight, and there was a very peculiar expression on her face.

"Tak' time afore ye answer, Nancy," said the miller quietly. "Ye're a sensible wuman, an' I'm sure ye'll see the advisabeelity o' my proposal. It's a quate fireside at the Girnol, an' I've often thoct I wad like a wuman body in the hoose."

"Lord help her, whaever she be!" fell fervently from Nancy's lips, a remark which caused Thomas Dryburgh to look at her inquiringly. Somehow the bonnie sonsy face was changed. The smile was

gone, the sunny gleam had vanished from the dark eyes, and they gleamed upon him fearless, cold, and stern.

"What div ye say, Nancy? I'm no that ill. 'Gie a dog a bad name,' they say,—ye ken the rest. I hinna haen a chance," he said almost humbly, for the advantages of his proposal to himself were very obvious.

"Did I hear ye richt? ye askit me to mairry, didna ye, Tammas Dryburgh?" said Nancy presently.

"Ay, I *am* askin' ye. I'm in earnest, Nancy."

"So am I; ye said richtly that *I* was ower auld to mak' a fule o' mysel'. What div ye tak' me for, Tammas Dryburgh?"

Tammas was silent. The question was not encouraging.

Slowly Nancy rose to her feet. "I might be angry if it wad dae ony guid," she said quietly, but with a ring of indignation in her voice. "I didna ken I had gien ony evidence o' bein' oot o' my seevin senses, which I wad be if I listened to your offer. So I'll bid ye guid nicht, Maister Dryburgh, wi' mony thanks for your trouble."

"Wull ye no tak' me, Nancy?" asked the miller helplessly, rising from his chair.

"Tak' ye?—no. No though I should hae to beg frae door to door. I ken ye ower weel, Tammas Dryburgh. Ye ken hoo ye treated that dear lamb,

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yer sister Mary. I hinna forgotten it. I ken weel eneuch it's my siller an' my gear an' Leerie Law ye're efter, no' me. But I'm no donert yet. I ken when I'm weel aff, an' as lang as I can get my bite an' my comfort at my ain fireside, it's no likely I'm gaun to sterve at the Girnel," said Nancy, speaking very fast, for she was much agitated, and her fingers shook as she lighted the candle to show her unwelcome suitor to the door.

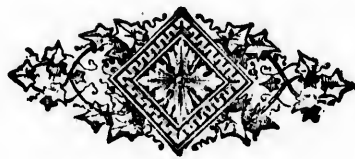
"Ye'll maybe think better o't," said the miller, in no way disconcerted. "It disna dae to hurry weemen folk in sic maitters. Weel, I'll jist be stappin'. Guid nicht, Nancy. I'll maybe look over some nicht neist week."

"Deed ye needna," said Nancy, quite snappishly for her. "Gang hame, Tammas Dryburgh, an' sit doon by yer meserable hearth, an' try an ca' up a' the folk ye hae wranged wi' greed an' hardness o' heart. The auld year's very near dune, an' ye dinna ken whether ye may live to see the new ane in. Ask God's mercy for your sins, an' syne dae what ye can to repair them. That'll set ye better nor seekin' a wife. Guid nicht; may I be forgi'en if I'm ower hard upon ye, but I'm no' able to stand sic a thing frae you at my time o' life."

Feeling very peculiar indeed, Thomas Dryburgh put on his coat and hat and stepped out into the rain. Recovering himself on the doorstep he turned

and looked into the sonsy face which expressed her mingled indignation and anger. Was it to express his regret, or to tender an apology for the mistake he had committed? not quite.

"Guid nicht, Nancy, yer birse is up," he said calmly. "If ye should think better o'd ye can let me ken." Nancy Thorburn so far forgot herself as to bang the door and push in the bolt with an angry hand. Then she hurried back to the kitchen, and sinking into her own chair gave way to a burst of hysterical laughter, which finally ended in a "guid greet."



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CHAPTER VI.

THE DREAM.

THE miller trudged through the rain to the Girnol, feeling that he had made a mistake. Courting a wife was not quite so simple a thing as he had imagined, and as Nancy Thorburn had spoken with unmistakable decision, he feared that the cosy homestead and the fertile acres of Leerie Law were not for him. Well, he was but where he was before, and yet as he stepped across the threshold of his dreary home, and entered the big cold kitchen, he heaved an involuntary sigh. There was a difference betwixt Nancy Thorburn's fireside and his; was it due to the mere fact of a woman's presence? Nay, there were many other things besides that lacking in the Girnol. He had "gathered" the fire with a lump of coal and a shovelful of dross before he went out, and it was still smouldering dimly, though giving forth neither light nor heat. He was loth to break it up, however, for it might last till morning if left undisturbed.

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon ;" "A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven ;" and again, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The warning cadence of those long forgotten words which the anxious mother had striven to implant in the heart of her boy, fearing lest his father's greed of gold should enchain him likewise, rang in Thomas Dryburgh's ears, growing fainter and fainter as the drowsiness of sleep began to creep over him. He leaned back in his chair, his hands fell on his knees, and his lids dropped over his restless eyes. And after a moment it seemed to him that a faint white light began to steal into the place, dispelling its gloomy shadows, and then he felt a firm but gentle touch upon his arm.

