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CHAPTER I
Introductory

I do not intend to carry my story one month beyond the hour when I saw that my boyhood was gone and my youth arrived; a period determined to some by the first tail-coat, to me by a different sign. My reason for wishing to tell this first portion of my history is, that when I look back upon it, it seems to me not only so pleasant, but so full of meaning, that, if I can only tell it right, it must prove rather pleasant and not quite unmeaning to those who will read it. It will prove a very poor story to such as care only for stirring adventures, and like them all the better for a pretty strong infusion of the impossible; but those to whom their own history is interesting—to whom, young as they may be, it is a pleasant thing to be in the world—will not, I think, find the experience of a boy born in a very different position from that of most of them, yet as much a boy as any of them, wearisome because ordinary.

If I did not mention that I, Ranald Bannerman, am a Scotchman, I should be found out before long by the kind of

thing I have to tell; for although England and Scotland are in all essentials one, there are such differences between them that one could tell at once, on opening his eyes, if he had been carried out of the one into the other during the night. I do not mean he might not be puzzled, but except there was an intention to puzzle him by a skilful selection of place, the very air, the very colours would tell him; or if he kept his eyes shut, his ears would tell him without his eyes. But I will not offend fastidious ears with any syllable of my rougher tongue. I will tell my story in English, and neither part of the country will like it the worse for that.

I will clear the way for it by mentioning that my father was the clergyman of a country parish in the north of Scotland—a humble position, involving plain living and plain ways altogether. There was a glebe or church-farm attached to the manse or clergyman's house, and my father rented a small farm besides, for he needed all he could make by farming to supplement the smallness of the living. My mother was an invalid as far back as I can remember. We were four boys, and had no sister. But I must begin at the beginning, that is, as far back as it is possible for me to begin.

CHAPTER II
The Glimmer of Twilight

I cannot tell any better than most of my readers how and when I began to come awake, or what it was that wakened me. I mean, I cannot remember when I began to remember, or what first got set down in my memory as worth remembering. Sometimes I fancy it must have been a tremendous flood that first made me wonder, and so made me begin to remember. At all events, I do remember one flood that seems about as far off as anything—the rain pouring so thick that I put out my hand in front of me to try whether I could see it through the veil of the falling water. The river, which in general was to be seen only in glimpses from the house—for it ran at the bottom of a hollow—was outspread like a sea in front, and stretched away far on either hand. It was a little stream, but it fills so much of my memory with its regular recurrence of autumnal floods, that I can have no confidence that one of these is in reality the oldest thing I remember. Indeed, I have a suspicion that my oldest memories are of dreams,—where or when dreamed, the good One who made me only knows. They are very vague to me now, but were almost all made up of bright things. One only I can recall, and it I will relate, or more properly describe, for there was hardly anything done in it. I dreamed it often. It was of the room I slept in, only it was narrower in the

dream, and loftier, and the window was gone. But the ceiling was a ceiling indeed; for the sun, moon, and stars lived there. The sun was not a scientific sun at all, but one such as you see in penny picture-books—a round, jolly, jocund man's face, with flashes of yellow frilling it all about, just what a grand sunflower would look if you set a countenance where the black seeds are. And the moon was just such a one as you may see the cow jumping over in the pictured nursery rhyme. She was a crescent, of course, that she might have a face drawn in the hollow, and turned towards the sun, who seemed to be her husband. He looked merrily at her, and she looked trustfully at him, and I knew that they got on very well together. The stars were their children, of course, and they seemed to run about the ceiling just as they pleased; but the sun and the moon had regular motions—rose and set at the proper times, for they were steady old folks. I do not, however, remember ever seeing them rise or set; they were always up and near the centre before the dream dawned on me. It would always come in one way: I thought I awoke in the middle of the night, and lo! there was the room with the sun and the moon and the stars at their pranks and revels in the ceiling—Mr. Sun nodding and smiling across the intervening space to Mrs. Moon, and she nodding back to him with a knowing look, and the corners of her mouth drawn down.

