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WINDOW WILLIE

A TWEEDSIDE TRADITION, BY W. CHAMBERS, LL.D

Crossing the tall and narrow old bridge of several arches which spans the Tweed at Peebles, is seen an aged gentleman riding composedly on a small white pony. His head is bent droopingly down, as if meditating on some important mission. From his general aspect, he may be a gentleman-farmer, disposed to take things easily at his time of life; or he may be some retired public official who keeps a pony, and in good weather pops about for amusement. His dress has nothing particular about it. He wears a blue coat with metal buttons and capacious outside pockets. His legs are endued in buff breeches, white rig-and-fur woollen stockings, and black spats, a kind of short gaiters, over the ankles. Any one may observe that he is no common person. At the end of his watch-chain dangle a gold seal, a Queen Anne sixpence, a small and very pretty shell, and a flexible watch-key. Instead of using a riding-whip, he has in his right hand a perfectly respectable gold-headed cane, with which he occasionally gives a gentle pat on the side of the pony. Altogether a creditable affair, as things went towards the end of last century.

This imposing personage, according to tradition, was proceeding in a southerly direction across the bridge from his residence at Cabbage Hall, on Tweed Green, in order to pursue his way down the right bank of the river to the mansion of Traquair. It is a pleasant ride of seven to eight miles; and looking to the leisurely progress of the little nag, it is not unlikely he may reach his destination in an hour and a half. So far well. But who is this venerable gentleman? His proper designation is of no consequence. Locally, and somewhat irreverently, he is known as Window Willie, a man of genial temperament, but who professionally commands a degree of respect in the neighbourhood; for he is the district inspector in relation to the tax on window-lights, and it is not surprising that with all his good humour people are a little afraid of him.

Is Window Willie going to inspect windows in that old weather-beaten château of the Earl of Traquair? Not at all. He is a chum of the old Earl, and what his particular business happens to be on the present occasion will afterwards appear. In the meantime, as paving the way for Window Willie's interview, we may run over a few particulars concerning the Traquair family. There need be the less ceremony in speaking of them, as all have gone to their rest. The family is extinct, leaving not a shred behind.

The Stewarts of Traquair come first prominently into notice in the reign of Charles I., 1628, when Sir John Stewart of Traquair, Knight, was raised to the peerage as Lord Stewart of Traquair, and shortly afterwards elevated to the dignity of Earl of Traquair, Lord Linton, and Caberston. In looking into history, we cannot discover that this gentleman had a single good quality. Like too many at that period, he was a time-server, devoid of anything like settled principle. In politics and religion he discreetly sided with the uppermost – a Puritan or an Anglican of the Laud type, whichever seemed to promise to pay best.

There is a very curious old book, which few know anything about, called the '*Staggering State of Scots Statesmen, for one hundred years from 1550 to 1650*, by Sir John Scot of Scotstarvit.' It was printed from a manuscript in 1754, and is exceedingly rare. This little book is full of amusing

gossip about the wretchedly struggling noblemen and officers of state at that unhappy period of Scottish history, during a large portion of which the central ruling authority was in London, and only a delegation of subordinates, who domineered at will, in Edinburgh. These subordinates were needy Scotsmen, of whom for more than a century hardly a good word can be said. They did as they liked, plundered and tyrannised without mercy. The *Staggering State* gives an awful account of them. Among the whole, none was such an adept at looking to his own interest as the newly created Earl of Traquair. Appointed Lord High Treasurer, he 'managed matters so nimbly' that in a short time he was able, by purchase, to vastly extend the possessions of the family. He also enlarged the old mansion at Traquair, and made a handsome avenue lined with trees as an approach.