"Come with me," a voice said ; and when he looked round to discern whither it came, he saw a white-robed figure by his side, and a face, half veiled, and wearing an expression of reproachful sadness, bent searchingly upon his own. He tried to demur, but the gentle touch grew firmer, and the eyes looking into his had a touch of command in their depths which compelled him to obey. So he rose unsteadily to his feet, and then the kitchen seemed to fade away, and in place of the chill yet close heavy atmosphere which was never purified by the free air of heaven, he felt the cool night-wind play upon his

brow, and knew that he was out of doors. To his astonishment he felt himself mounting above the earth, upheld apparently by the touch of the mysterious companion by his side. The rain had ceased, and the clouds were breaking overhead. Here and there a sweet and solitary star would peep shyly up, and away over the hills a mystic halo indicated the rising place of the Christmas moon. Far beneath he saw the clustering roofs of the clachan, with its circle of outlying farm places and homesteads, among them the Girdel and Laverie Law; but in a short space of time these were left in the far distance as they sped through the air in a northerly direction. Where, oh where, was the mystic messenger taking him? He ventured to ask the question, but she silenced him by a mournful shake of the head and a wave of the left hand, and he spoke no more.

As they sped onwards the air seemed to grow less clear, and presently Thomas Dryburgh learned its cause, for they were approaching the confines of what appeared to be a great city. He saw the wide, dark stretch of roofs, relieved at intervals by a graceful spire or a tall chimney-stalk, and as they drew nearer he could discern a forest of masts, which indicated that it was a shipping place.

"Knowest thou this place?" asked the messenger, speaking for the first time since they began their flight.

He tremblingly replied, that "it somewhat resembled Dundee."

The messenger coughed gravely, and as they were now directly above the town, they began to make a rapid descent, until they passed under the gloomy arches of a railway bridge. Then it seemed to Thomas Dryburgh that the gentle fingers tightened on his arm as he was driven into a cold, damp corner, safe hidden from the public view. A soft light, shed apparently by some invisible lamp, fell upon what seemed at first to be a heap of something, but which the wondering miller presently discerned to be two children closely clasped in each other's arms, and apparently asleep. They were in rags, shoeless, hatless, shirtless, poor little arab lads, crouching close together to obtain what little heat they might from each other. The little bare feet resting against the cold wet flags were rough and discoloured, and one had an ugly open wound bleeding with the cold.

Thomas Dryburgh shivered as he looked.

"O Charlie, I'm cauld! I think I'll dee wi' the cauld!" muttered the younger of that pitiful pair; then his companion rose, and taking off his own miserable jacket, wrapped it round his brother, though his own teeth were chattering in his head. A great lump rose in Thomas Dryburgh's throat, and involuntarily his hand sought his pocket. But

the messenger prevented him, and pointed with pitying finger at the brothers, said mournfully,

"Behold! One of thy neglected duties."

"Let me gi'e them something; a bawbee, or my coat," he said pleadingly. But the messenger only shook her head.

"Too late!" was all she said, and again impelled him to go forward. A little way farther on the tiny figure of a little match-girl was seen running towards them as if for dear life. She, too, was bareheaded and barefooted, and the bitter winter wind played rudely with the thin old shawl and the ragged frock, which were her only coverings. She was weeping, and every bursting sob seemed to probe Thomas Dryburgh's heart like a two-edged sword. Again his hand sought his pocket, and he heard his money jingling; never had the sound seemed so delightful in his ears. But again he was withheld.

"She suffers, and will suffer, for the lack of what thou possessest," said the messenger sadly; "but it is too late!"

And again they sped onwards. Passing rapidly beyond the wide, pleasant streets and crescents where stood the abodes of the rich, they sped across to the river, which was reached by many a narrow alley and filthy lane, in which were the homes, or haunts of the very poor: In one of these they

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alighted, and began to walk slowly up a narrow lane, with high tenements on either side, the like of which Thomas Dryburgh had never seen before.

"Here, enter this way with me," said the messenger pausing at a low, dark doorway, and though Thomas hesitated a moment, he was obliged to obey. There was the din of drunken revelry in one of the lower rooms, sounds of coarse laughter and brutal jest, and then a woman's shrill scream. But all these the messenger passed unheeded. Up, up the narrow broken stairway, up to the very top, and then the feeble wailing of a child fell upon Thomas Dryburgh's ears. The messenger pushed open one of the many doors on the landing, and they entered together. What a poor little place it was; only twelve feet square, with a sloping roof, and a little window scarcely big enough for a sparrow to peep through. It was damp too, for there were little streams trickling down the bare discoloured walls, and the drops of the passing shower were pattering down the chimney on the grate; where, alas! no fire burned, not even a red ember to relieve the cold, grey, cheerless ashes. The room was not quite dark. A candle flickered on the broken table, sending its fitful gleam across the floor, and revealing yet more pitifully its desolation. By the table a woman sat plying her needle and thread. A cold perspiration broke over Thomas Dryburgh as he scanned these pinched and wan

features, for they seemed strangely familiar. Ay, once these thin cheeks had been round and red, once these pale lips had rivalled the bloom of the cherry, once these shadowed eyes had been bright as sunshine. On the little low bed a child lay moaning as if in pain. After listening to it for a little the woman rose, and lifting it in her arms, began to croon a low song, which had no music in it, but only the wail of despair. And yet that sweet voice had been wont to trill as noisily and clearly as the lark uprising to the morning sky—but that was long ago.