I have vague memories of having heard them talk. At times I feel as if I could yet recall something of what they said, but it vanishes the moment I try to catch it. It was very queer talk,

indeed—about me, I fancied—but a thread of strong sense ran through it all. When the dream had been very vivid, I would sometimes think of it in the middle of the next day, and look up to the sun, saying to myself: He's up there now, busy enough. I wonder what he is seeing to talk to his wife about when he comes down at night? I think it sometimes made me a little more careful of my conduct. When the sun set, I thought he was going in the back way; and when the moon rose, I thought she was going out for a little stroll until I should go to sleep, when they might come and talk about me again. It was odd that, although I never fancied it of the sun, I thought I could make the moon follow me as I pleased. I remember once my eldest brother giving me great offence by bursting into laughter, when I offered, in all seriousness, to bring her to the other side of the house where they wanted light to go on with something they were about. But I must return to my dream; for the most remarkable thing in it I have not yet told you. In one corner of the ceiling there was a hole, and through that hole came down a ladder of sun-rays —very bright and lovely. Where it came from I never thought, but of course it could not come from the sun, because there he was, with his bright coat off, playing the father of his family in the most homely Old-English-gentleman fashion possible. That it was a ladder of rays there could, however, be no doubt: if only I could climb upon it! I often tried, but fast as I lifted my feet to climb, down they came again upon the boards of the floor. At length I did succeed, but this time the dream had a setting.

I have said that we were four boys; but at this time we were five—there was a little baby. He was very ill, however, and I knew he was not expected to live. I remember looking out of my bed one night and seeing my mother bending over him in her lap;—it is one of the few things in which I do remember my mother. I fell asleep, but by and by woke and looked out again. No one was there. Not only were mother and baby gone, but the cradle was gone too. I knew that my little brother was dead. I did not cry: I was too young and ignorant to cry about it. I went to sleep again, and seemed to wake once more; but it was into my dream this time. There were the sun and the moon and the stars. But the sun and the moon had got close together and were talking very earnestly, and all the stars had gathered round them. I could not hear a word they said, but I concluded that they were talking about my little brother. "I suppose I ought to be sorry," I said to myself; and I tried hard, but I could not feel sorry. Meantime I observed a curious motion in the heavenly host. They kept looking at me, and then at the corner where the ladder stood, and talking on, for I saw their lips moving very fast; and I thought by the motion of them that they were saying something about the ladder. I got out of bed and went to it. If I could only get up it! I would try once more. To my delight I found it would bear me. I climbed and climbed, and the sun and the moon and the stars looked more and more pleased as I got up nearer to them, till at last the sun's face was in a broad smile. But they did not move from their places, and my head rose above

them, and got out at the hole where the ladder came in. What I saw there, I cannot tell. I only know that a wind such as had never blown upon me in my waking hours, blew upon me now. I did not care much for kisses then, for I had not learned how good they are; but somehow I fancied afterwards that the wind was made of my baby brother's kisses, and I began to love the little man who had lived only long enough to be our brother and get up above the sun and the moon and the stars by the ladder of sun-rays. But this, I say, I thought afterwards. Now all that I can remember of my dream is that I began to weep for very delight of something I have forgotten, and that I fell down the ladder into the room again and awoke, as one always does with a fall in a dream. Sun, moon, and stars were gone; the ladder of light had vanished; and I lay sobbing on my pillow.

I have taken up a great deal of room with this story of a dream, but it clung to me, and would often return. And then the time of life to which this chapter refers is all so like one, that a dream comes in well enough in it. There is a twilight of the mind, when all things are strange, and when the memory is only beginning to know that it has got a notebook, and must put things down in it.

It was not long after this before my mother died, and I was sorrier for my father than for myself—he looked so sad. I have said that as far back as I can remember, she was an invalid. Hence she was unable to be much with us. She is very beautiful in my memory, but during the last months of her life we seldom saw her, and the desire to keep the house quiet for her sake must have

been the beginning of that freedom which we enjoyed during the whole of our boyhood. So we were out every day and all day long, finding our meals when we pleased, and that, as I shall explain, without going home for them. I remember her death clearly, but I will not dwell upon that. It is too sad to write much about, though she was happy, and the least troubled of us all. Her sole concern was at leaving her husband and children. But the will of God was a better thing to her than to live with them. My sorrow at least was soon over, for God makes children so that grief cannot cleave to them. They must not begin life with a burden of loss. He knows it is only for a time. When I see my mother again, she will not reproach me that my tears were so soon dried. "Little one," I think I hear her saying, "how could you go on crying for your poor mother when God was mothering you all the time, and breathing life into you, and making the world a blessed place for you? You will tell me all about it some day." Yes, and we shall tell our mothers—shall we not?—how sorry we are that we ever gave them any trouble. Sometimes we were very naughty, and sometimes we did not know better. My mother was very good, but I cannot remember a single one of the many kisses she must have given me. I remember her holding my head to her bosom when she was dying—that is all.