When Charles I. got into trouble, the Earl of Traquair for a time stuck to his cause, which in a half-hearted way he afterwards thought fit to desert. The Commonwealth under Cromwell proved a sore trial to every class of home-rulers in Scotland. A stern system of honesty and justice was introduced, at which the native nobility and judges stood aghast. Monopolies were abolished. Free trade was established between England and Scotland. Very hard all this on those who had been pocketing the public money, thriving on monopolies, and selling justice to the highest bidder. Turned out of office, and his estate being sequestrated, the Earl of Traquair was ruined. By some manœuvre, his son Lord Linton had the address to save for himself and his heirs at least a portion of the family property, and was able to keep house at Traquair, while the Earl was exposed to vicissitudes, uncheered by public respect or sympathy. Lord Linton can hardly be acquitted of having acted an unnatural part towards his father. He allowed him to drop into such extreme poverty that he was fain to accept an alms from an old friend, and to dine on a salt herring and an onion. Broken in spirit, he died in 1659; and as evidencing the meanness of his circumstances, it is recorded that at his burial there was no pall, but only a black apron over the coffin.

So ended the first Earl, who though not without the faults common to the period, was at least an historical personage. His son, the second Earl, was noted only for scandalous irregularities, and by him Roman Catholicism was introduced into the family, through his marriage with Lady Anne Seton. He was succeeded by his elder son, William, as third Earl; and he was succeeded by his brother, Charles, as fourth Earl, who married Lady Mary Maxwell, daughter of the fourth Earl of Nithsdale. We need say nothing of the fifth Earl. In the sixth Earl we begin to have a living interest. He had a son, Charles, and three daughters, Christiana, Mary, and Lucy. Lady Christiana caused serious trouble in the family by what was deemed a *mésalliance*. The story is that she fell in love with a young man named Griffiths, who as a lawyer's clerk had visited Traquair on some piece of business, married him – and was disowned. There is no doubt of the marriage, whatever might have been the position of Mr Griffiths; for it is recorded in the *Peerage* of Sir Robert Douglas. Descendants of Lady Christiana are still living, we believe, in America.

The Ladies Mary and Lucy do not appear to have been married. As genteel spinsters they lived in the Canongate, Edinburgh, which even in their time had not been entirely deserted by noble families. Charles, their brother, who succeeded as seventh Earl in 1779, and was already married, dwelt for a time in Edinburgh. There to him was born a daughter, Louisa, 20th March 1776; and a son, Charles, 31st January 1781. After the birth of the two children, the Earl and his Countess spent most of their time at Traquair House. Here, for a number of years the Earl flourished, if it can be called flourishing, the more appropriate term being vegetating, at the period when Window Willie was in his glory.

There lingered some traditions of the Countess of Traquair in our young days. She was an invalid. The rumour in Peebles was that she had been afflicted with an 'eating cancer in her great toe.' Whether there was any truth in the report we cannot tell. All we know is, that the ailment of her Ladyship gave rise to a droll and popular myth. The cancer being an 'eating' cancer, required something to eat. If it was not properly provided with food, it would eat off her Ladyship's foot, and finally eat her up bodily. To avert this calamity, it was customary – so ran the legend in Peebles –

to provide the cancer every morning regularly with a fresh pigeon, which it devoured with a relish in the course of the day, and so the foot of the Countess was luckily saved. The gossip about the daily consumption of a pigeon was possibly a piece of nonsense. At anyrate, the Countess having been much of an invalid, the old Earl her husband sought to amuse himself in a way, immediately to be specified.

We are now ready for the interview with Window Willie, who has been jogging on his way to Traquair. For the last hour the Earl had been expecting him, and now and then looks out from a small apartment with a low ceiling to see his approach down a side avenue. There at length he comes on his little white pony; and giving the animal to a groom, he enters the antiquated mansion.

'Glad to see you,' said the Earl. 'I've been out of work for a week; at least hardly anything to do. I hope you have brought something. How many have you got?'

'Well, my Lord,' replied Willie, 'I think I have made a pretty good haul. I have just returned from my circuit in the western district of the county, and have managed to pick up a round dozen.'

'That will do capitally. Lay them out carefully in a row, and tell me to whom they belong.'