"The morn, my bairnie, we'll hae something to eat and drink," she whispered as she laid the hushed child back on the weary pillow; then she went to her work again until every buttonhole was made, and every button in its place. Folding it up, then she laid it aside, and taking a half-sheet of paper from the mantel began to write. Even from where he was Thomas Dryburgh could read the trembling words she penned. What was it she wrote? Words of reproach or bitter upbraiding such as he deserved? No, no,—“Dear brother.” Were these two simple words not an awful mockery of his pain?

He tried to dart forward, but again he was resolutely withheld. “Let me gang!” he cried fiercely. “It’s my ain sister! It’s Mary! Let me gang doon on my knees till her! Let me gang!”

“Too late!” fell yet more sadly from the messen-

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ger's mournful lips, as she slowly pulled him away. He struggled desperately, but in vain. Then the whole scene vanished, the clasp on his arm relaxed, and he opened his eyes. The fire was out; the candle at its last gasp on the mantel. The old clock in the corner rang twelve. Thomas Dryburgh rose to his feet, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him. He was at his own fireside in the Girnel kitchen,—and behold, it was a dream.





CHAPTER VII.

THE AWAKENING.

WHAUR 'LL the miller be gaun the day?" said the station-master to Robbie Wilson, the postman, when he brought down the mail-bag to the eight o'clock train for the North.

"The miller! whaur is he?" queried Rob, squinting with his only available eye along the platform.

"There he is, mun, jist at yer back; wheesht!" said the station-master, stifling a laugh, as Rob in his haste and confusion turned round and knocked up against the miller. Contrary to his expectation, Thomas Dryburgh did not growl or swear at him, but only said quietly, "Cauld mornin', Rob," and passing out of the little shed, sauntered, hands in pocket, along the platform.

"Whaur did he tak' a ticket till, Geordie?" queried Rob, in an intensely interested voice, for he was consumingly fond of news.

"Dunleith."

“There’s something up. When did ye see Tammas wi’ a clean collar on afore?”

“Is this a corn market at Dunleith?”

“No, it’s on Fridays. There’s naething to tak’ Tammas Dryburgh to the toon the day that *I* ken o’. I thocht maybe ye wad ken.”

“No, but I’ll sune find out. I’ll tell ye what I think. It’ll be something to dae wi’ Mary,” said Rob, with a peculiar knowing twist of his ill-favoured countenance. “It’s, lat me see, mair nor a month syne I cairrit a letter to the Girnelt, and the writin’ was unco like Mary Dryburgh’s.”

“Ay, it’ll jist be that. Wad it be ill news, I wunner? There hasna been a cheep aboot Mary Dryburgh heard in thae pairts sin she mairret the English lad; but nae news, they say, s guid news.”

“So they say. The miller’s a wee dowie like, div ye no think? He was unco canny for *him* this mornin’. It’s no often ye get a cævil word frae him.”

“Yer richt;—but there she’s comin’. Tammas is the only passenger the day, seemin’ly. We needna ring the bell for him. Is thon the minister runnin’ fit to break his neck? He’s a shuffle-katie o’ a cratur, aye ahint,” said the station-master, and then,—oh, for the hypocrisy of human kind,—turned to touch his hat to the minister, and to assure him blandly that he was in good time. Then the train puffed in with a great shriek and bang, the miller jumped into

a third-class compartment, the minister into a first, and off she went again without losing a minute. There was little time lost either at any of the intermediate stations, for passengers were few and far between. But in another week trains and officials alike would be groaning under the burden of the holiday traffic. Dunleith was reached at ten minutes past nine, and even that big station, where so many lines converged, presented rather a bleak, deserted appearance. It was a raw, damp, disagreeable morning. Snow had fallen on the previous day, and being followed by a partial thaw, the streets were covered with a mixture of mud and slush. A thick fog hung low over the river, and was disagreeably felt in the town. In the windows of warehouses and offices the gaslights flickered still, the daylight being of the dullest, dingiest kind.

The streets were lively enough, however, for men of business and their clerks alike were hurrying to their work. In the principal thoroughfares shopmen were beginning to dress their windows prior to the exodus of the ladies at noon. It seemed to the miller that Dunleith must have overslept itself; every one seemed to be in such a hurry, even the errand-boys resisting the temptation to look in at the confectioners' and toy-shop windows, which were all gaily decked for Christmas time. At a crossing the miller spied a policeman leisurely pacing up and

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down, and looking as if nothing in the world could or would ever put *him* in a hurry. Guessing rightly enough that this individual could give him any information he required, Thomas marched up to him.

"Cauldish mornin', freen'," he said civilly. "Maybe ye could tell me whaur the Undergate is, could ye?"

"Ay, that coot she!" answered Donald, with ready Highland politeness. "It pe doon there, see, and syne alang py ta railway prig, till she comes to ta watter. Then ony pody'll tell her whaur it pe efter that."