CHAPTER III
My Father

My father was a tall, staid, solemn man, who walked slowly with long strides. He spoke very little, and generally looked as if he were pondering next Sunday's sermon. His head was grey, and a little bent, as if he were gathering truth from the ground. Once I came upon him in the garden, standing with his face up to heaven, and I thought he was seeing something in the clouds; but when I came nearer, I saw that his eyes were closed, and it made me feel very solemn. I crept away as if I had been peeping where I ought not. He did not talk much to us. What he said was very gentle, and it seemed to me it was his solemnity that made him gentle. I have seen him look very angry. He used to walk much about his fields, especially of a summer morning before the sun was up. This was after my mother's death. I presume he felt nearer to her in the fields than in the house. There was a kind of grandeur about him, I am sure; for I never saw one of his parishioners salute him in the road, without a look of my father himself passing like a solemn cloud over the face of the man or woman. For us, we feared and loved him both at once. I do not remember ever being punished by him, but Kirsty (of whom I shall have to speak by and by) has told me that he did punish us when we were very small children. Neither did he teach us much

himself, except on the occasions I am about to mention; and I cannot say that I learned much from his sermons. These gave entire satisfaction to those of his parishioners whom I happened to hear speak of them; but, although I loved the sound of his voice, and liked to look at his face as he stood up there in the ancient pulpit clad in his gown and bands, I never cared much about what he said. Of course it was all right, and a better sermon than any other clergyman whatever could have preached, but what it was all about was of no consequence to me. I may as well confess at once that I never had the least doubt that my father was the best man in the world. Nay, to this very hour I am of the same opinion, notwithstanding that the son of the village tailor once gave me a tremendous thrashing for saying so, on the ground that I was altogether wrong, seeing *his* father was the best man in the world—at least I have learned to modify the assertion only to this extent—that my father was the best man I have ever known.

The church was a very old one—had seen candles burning, heard the little bell ringing, and smelt the incense of the old Catholic service. It was so old, that it seemed settling down again into the earth, especially on one side, where great buttresses had been built to keep it up. It leaned against them like a weary old thing that wanted to go to sleep. It had a short square tower, like so many of the churches in England; and although there was but one old cracked bell in it, although there was no organ to give out its glorious sounds, although there was neither chanting nor responses, I assure my English readers that the awe and

reverence which fell upon me as I crossed its worn threshold were nowise inferior, as far as I can judge, to the awe and respect they feel when they enter the more beautiful churches of their country. There was a hush in it which demanded a refraining of the foot, a treading softly as upon holy ground; and the church was inseparably associated with my father.

The pew we sat in was a square one, with a table in the middle of it for our books. My brother David generally used it for laying his head upon, that he might go to sleep comfortably. My brother Tom put his feet on the cross-bar of it, leaned back in his corner —for you see we had a corner apiece—put his hands in his trousers pockets, and stared hard at my father—for Tom's corner was well in front of the pulpit. My brother Allister, whose back was to the pulpit, used to learn the *paraphrases* all the time of the sermon. I, happiest of all in my position, could look up at my father, if I pleased, a little sideways; or, if I preferred, which I confess I often did, study—a rare sight in Scotch churches—the figure of an armed knight, carved in stone, which lay on the top of the tomb of Sir Worm Wymble—at least that is the nearest I can come to the spelling of the name they gave him. The tomb was close by the side of the pew, with only a flagged passage between. It stood in a hollow in the wall, and the knight lay under the arch of the recess, so silent, so patient, with folded palms, as if praying for some help which he could not name. From the presence of this labour of the sculptor came a certain element into the feeling of the place, which it could not otherwise have

possessed: organ and chant were not altogether needful while that carved knight lay there with face upturned, as if looking to heaven.

But from gazing at the knight I began to regard the wall about him, and the arch over him; and from the arch my eye would seek the roof, and descending, rest on the pillars, or wander about the windows, searching the building of the place, discovering the points of its strength, and how it was upheld. So that while my father was talking of the church as a company of believers, and describing how it was held together by faith, I was trying to understand how the stone and lime of the old place was kept from falling asunder, and thus beginning to follow what has become my profession since; for I am an architect.