So requested, Window Willie disburdened himself by drawing from his pockets a dozen razors in their respective cases, some of them having a very common appearance, and he proceeded to arrange and specify them as follows:

'There's one from Dickson of Hartree; one from Loch of Rachan; one from Murray at Drachal; one from Kerr, minister of Stobo; one from Marshall, minister of Manor; and one from Bowed Davie; it's sair lippit, but it will stand grunden. That makes six. Then comes one from Mr Findlater, the minister of Newlands; next one from Sir James Naesmyth; one from Robbie Symington at Edston; one from Mr Alexander at Easter Haprew; one from Toll Tammie at the Neidpath, which I got yesterday in passing; and last of all, one from your lordship's friend and adviser, Commissary Robertson, at Peebles. That makes the dozen.'

The row of razors made a splendid array, and put the Earl in high spirits. Window Willie must stay to dinner to talk over his adventures in securing the razors, for each has its story, which will furnish some amusement. Willie, of course, as he had expected, dines with the Earl, and pops home to Cabbage Hall in the evening.

Not to keep the reader in suspense: The Earl of Traquair had a profound passion for sharpening razors. Thankfully and gratuitously his Lordship sharpened not only all the razors of his tenants and their servants, but of all the landed gentlemen, farmers, and traders throughout the county who would favour him with a commission of the kind. In his time, no one in Peeblesshire needed to torture himself by shaving with a blunt razor. Of course, the razors were not sent for sharpening in a business fashion. Window Willie's professional rounds gave him an excellent opportunity of collecting razors for the Earl, and of returning them properly cuttled to their proprietors. When he brought one batch he took away another. It was a satisfactory arrangement all round. The Earl was delighted to be kept working at his favourite pursuit; people were glad to get their razors on all occasions sharpened for nothing; and Window Willie was pleased to have an employment which made him everywhere an acceptable guest, and afforded opportunities of visiting at Traquair. I happen to have an agreeable remembrance of various persons in Peebles telling me several of the foregoing particulars, and of how Window Willie used to call to ask if their razors did not want a little touching up, as he was going next day to visit the Earl.

The world was not then constituted exactly as it now is. Nobody thought there was anything particularly strange in an Earl sharpening razors as a recreation. It was a harmless hobby; and, besides, there was a gratification in thinking that your razor was put in trim by a nobleman. The Earl of Traquair was a general benefactor. He was a sort of artist. He should have been born and bred a cutler, in which capacity he excelled; but as he had the misfortune to be born an heir to an earldom, he had just to make the best of it. As for Window Willie, he seemed to have been born to be the Earl's provider with blunt razors to be sharpened; in which line he acquitted himself admirably. Working to

each other's hands, they in their time kept the county well and comfortably shaved, and that is saying a good deal in the way of eulogium.

The Earl had another eccentricity. He did not patronise London or Edinburgh tailors. After some experience, he had a firm belief that no man could make clothes for him that would thoroughly fit but Thorburn, a tailor at Eddleston, a small village of forty to fifty houses, close to Darnhall, the residence of Lord Elibank. We have never heard how the Earl discovered Thorburn; in all likelihood he heard of him through his factotum, Window Willie, who knew something of everybody. Having tried, he stuck to Thorburn. One thing materially guided this selection. Thorburn was exactly his own shape, body, legs, and arms. That was a great point. The Earl had an invincible hatred of putting on new-made clothes, which required some time to settle down into the required figure, and were at first a little awkward. Thorburn was an accommodating fellow. He volunteered to wear the Earl's new clothes for a day or two, to give them a set. The obliging offer was accepted. When the Earl wanted a new pair of black velvet breeches, Thorburn took care to wear them for a Sunday at church, which gave the legs the appropriately round baggy form, and then they were ready for use. By the agency of Window Willie and his little pony, the garment safely reached Traquair House.