"Muckle obleeged," said the miller, and then as Donald was looking very significantly at him, a look which seemed to remind him rather pathetically that it was near Christmas, he actually produced three coppers, which the defender of the peace acknowledged by a broad grin, and a very hearty "Thank her, kindly." Then the miller trudged off to follow Donald's somewhat vague directions as best he might. After walking a little distance, he reached the railway arch, which seemed quite familiar to him, though he was positive he had never been there in the flesh. His dream, however, was very fresh in his memory, and when he stood bencath the arch he turned aside to the quiet corner under the wall, almost expecting to see the little ragged laddies clasped in each other's arms. But if they had ever been there, they were

gone now, and, abusing himself for his foolish fancy, he proceeded towards the river. Meeting a message-boy at the corner of a narrow lane, he inquired for the Undergate, and was directed to go to the other end of the lane, and then turn to the right, and he would find himself in it. With heart beating a little faster, Thomas Dryburgh gave the lad a copper, and hastened down the lane. When he turned to the right and saw the long narrow, squalid thoroughfare, with the crazy-looking houses on either side, the dirty, dingy, little provision shops, and the flaring gin palaces, he felt a trifle eerie, for it was down this very street his mysterious guide had led him in his dream. Strong, robust countryman though he was, the close, heavy air, reeking with foul fumes and noxious vapours, almost sickened him. How did the hundreds who knew no other habitation live, and breathe, and have their being in such a place? Ay, well might he ask himself the question, and think with longing of the free winds and the fresh, pure airs blowing about the Girnel. He dared not pursue the thought further, and ask how his sister supported existence here. No; it was too bitter and heart-probing a question. He took out his pocket-book and carefully read the address on the scrap of paper which had providentially escaped the fate of the letter itself. 319 were the figures, so he went slowly up the middle of the street, keeping

count of the numbers on either side, an object of curiosity and remark to such as were abroad at that hour. At last, near the farther end of the thoroughfare, he reached the low doorway with the figures painted above it, but almost illegible. A slatternly woman, with unkempt hair, unwashed face, and arms akimbo, stood on the step, surveying the well-dressed stranger with all the curiosity of her kind.

"Mistress, could ye tell me if there's a weedy-wuman ca'd Mary Derrick bidin' up this stair?" he asked, addressing himself to the matron, who only shook her head.

"No that I ken o'. I'm no lang here. My guidman's been oot o' wark for twa month, or ye may be sure we wadna be bidin' in sic an ill hole," she answered, with a dignity which was quite out of keeping with her appearance.

"Eh, what does the man want, Kirsty?" queried another shrill-voiced virago, of strikingly similar appearance, emerging out of the dark recesses of the entry.

"He's seekin' ane Mary Derrick," said Kirsty, elbowing aside to let her neighbour have half the doorway.

"Derrick, oo ay; a white-faced, genty kin' o' body, wi' ae bairn; is that the wuman ye're seekin'?"

"Yes," said the miller, eagerly; "does she bide here yet?"

"No ; she left nearly a month ago," said Jean, settling herself against the lintel, prior to giving and receiving news. "Ony freen' ?"

"Yes, she's a relation o' mine," was all the satisfaction Thomas Dryburgh gave. "Can ye tell me onything about her ?"

"Deed, very little ; she wasna a neeborly body ava'," said Jean, with a toss of her head. "She cast her heid ower high. She micht be better nor the rest o' us, but she hadna muckle to show for't, and she was geyan hard up, when she couldna pay a shillin' a-week for the soothmost garret."

Thomas Dryburgh's face fell ; was he indeed too late after all ?

"Then ye canna tell me onything about her," he said, hopelessly.

"Naething, exceptin' that she's awa'," said Jean, looking as if she rather relished the answer she could make.

The miller turned rather dejectedly away from the door, but before he had gone many steps, a voice called him, and a thin weary-faced little woman, with a heavy baby in her arms, came up to him.

"I heard ye speirin' for Mrs. Derrick, sir," she said, in a quiet, listless voice, which made one think the spirit had been all knocked out of her, "I canna tell ye muckle about her ; but I ken ae thing, her bairn's in the Children's Hospital oot at Parkside.

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The minister's wife got it in. Maybe they could tell ye whaur the mother is."

Thomas Dryburgh's face brightened. "I'm certainly obleeged till ye, mistress. Whaur did ye say the place was?"

"Parkside. It's a bittie frae here, but you'll sune gang. May I mak' bold tae speir if ye are ony freen'? I often wondered wha she belanged tae. She wasna toon bred onyway. She took sae ill wi' the Undergate. Ye see she was my neebor on the stair-heed, an' though we hadna muckle trock, she was the best an' kindest neebor I ever had, an' I was aye vext for her."

There were tears in the poor worn eyes of the weary mother as she uttered these words, and somehow the miller felt an unwonted dimness touch his own.

"I'm her brither, mistress," he said, readily enough. "Thenk ye for yer information. There's something for the bairn."

As he spoke, he slipped a half-crown into the woman's hardened palm; a proceeding which was jealously noted by the two stout viragoes in the entry door, and who, thereupon, fell to abusing their meek-faced neighbour in no measured terms.