But the church has led me away from my father. He always spoke in rather a low voice, but so earnestly that every eye, as it seemed to me, but mine and those of two of my brothers, was fixed upon him. I think, however, that it was in part the fault of certain teaching of his own, better fitted for our understanding, that we paid so little heed. Even Tom, with all his staring, knew as little about the sermon as any of us. But my father did not question us much concerning it; he did what was far better. On Sunday afternoons, in the warm, peaceful sunlight of summer, with the honeysuckle filling the air of the little arbour in which we sat, and his one glass of wine set on the table in the middle, he would sit for an hour talking away to us in his gentle, slow, deep voice, telling us story after story out of the New Testament,

and explaining them in a way I have seldom heard equalled. Or, in the cold winter nights, he would come into the room where I and my two younger brothers slept—the nursery it was—and, sitting down with Tom by his side before the fire that burned bright in the frosty air, would open the great family Bible on the table, turn his face towards the two beds where we three lay wide awake, and tell us story after story out of the Old Testament, sometimes reading a few verses, sometimes turning the bare facts into an expanded and illustrated narrative of his own, which, in Shakspere fashion, he presented after the modes and ways of our own country and time. I shall never forget Joseph in Egypt hearing the pattering of the asses' hoofs in the street, and throwing up the window, and looking out, and seeing all his own brothers coming riding towards him; or the grand rush of the sea waves over the bewildered hosts of the Egyptians. We lay and listened with all the more enjoyment, that while the fire was burning so brightly, and the presence of my father filling the room with safety and peace, the wind was howling outside, and the snow drifting up against the window. Sometimes I passed into the land of sleep with his voice in my ears and his love in my heart; perhaps into the land of visions—once certainly into a dream of the sun and moon and stars making obeisance to the too-favoured son of Jacob.

CHAPTER IV
Kirsty

My father had a housekeeper, a trusty woman, he considered her. We thought her *very* old. I suppose she was about forty. She was not pleasant, for she was grim-faced and censorious, with a very straight back, and a very long upper lip. Indeed the distance from her nose to her mouth was greater than the length of her nose. When I think of her first, it is always as making some complaint to my father against us. Perhaps she meant to speak the truth, or rather, perhaps took it for granted that she always did speak the truth; but certainly she would exaggerate things, and give them quite another look. The bones of her story might be true, but she would put a skin over it after her own fashion, which was not one of mildness and charity. The consequence was that the older we grew, the more our minds were alienated from her, and the more we came to regard her as our enemy. If she really meant to be our friend after the best fashion she knew, it was at least an uncomely kind of friendship, that showed itself in constant opposition, fault-finding, and complaint. The real mistake was that we were boys. There was something in her altogether antagonistic to the boy-nature. You would have thought that to be a boy was in her eyes to be something wrong to begin with; that boys ought never to have been made; that they

must always, by their very nature, be about something amiss. I have occasionally wondered how she would have behaved to a girl. On reflection, I think a little better; but the girl would have been worse off, because she could not have escaped from her as we did. My father would hear her complaints to the end without putting in a word, except it were to ask her a question, and when she had finished, would turn again to his book or his sermon, saying—

"Very well, Mrs. Mitchell; I will speak to them about it."

My impression is that he did not believe the half she told him. At all events, when he had sent for us, he would ask our version of the affair, and listen to that as he had listened to hers. Then he would set forth to us where we had been wrong, if we were wrong, and send us away with an injunction not to provoke Mrs. Mitchell, who couldn't help being short in her temper, poor thing! Somehow or other we got it into our heads that the shortness of her temper was mysteriously associated with the shortness of her nose.

She was saving even to stinginess. She would do her best to provide what my father liked, but for us she thought almost anything good enough. She would, for instance, give us the thinnest of milk—we said she skimmed it three times before she thought it blue enough for us. My two younger brothers did not mind it so much as I did, for I was always rather delicate, and if I took a dislike to anything, would rather go without than eat or drink of it. But I have told you enough about her to make it

plain that she could be no favourite with us; and enough likewise to serve as a background to my description of Kirsty.

Kirsty was a Highland woman who had the charge of the house in which the farm servants lived. She was a cheerful, gracious, kind woman—a woman of God's making, one would say, were it not that, however mysterious it may look, we cannot deny that he made Mrs. Mitchell too. It is very puzzling, I confess. I remember once that my youngest brother Davie, a very little fellow then, for he could not speak plainly, came running in great distress to Kirsty, crying, "Fee, fee!" by which he meant to indicate that a flea was rendering his life miserable. Kirsty at once undressed him and entered on the pursuit. After a successful search, while she was putting on his garments again, little Davie, who had been looking very solemn and thoughtful for some time, said, not in a questioning, but in a concluding tone—

"God didn't make the fees, Kirsty!"