Dear old Earl, and dear good-hearted Window Willie! Both have long since passed away. The beards of the county are said to have been sensibly affected by their decease. Charles, the eighth Earl, had unfortunately none of his father's aptitude for razor-sharpening. As a bachelor and a recluse, he was mainly noted for effecting improvements on his various farm-steadings, which was by no means a bad hobby for a nobleman. Partly perhaps on account of a stammering in his speech, he shrank from general society, and vegetated till the last in the queer antiquated mansion of his forefathers, in the society of his only sister, Lady Louisa Stuart. We had the honour of several interviews with him in relation to railways for the district, and could not help feeling pained with that distressing stammer. A very curious fact afterwards came to our knowledge. The Earl having spent a number of his early years abroad, acquired a proficiency in speaking French, which he ever afterwards retained. When he spoke French, he never stammered! At his decease in 1861, the male line and peerage became extinct; and on the death of Lady Louisa Stuart in 1875, in the hundredth year of her age, all the family had departed, the property devolving by will on a distant relative. Traquair House, which looks like two ancient feudal keeps rolled into one, remains embosomed in trees almost as it was left by the Lord High Treasurer upwards of two hundred years ago, and as it used to be visited of old by Window Willie.

W. C.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS

CHAPTER XXVI. – PREPARATION

Great was my relief the next day when, on Lilian and I returning from a ramble in our beloved woods, we heard Robert Wentworth talking to Mrs Tipper in the parlour. But at first sight of him, I shrank back. How altered he looked, how terribly altered since we had last met! The kind little lady's hurried explanation as we entered the room, that illness had kept him away, gave me another blow, and he saw that it did.

'Only a sort of cold,' he cheerfully explained, extending his hand towards me with a smile. 'How do you do, Mary?'

My own hand shook; but he kept it long enough in his own to steady it, giving me a reassuring look before releasing it.

But Lilian could not get over the shock which the first sight of him had given her, involuntarily exclaiming: 'But I fear you have been ill – very ill; and it has made you quite' – She paused, not liking to go on; but he lightly replied: 'Gray, do you mean? My dear Lilian, the gray season had set in long ago, only you saw me too frequently to notice it.'

Mrs Tipper laid her hand for a moment on his shoulder as she passed him on her way out of the room to prepare some special dainty to tempt him at tea-time; and I noticed that she was looking much graver than usual.

'And how have you been going on with your work during my absence?' he asked; 'not carelessly, I hope? I am in the humour to be very exacting and critical to-night; so you must not expect me to treat sins of omission or commission with my usual amiability.'

'Amiability, indeed!' ejaculated Lilian. 'The idea of your setting up for being amiable! I do not consider you at all considerate and good-natured to failure, sir.'

He smiled. 'I certainly have not much sympathy with failure; it would not be orthodox, you know. But get out your work, and let me find a safe outlet for my savage propensity.'

He saw that it did me good to be taken to task in the old fashion; and was quite as unsparing as I could desire, when he came upon any error. Whatever it cost him, Robert Wentworth succeeded in setting my heart as well as theirs at rest before he took his departure that night. If Mrs Tipper saw something of the truth, she shewed her consideration for me by carefully avoiding to give any expression to her thoughts. Lilian evidently guessed nothing. She openly expressed her surprise and regret at the alteration which she perceived in him.

'I really felt quite shocked for the first few moments,' she said. 'Even serious illness does not seem quite to account for such an alteration as there is in him. He looks as though he had suddenly grown old. Do not you think so, auntie? – Don't you, Mary?'

Mrs Tipper was silent, leaving me to reply, though I knew that she was watching me somewhat closely the while. It required all the nerve and self-command I could muster to make something like a suitable reply; but I did make it; and Lilian at anyrate remained in ignorance of the true state of the case, although her ignorance occasioned me almost as much pain as her knowledge of it would have done, so very closely did she sometimes approach to the truth, in her speculations as to the possible and probable cause of the change which had taken place in Robert Wentworth.

I was becoming restless and anxious from more causes than one. The time of Philip's expected arrival was drawing near, and my news remained still untold. Whilst I was ashamed of my reticence with two such friends, the difficulty of approaching the subject seemed rather to increase than

diminish. My uneasiness was becoming apparent too; even Lilian and Mrs Tipper were beginning to notice a difference in me, which they could not account for.

The dear little lady once ventured a few words to me to the effect that no good man could be the worse for loving a woman, though she could not return his love; fancying, I believe, that possibly I was uneasy upon Robert Wentworth's account. I could only kiss the hand laid so lovingly upon mine.