It was a good hour's walk from the Undergate to Parkside, so that it was about noon when Thomas Dryburgh reached the gates of the Children's Hospital.

How pleasant it was out here, he could not help thinking ; what a grateful change from the miserable, squalid, unwholesome streets which fringed the river. The mist was fast disappearing under the genial rays of the sun, which shone brightly as usual on the windows of the Children's Home. If there was sun anywhere, it was sure to shine brightest and longest there ; perhaps it loved the place. The miller felt some little hesitation as his fingers touched the shining bell handle ; this was altogether a new experience for him, and he wondered at his own courage and perseverance.

A trim maid-servant promptly answered his summons, but as it was not the visitors' hour did not ask him to enter, but only waited to hear his business.

"Ye hae a bairn ca'd Derrick here, haven't ye, my lassie?" he said, bluntly.

The girl smiled slightly at the broad salutation. "I don't know, sir ; but if you want to see any of the patients, the visiting hours are from two to six, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays."

"Could I no' get in the day? I'm frae the country, an' it's an important business."

"Well, come in, and I'll ask the matron to speak to you," said the girl, pleasantly ; and ushering him into a little ante-room off the hall, left him to his own thoughts for a few minutes, then returned and requested him to follow her to the matron's room.

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CHAPTER VIII.

TIBBIE.



GOOD morning, sir. You are asking for a child named Derrick, I think," said the matron, pleasantly, when the miller, red-faced and awkward looking, was ushered into her presence. She looked at him keenly, surmising that he was the brother of Mary Derrick, for Mrs. West had told her some, though not all, of the young widow's history.

"Yes, mem; I was told she was here. But it's the mither I want mair parteecklerly to see. I'm her brither; my name is Thomas Dryburgh."

"We have the little one here; but we cannot take in the mothers as well, though some of them would fain stay," said the matron with a smile. "I am sorry I cannot tell you where Mrs. Derrick is to be found. I know she has left her old residence, and that the clergyman's wife who brought her and her baby here, has obtained a situation for her. But to-morrow is visiting day, and she never fails to put

in an appearance. If you could call about five, you would be quite certain to see her."

"Ye see, mem, I'm frae the country, an' I wad need to bide in Dunleith a' nicht in that case," said the miller, scratching his head.

"Well, I could give you the address of the clergyman's wife, who knows where your sister is," said the matron, kindly.

"Thenk ye ; but I'll just bide till the morn," said the miller, who had faced quite enough strangers already. "I'm jist troublin' ye, bit if ye wad let me get a glint o' the bairn, I wad be muckle obleeged. Is she no' weel?"

"She was, but she is mending every day. The wards are in great confusion, for to-morrow is Christmas Day, you know, and we are having an entertainment for the children," said the matron. "But, I daresay, you won't mind."

Thomas Dryburgh had only a very vague idea of what a ward was, and certainly did not expect the sight which met his view, when, at the end of the long corridor, Mrs. Carnegie opened the door of the western ward and he saw the long, wide, high-ceiled room, with its row of dainty cots on either side ; he looked overwhelmingly surprised.

"Bless me, what a heap o' bairns, an' what a braw place," he ejaculated. "It'll tak' a mint o' money to keep up a place like this."

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"Ay, it does, but we have always enough and to spare. Nobody grudges to give for such a purpose," said the matron. "Of course, you know it is kept up by voluntary subscriptions."

"No, I didna ken. Eh, there's a white faced wee callant!" he said, looking compassionately at a little lad lying wearily back among his pillows, his face as white as they.

"Ay, poor Willie, he will never be well until he reaches the better Children's Home," whispered the matron softly. "Come and see your little niece, she is at the other end of the ward."

"This'll be the Christmas tree for the morn?" said the miller, as they passed the big fir-tree, which was being decorated by such of the children as were able to be out of bed, while those in the cots looked on with eager interest.

"Yes, all these toys came in yesterday, free gifts from the Sabbath scholars in Dunleith," said the matron, pointing to two big hampers filled with all sorts of pretty things. "There are the same in the other three wards, so we will have a good time tomorrow. Here is your little niece. Well, Tibbie, how are you this morning? Are you going to speak to the gentleman who has come to see you?"

The fragile looking little girlie, sitting up in her cot with her golden curls falling like a halo above her little pink gown, smiled at the matron's kind

salutation, and gravely nodded her head in response.

"Shake hands with him, then," said Mrs. Carnegie, and instantly one pale, white hand was offered to the miller, who laid it on his own brown palm, and looked at it with a very curious expression on his face.

"Are ye verra no-weel, my dawtie?" he asked in a queer, husky voice.

"No, I'm better now," piped the shrill, sweet, childish voice. "Isn't this a nice place? See the Christmas tree."

How like to her fair mother she was when that smile, that eager look came upon her face! It seemed to Thomas Dryburgh that the years rolled backward, and he saw his baby sister playing about the Girnelt, and himself a big uncouth halflin lad watching her with amused curiosity. And yet there was a look of her father about her too, a glint of the sunshine which made her doubly dear to her mother's heart.