"Oh yes, Davie! God made everything. God did make the fleas," said Kirsty.

Davie was silent for a while. Then he opened his mouth and spake like a discontented prophet of old:

"Why doesn't he give them something else to eat, then?"

"You must ask himself that," said Kirsty, with a wisdom I have since learned to comprehend, though I remember it shocked me a little at the time.

All this set me thinking. Before the dressing of little Davie was over, I had *my* question to put to Kirsty. It was, in fact, the

same question, only with a more important object in the eye of it.

"*Then* I suppose God made Mrs. Mitchell, as well as you and the rest of us, Kirsty?" I said.

"Certainly, Ranald," returned Kirsty.

"Well, I wish he hadn't," was my remark, in which I only imitated my baby brother, who was always much cleverer than I.

"Oh! she's not a bad sort," said Kirsty; "though I must say, if I was her, I would try to be a little more agreeable."

To return to Kirsty: she was our constant resort. The farmhouse was a furlong or so from the manse, but with the blood pouring from a cut finger, the feet would of themselves devour that furlong rather than apply to Mrs. Mitchell. Oh! she was dear, and good, and kind, our Kirsty!

In person she was short and slender, with keen blue eyes and dark hair; an uncommonly small foot, which she claimed for all Highland folk; a light step, a sweet voice, and a most bounteous hand—but there I come into the moral nature of her, for it is the mind that makes the hand bountiful. For her face, I think that was rather queer, but in truth I can hardly tell, so entirely was it the sign of good to me and my brothers; in short, I loved her so much that I do not know now, even as I did not care then, whether she was nice-looking or not. She was quite as old as Mrs. Mitchell, but we never thought of *her* being old. She was our refuge in all time of trouble and necessity. It was she who gave us something to eat as often and as much as we wanted. She used to say it was no cheating of the minister to feed the minister's boys.

And then her stories! There was nothing like them in all that countryside. It was rather a dreary country in outward aspect, having many bleak moorland hills, that lay about like slow-stiffened waves, of no great height but of much desolation; and as far as the imagination was concerned, it would seem that the minds of former generations had been as bleak as the country, they had left such small store of legends of any sort. But Kirsty had come from a region where the hills were hills indeed—hills with mighty skeletons of stone inside them; hills that looked as if they had been heaped over huge monsters which were ever trying to get up—a country where every cliff, and rock, and well had its story—and Kirsty's head was full of such. It was delight indeed to sit by her fire and listen to them. That would be after the men had had their supper, early of a winter night, and had gone, two of them to the village, and the other to attend to the horses. Then we and the herd, as we called the boy who attended to the cattle, whose work was over for the night, would sit by the fire, and Kirsty would tell us stories, and we were in our heaven.

CHAPTER V
I Begin Life

I began life, and that after no pleasant fashion, as near as I can guess, about the age of six years. One glorious morning in early summer I found myself led by the ungentle hand of Mrs. Mitchell towards a little school on the outside of the village, kept by an old woman called Mrs. Shand. In an English village I think she would have been called Dame Shand: we called her Luckie Shand. Half dragged along the road by Mrs. Mitchell, from whose rough grasp I attempted in vain to extricate my hand, I looked around at the shining fields and up at the blue sky, where a lark was singing as if he had just found out that he could sing, with something like the despair of a man going to the gallows and bidding farewell to the world. We had to cross a little stream, and when we reached the middle of the foot-bridge, I tugged yet again at my imprisoned hand, with a half-formed intention of throwing myself into the brook. But my efforts were still unavailing. Over a half-mile or so, rendered weary by unwillingness, I was led to the cottage door—no such cottage as some of my readers will picture, with roses and honeysuckle hiding its walls, but a dreary little house with nothing green to cover the brown stones of which it was built, and having an open ditch in front of it with a stone slab over it for a bridge. Did I say there was nothing on the walls? This morning

there was the loveliest sunshine, and that I was going to leave behind. It was very bitter, especially as I had expected to go with my elder brother to spend the day at a neighbouring farm.