It so happened that just at this juncture Mrs Tipper required sundry little housekeeping errands done in town; and partly to be alone a few hours, partly to do a little shopping for myself, I volunteered to go for her.

'Are you sure you would prefer going, dear Mary?' said Mrs Tipper anxiously; 'the days are so hot, and the things could be sent down, if we write, you know.'

I murmured something about wanting to replenish my wardrobe a little, and she easily acquiesced: 'To tell the truth, my dear, I *should* prefer your choosing the patty-pans,' she candidly allowed, when she found I really wished to go. 'Becky and I will think over all we require, and make a list,' she added, trotting off in high-feather to compare notes with Becky in the kitchen. If we were proud of our 'drawing-room,' Mrs Tipper was quite as proud of her kitchen. 'There is a place for everything and everything in its place, my dear, clean and ready to hand.' Becky in the evening, seated in state, surrounded by her brilliantly burnished tins, was a sight to behold. Nothing would have delighted her mistress and herself more than a sudden invasion of company as a test of their resources. Lilian and I were sometimes taxed beyond our powers, in our endeavours to shew our appreciation of the little dainty cakes, patties, &c. set before us. Indeed we had more than once consulted together upon the advisability of suggesting a party of children from the village to relieve us.

Lilian looked, I thought, a little surprised at not being invited to accompany me on my expedition to town. But if she was surprised, she was not offended; sensitive as she was, there was as little self-love in Lilian as it is possible for any human being to have. Hers was not fine-weather friendship. She was content to stand quietly aside until I should need her, without any complaints about being neglected, or what not, which half-hearted people are so apt to make at a fancied slight. She knew that I loved her, and I knew that she loved me, and we could trust each other, without the repeated assurance of it, which some people seem to require.

She was only a shade or two more tender and loving in bidding me good-bye, when I set forth in the morning, anxious to make me feel that my return would be eagerly looked for; and whispering a little jest about the necessity for bringing back a good appetite. 'Auntie and Becky will be sure to be busily engaged in preparing treats all day, you know; so you must come home hungry, whatever you do. And do not forget your promise to buy a pretty bonnet, Mary, and leave off that old dowdy thing; it makes you look as though nobody loved you, which is not fair to your sister Lilian. And oh, Mary, I had almost forgotten; if you bring any of this back, I shall say you don't care for me in real earnest;' pressing a little roll of paper into my hand.

I knew that she was genuinely disappointed when I proved to her that I had as much as five-and-twenty pounds in hand; and so I was obliged to promise to take from her store for my next need. 'Or else one may just as well not be a sister,' she said, with a discontented little shake of the head.

How cheering it was – how precious the knowledge that I was cared for in this way! And there was dear old Mrs Tipper too! I thought I knew why she was desirous just at that season to make me feel that my presence was so much required at the cottage.

'I wanted to ask you to cut out the little pinafores for Mercy Green's child, Mary; but they must wait till to-morrow, I suppose. And there's the curtains for my bed, dear; nobody would fit them to please me but you;' and so forth, and so forth, until the last moment, when Lilian accompanied me as far as the stile.

As I walked across the fields in that lovely August morning, while the bright sun was my thoughts attuned themselves to the summer sights and sounds, and I shook off the morbid doubts and fears which had so beset me of late. I resolved to be no longer so weak and unfriendly as to keep the

truth from Mrs Tipper and Lilian. It really was unfriendly not to tell them what I knew they would both be glad to hear! That very evening my secret should be told, and I would at once begin brushing up for Philip, making up my mind to overcome my shyness for finery, and render myself as attractive as possible within the compass of – five-and-twenty pounds. It appeared to me a very large sum to spend at once upon finery, and I could only hope the end would justify the means. As it chanced, I really knew very little about Philip's taste in such matters. The selection of the modest outfit which was purchased for me nine years ago, I had been only too glad to leave to my dear mother's judgment, and we had been neither of us inclined to trouble Philip with *chiffon*

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