"You see Tibbie is well cared for, and coming on nicely; in another month she will be running with the best of them," said Mrs. Carnegie. "Well, Mr. Dryburgh, I am afraid I must send you away, for it is just the children's dinner hour, and we will be in the way."

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Ay, very well did Tibbie know what it was, and quickly enough did the little hand close over it, while a pleased smile touched the dainty lips.

"What do they pay for gettin' bairns in here, mem?" asked the miller, as he followed Mrs. Carnegie out of the ward.

"Nothing. It is a free institution for the benefit of the poor, kept up, as I told you, by voluntary subscription."

"D'ye say sae? There maun be an awfu' feck o' rich folk in Dunleith."

"There are some both rich and generous-hearted, but many of our most willing offerings come from poor folks who have been benefited by coming here."

"Ay, d'ye say sae? Can onybody gie that likes?"

"Certainly," answered the matron, with a smile.

"Wad ye tak a wheen bawbees frae the like o' me, na?"

"If you are so kind, try me and see," laughed the matron.

"I hinna muckle on me," said the miller, drawing out a handful of silver, and laying it on the hall table; "but I'll write oot a cheque afore I sleep, an' bring it the morn; for I never kent or heard o' onything mair deservin' o' support."

"I agree with you, Mr. Dryburgh. Anything you may be pleased to give will be gratefully accepted. Good morning. We will be pleased to see you tomorrow. I am sure you will enjoy seeing the children's treat. It is quite a sight."

So Thomas Dryburgh left the Children's Hospital, with his eyes opened to several things of which he had never dreamed before.

He occupied the rest of the day in hunting up several old acquaintances, who, as lads, had left quiet Balwhinnie to seek a wider sphere in the town. One of these lads, now a prosperous merchant, was so delighted to see a face from his native hills, that though he had not been particularly friendly with Thomas Dryburgh when they were boys together at Balwhinnie, he insisted on taking him out to his comfortable and even luxurious home in the suburbs, where a gentle-eyed wife and a troop of happy children made the sunshine of his life. And when he heard that business would keep the miller in Dunleith till next day, he would not hear of him spending the night at an hotel, and when the sweet wife added her kind words of invitation, Thomas Dryburgh was prevailed upon; so the evening was spent in the cosy dining-room, amid all the blithe chatter and quiet mirth found only in a truly happy home.

"What d'ye think o' my bairns, Tam?" said the merchant, when the two were left sitting by the fire





"A GENTLE-EYED WIFE AND A GROUP OF HAPPY CHILDREN."

after supper. "Doesn't it say a guid deal for daft Jamie Colquhoun that he has a hame like this, an' sic a wife, eh?" There was a twinkle in his eyes as he spoke; but the glow of a deeper feeling mingled with it.

"Ay, man," was all the miller made answer, for his heart was filled by a thousand vague longings and unavailing regrets which were like to overwhelm him. Here was one, the son of a poor widow in Balwhinnie, who, by dint of his own unaided exertions, and the exercise of the manly qualities of heart and head, had risen to a position of influence and happiness, while he, Thomas Dryburgh, who had been a rich man all his days, and that without any exertion of his own, was a mere cipher, whose existence had never benefited a human being. When the day came to balance accounts in the Great Hall of Judgment, with what words would he answer the accusing voice of the Master, when the intrusted talents were brought unused out of the napkin wherein he had so selfishly hid them?

"So ye've never mairrit, Tam," said the merchant, speaking in the broad dialect he loved, though it was seldom heard in the society in which he moved; "man, ye've missed a heap. There's nae life like it. But for my wife, God bless her, I wadna hae been whaur I am the day. An' the bairns are the very glint o' the sun itsel'."

"Ay, man," said the miller again, and his head fell upon his hands.

The merchant looked at him compassionately, guessing something of what was passing in his heart. He knew his greed of gold ; knew, too, the story of Mary Dryburgh and her somewhat sad marriage, and, in the silence which ensued, a prayer rose silently from the good man's heart, that Thomas Dryburgh's remorse might bear its fruit.

"I think I'll gang to my bed, Jamie," said the miller, rising somewhat heavily to his feet, and passing his hand wearily across his brow. "The morn, maybe, I'll tell ye my errand to Dunleith. Man, be thankfu' ye are what ye are, an' no a meeserable useless cratur' siccan as me. Guid nicht."

In the night Mrs. Colquhoun awoke her husband, saying there was some one speaking in the adjoining room, which was the guest-chamber, occupied by Thomas Dryburgh.

"It's the voice of prayer, my dear," said the merchant. "The Spirit of God is wrestling with the man, let us pray that He may prevail."



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CHAPTER IX.

A HAPPY ENDING.

IT snowed on Christmas morning ; and when the little ones awoke, thinking rapturously of all the glories in store, the sun was up, and the delicate fringe beginning to disappear from the boughs of the big elm tree which nodded in at the long windows of the western ward. What a bustle it was all forenoon getting each face and each pair of hands washed, each little head brushed smooth and straight, and each small figure attired in a new, bright-coloured night-dress, the gift of a kind lady in the town, all to do honour to Father Christmas, and to the dear friends who had done so much to make it bright and pleasant for the suffering children shut out from the pleasures attendant upon youth and health. But for the time aches and pains were almost forgotten (though there *were* one or two poor wee mortals too sorely stricken even to be roused by Christmas cheer), and when the long shadows of the early twilight began to fall,

the nurses stepped about briskly, lighting a gas-lamp here and another there, though the full brilliance of light, when the taper should be put to the candles and little lanterns on the tree itself, was reserved until the visitors began to arrive.