Mrs. Mitchell opened the door, and led me in. It was an awful experience. Dame Shand stood at her table ironing. She was as tall as Mrs. Mitchell, and that was enough to prejudice me against her at once. She wore a close-fitting widow's cap, with a black ribbon round it. Her hair was grey, and her face was as grey as her hair, and her skin was gathered in wrinkles about her mouth, where they twitched and twitched, as if she were constantly meditating something unpleasant. She looked up inquiringly.

"I've brought you a new scholar," said Mrs. Mitchell.

"Well. Very well," said the dame, in a dubious tone. "I hope he's a good boy, for he must be good if he comes here."

"Well, he's just middling. His father spares the rod, Mrs. Shand, and we know what comes of that."

They went on with their talk, which, as far as I can recall it, was complimentary to none but the two women themselves. Meantime I was making what observations my terror would allow. About a dozen children were seated on forms along the walls, looking over the tops of their spelling-books at the newcomer. In the farther corner two were kicking at each other as opportunity offered, looking very angry, but not daring to cry. My next discovery was terribly disconcerting. Some movement drew my eyes to the floor; there I saw a boy of my own age on

all-fours, fastened by a string to a leg of the table at which the dame was ironing, while—horrible to relate!—a dog, not very big but very ugly, and big enough to be frightened at, lay under the table watching him. I gazed in utter dismay.

"Ah, you may look!" said the dame. "If you're not a good boy, that is how you shall be served. The dog shall have you to look after."

I trembled, and was speechless. After some further confabulation, Mrs. Mitchell took her leave, saying—

"I'll come back for him at one o'clock, and if I don't come, just keep him till I do come."

The dame accompanied her to the door, and then I discovered that she was lame, and hobbled very much. A resolution arose full-formed in my brain.

I sat down on the form near the door, and kept very quiet. Had it not been for the intention I cherished, I am sure I should have cried. When the dame returned, she resumed her box-iron, in which the heater went rattling about, as, standing on one leg—the other was so much shorter—she moved it to and fro over the garment on the table. Then she called me to her by name in a would-be pompous manner. I obeyed, trembling.

"Can you say your letters?" she asked.

Now, although I could not read, I could repeat the alphabet; how I had learned it I do not know. I did repeat it.

"How many questions of your catechism can you say?" she asked next.

Not knowing with certainty what she meant, I was silent.

"No sulking!" said the dame; and opening a drawer in the table, she took out a catechism. Turning back the cover she put it in my hand, and told me to learn the first question. She had not even inquired whether I could read. I took the catechism, and stood as before.

"Go to your seat," she said.

I obeyed, and with the book before me pondered my plan.

Everything depended on whether I could open the door before she could reach me. Once out of the house, I was sure of running faster than she could follow. And soon I had my first experience of how those are helped who will help themselves.

The ironing of course required a fire to make the irons hot, and as the morning went on, the sunshine on the walls, conspiring with the fire on the hearth, made the place too hot for the comfort of the old dame. She went and set the door wide open. I was instantly on the alert, watching for an opportunity. One soon occurred.

A class of some five or six was reading, if reading it could be called, out of the Bible. At length it came to the turn of one who blundered dreadfully. It was the same boy who had been tied under the table, but he had been released for his lesson. The dame hobbled to him, and found he had his book upside down; whereupon she turned in wrath to the table, and took from the drawer a long leather strap, with which she proceeded to chastise him. As his first cry reached my ears I was halfway to the door.

On the threshold I stumbled and fell.

"The new boy's running away!" shrieked some little sycophant inside.

I heard with horror, but I was up and off in a moment. I had not, however, got many yards from the cottage before I heard the voice of the dame screaming after me to return. I took no heed—only sped the faster. But what was my horror to find her command enforced by the pursuing bark of her prime minister. This paralysed me. I turned, and there was the fiendish-looking dog close on my heels. I could run no longer. For one moment I felt as if I should sink to the earth for sheer terror. The next moment a wholesome rage sent the blood to my brain. From abject cowardice to wild attack—I cannot call it courage—was the change of an instant. I rushed towards the little wretch. I did not know how to fight him, but in desperation I threw myself upon him, and dug my nails into him. They had fortunately found their way to his eyes. He was the veriest coward of his species. He yelped and howled, and struggling from my grasp ran with his tail merged in his person back to his mistress, who was hobbling after me. But with the renewed strength of triumph I turned again for home, and ran as I had never run before. When or where the dame gave in, I do not know; I never turned my head until I laid it on Kirsty's bosom, and there I burst out sobbing and crying. It was all the utterance I had left.