Among the first to enter the western ward was Mary Derrick ; the lady who, on Mrs. West's recommendation, had engaged her to help in her house until the busy festive season should be past, having kindly given her the afternoon to visit her sick child. A few weeks' pure air and good food, coupled with relief from anxiety and care, had already made a marked improvement in Mary Derrick. Her step was lighter and freer, her eyes brighter, and her cheeks even had gained a little of the bloom they had lost. The nurses and the children, who knew her well now, wished her "A Merry Christmas" as she passed up the ward, a greeting which she returned with that sweet, ready smile which made her face so pleasant to look at ; and in another moment she was at Tibbie's bedside, clasping the dear wee figure in her arms, and feasting her motherly eyes on the sweet, bonnie face which was her only earthly treasure. What an unutterable joy it was to Mary Derrick to watch the gradual improvement in her darling, and how deep and true was the gratitude in her heart I cannot tell you. She had vowed again and again in her inmost heart

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that every penny she could save from her wages should be laid aside for the purpose of paying her debt to the Children's Hospital. She looked upon the benefits Tibbie had received as a loan to herself, to be paid back by slow degrees perhaps, but still as scrupulously and honourably as any ordinary debt. There was not one atom of meanness nor of selfishness in Mary Derrick's heart.

"See my sixpence, mother," said Tibbie, exhibiting with childish glee the shining coin she had received from the stranger on the previous day.

"Ay ; an' whaur did Tibbie get that ?" asked the fond mother, as her hand wandered to and fro caressingly on the bairn's golden head.

"The kind man that came yesterday," said the sweet, childish tones. "An' I telled him to look at the Christmas tree, mother."

"Ay, well, my lamb, Tibbie'll keep the sixpence till the bonnie days when she can rin again," said Mary Derrick caressingly, thinking one of the many friends of the Children's Hospital had been paying a Christmas visit to the inmates. At that moment one of the nurses touched her arm.

"There's somebody wishing to see you downstairs, Mrs. Derrick. A gentleman, Mrs. Carnegie told me to say. He is in the little waiting-room off the hall, and you are to go down at once."

Mary Derrick rose to her feet, looking somewnat surprised.

"To see me ! are ye sure it's me ?"

The nurse nodded, and went off again, for the visitors were beginning to drop into the ward, and the pleasant clatter of tea-cups was going on at the other end.

"There's somebody wantin' to see mother, Tibbie, but she'll no bide lang," said Mrs. Derrick, and with a smiling nod to the bairn, she left the ward, and took her way down the now familiar stairs, wondering much who could be seeking an interview with her.

The thought that by any possibility it might be her brother never for a moment entered her mind. She supposed that they were parted to meet no more, at least this side the grave.

She opened unhesitatingly the door of the little ante-room, in which a cheery fire relieved the gloom of the wintry afternoon. Even when she saw the tall stalwart figure in grey home-spun, standing on the hearth, with its back to the door, she did not recognise it.

"Ye wished to see me, sir ?" she said, closing the door, and advancing into the room. Then the figure slowly turned, and her startled eyes beheld the face of her brother, Thomas Dryburgh.

"Tam !" she exclaimed faintly. Is't you or yer ghost ?"

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"It's me, Mary," returned he in tremulous husky tones. "Oh, lassie, my een's been opened, though late, to my sin, an' I hae come to see if ye can ever forgi'e me. I ken I dinna deserve it, but if ye could, Mary, I'd mak' it up to you, I wad indeed, baith to you an' to the bairn."

"Oh, Tam, Tam!" fell brokenly from Mary Derrick's lips, and sitting down at the table, she leaned her head on her hands, and burst into tears. Her brother moved nearer to her, and looked down upon her with humble beseeching eyes. How changed she was, from the winsome lassie of long ago, and yet how he loved her, the sister against whom he had steeled his heart so long!

"I hae been a puir, meeserable, hard-hearted, sinfu' wretch a' my days, Mary," he went on in the same low self-accusing tones. "I hae wranged ye, lassie, an' keepit the siller which wad hae stood between you an' want. But it's a' safe in the bank, Mary, beside my ain, an' it shall be a' yours an' the bairn's, if ye'll only forgi'e me, an' come hame to the Girnel."

"I dinna deserve that ye should forgi'e me, Mary, but the Almichty, whom I hae sinned against continually a' thae years, has forgi'en me, an' gi'en peace an' pardon an' hope to my heart. Wull ye, Mary?"

The miller's voice had sunk almost to a whisper now, and as he ceased speaking, his trembling hand

fell upon his sister's drooping shoulder, with a touch of yearning love. For the dear tie of kinship was between them, and he had been lonely and miserable so long. But no answer came, except the sound of weeping in the quiet room, as if Mary Derrick's overcharged heart must spend itself in tears, or break.

"I daurna think on what ye hae suffert, Mary, for it gars me despair o' ever bein' able to mak' my atonement. But if ye'll only come, I'll try. I'll jist be like a bairn in yer hands, for I maun begin at the very beginnin' an' falter along the road ye hae walkit a' yer days.

"But if, mindin' on the puir life ye had at the Girnelt wi' me afore, ye canna think to come," he continued, when still no answer came to his pleading, "ye'll let me set ye up in a comfortable hoose, an' see that the siller's a' richt invested for you and the bairn. It'll keep you an' her in comfort a' yer days."

Then Mary Derrick started up; and oh, how beautiful was the smile which shone so radiantly through her tears!

"Oh, Tam! Tam! dinna say ony mair! what can I say but that Tibbie an me'll come to the Girnelt, ay, an' that we'll be blithe to come; and we'll live canty an cosy thegither a' oor days!"

"Thank the Lord!" fell fervently from Thomas Dryburgh's lips, and then a hushed silence fell upon

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them, for there came floating down to them the sweet glad strains of the Christmas hymn they were singing upstairs.

"Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good-will to men."

Ay, it was a happy, happy Christmas day!

* * * * *

One more peep, only one, we must have into the Girnel kitchen on a sunshiny summer afternoon. Oh, what a sight it was, what a bright, cheerful, cosy place, what a home! No cobwebs now, no dim tins and discoloured brasses, no grimy floor, and ash-choked bars, no, no! Though you looked till your eyes grew tired, you could not discover a speck of dust or a single spot to blemish the perfect cleanliness of the Girnel kitchen. And then, though it was the summer time, what a clear, bright, inviting fire crackled in the shining grate, and how the kettle sang, as if vieing with the clear notes of the canary, Tibbie's last fairing from Uncle Tom, when he had been at Dunleith market. Then, what a delicious odour of new-made tea, and buttered toast, and home-made scones and cakes, with which the big table was groaning! About the table flitted the dear mistress of the Girnel, a sweet-faced gentle-eyed woman to whom the bloom of early beauty has returned again. Ay, Mary Derrick was a happy woman now, and there was only at times a glimmer

of thoughtfulness a passing shadow which recalled the burdened past. After all, we cannot *quite* forget. Presently the sweet shrill tones of a child's voice came sounding in through the open door, and a chubby rosy-cheeked wee mai'an, with her hands filled with buttercups, came toddling in, followed by a substantial, well-dressed, comely figure marvellously like that of Nancy Thorburn. And so it was; for since the new reign had begun at the Girnelt, there were many comings and goings between it and Leerie Law.

"Guid day t'ye, Mary. Am I late? It's no easy gaun tea-drinkin' wi' sae mony beasts to look efter. I spent a guid hoor efter I was dressed huntin' a clockin' hen. They're perfect pests," she said laughing. "What a pet that bairn o' yours is! She was ower Balwhinnie Brae puin' buttercups an' lookin' for me."

"Ay, ye see Tibbie never saw them growin' by the roadsides afore;" answered Mary, with a smile and a tear; and while she ushered her visitor into the bedroom to take off her bonnet, Tibbie ran off to find her uncle and bring him in to tea. The women folk stayed so long chatting, after the manner of their kind, that when they again entered the kitchen the miller was in his seat at the table, with the bairn perched on her high chair beside him. It was an amusing and yet a touching thing to see the

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grey-haired man and the sunny-haired child so utterly devoted to each other. Mary would laugh sometimes, and say she was jealous of the love the bairn had for her uncle ; but that was only in jest.

A hearty greeting passed between the miller and the mistress of Leerie Law. The past, though not forgotten, was laid aside, although a joke was sometimes passed about the miller's first visit to Leerie Law, of which Mary had received a comical account from her brother.

"Oh, this fireside's a sicht for sair een, neebor," said Nancy, looking round with glistening eyes. "I never thocht to see the like in the Girncl."

"Nor I, Nancy," said the miller, and his brown hand fell caressingly on Tibbie's golden head.

"Them that lives langest sees maist, they say," said Nancy blithely. "What d'ye say, Mary?"

But Mary's answer was not audible. She smiled upon them all, and when she stepped back to set the teapot at the fire, she whispered to herself very low, "But with God all things are possible."

And then the merry meal began.

* * * * *

I have only to add that Mary Derrick's debt to the Children's Hospital has been long since paid,—ay, *over and above*. At Christmas time two cheques are regularly despatched from the Girncl, and a big hamper as well, in which are packed the

freshest eggs and the most delicious butter and the fattest chickens the Girdel can produce ; in the sending of which Thomas Dryburgh himself is more deeply interested than any one else. And, in the old-fashioned bureau, which stands in his own bedroom, there is to be found a blue document, the counterpart of that lying in a solicitor's office in Dunleith, which is marked "Thomas Dryburgh's Will." There is one bequest set forth in that document which we may mention, though it is a breach of professional confidence. This clause ensures that after Thomas Dryburgh's death the greater part of his hoarded gold shall go to the endowment of two cots in the Children's Hospital in Dunleith, to be marked, "The gift of an anonymous donor, out of gratitude for great mercy vouchsafed."

So the dream bore its fruit, and proved one of the greatest blessings of Thomas Dryburgh's life.

THE END.