As soon as Kirsty had succeeded in calming me, I told her the whole story. She said very little, but I could see she was very

angry. No doubt she was pondering what could be done. She got me some milk—half cream I do believe, it was so nice—and some oatcake, and went on with her work.

While I ate I reflected that any moment Mrs. Mitchell might appear to drag me back in disgrace to that horrible den. I knew that Kirsty's authority was not equal to hers, and that she would be compelled to give me up. So I watched an opportunity to escape once more and hide myself, so that Kirsty might be able to say she did not know where I was.

When I had finished, and Kirsty had left the kitchen for a moment, I sped noiselessly to the door, and looked out into the farmyard. There was no one to be seen. Dark and brown and cool the door of the barn stood open, as if inviting me to shelter and safety; for I knew that in the darkest end of it lay a great heap of oat-straw. I sped across the intervening sunshine into the darkness, and began burrowing in the straw like a wild animal, drawing out handfuls and laying them carefully aside, so that no disorder should betray my retreat. When I had made a hole large enough to hold me, I got in, but kept drawing out the straw behind me, and filling the hole in front. This I continued until I had not only stopped up the entrance, but placed a good thickness of straw between me and the outside. By the time I had burrowed as far as I thought necessary, I was tired, and lay down at full length in my hole, delighting in such a sense of safety as I had never before experienced. I was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER VI
No Father

I woke, and creeping out of my lair, and peeping from the door of the barn, which looked into the cornyard, found that the sun was going down. I had already discovered that I was getting hungry. I went out at the other door into the close or farmyard, and ran across to the house. No one was there. Something moved me to climb on the form and look out of a little window, from which I could see the manse and the road from it. To my dismay, there was Mrs. Mitchell coming towards the farm. I possessed my wits sufficiently to run first to Kirsty's press and secure a good supply of oatcake, with which I then sped like a hunted hare to her form. I had soon drawn the stopper of straw into the mouth of the hole, where, hearing no one approach, I began to eat my oatcake, and fell asleep again before I had finished.

And as I slept I dreamed my dream. The sun was looking very grave, and the moon reflected his concern. They were not satisfied with me. At length the sun shook his head; that is, his whole self oscillated on an axis, and the moon thereupon shook herself in response. Then they nodded to each other as much as to say, "That is entirely my own opinion." At last they began to talk; not as men converse, but both at once, yet each listening while each spoke. I heard no word, but their lips moved most

busily; their eyebrows went up and down; their eyelids winked and winked, and their cheeks puckered and relaxed incessantly. There was an absolute storm of expression upon their faces; their very noses twisted and curled. It seemed as if, in the agony of their talk, their countenances would go to pieces. For the stars, they darted about hither and thither, gathered into groups, dispersed, and formed new groups, and having no faces yet, but being a sort of celestial tadpoles, indicated by their motions alone that they took an active interest in the questions agitating their parents. Some of them kept darting up and down the ladder of rays, like phosphorescent sparks in the sea foam.

I could bear it no longer, and awoke. I was in darkness, but not in my own bed. When I proceeded to turn, I found myself hemmed in on all sides. I could not stretch my arms, and there was hardly room for my body between my feet and my head. I was dreadfully frightened at first, and felt as if I were being slowly stifled. As my brain awoke, I recalled the horrible school, the horrible schoolmistress, and the most horrible dog, over whose defeat, however, I rejoiced with the pride of a dragon-slayer. Next I thought it would be well to look abroad and reconnoitre once more. I drew away the straw from the entrance to my lair; but what was my dismay to find that even when my hand went out into space no light came through the opening. What could it mean? Surely I had not grown blind while I lay asleep. Hurriedly I shot out the remainder of the stopper of straw, and crept from the hole. In the great barn there was but the dullest glimmer of light; I

had almost said the clumsiest reduction of darkness. I tumbled at one of the doors rather than ran to it. I found it fast, but this one I knew was fastened on the inside by a wooden bolt or bar, which I could draw back. The open door revealed the dark night. Before me was the cornyard, as we called it, full of ricks. Huge and very positive although dim, they rose betwixt me and the sky. Between their tops I saw only stars and darkness. I turned and looked back into the barn. It appeared a horrible cave filled with darkness. I remembered there were rats in it. I dared not enter it again, even to go out at the opposite door: I forgot how soundly and peacefully I had slept in it. I stepped out into the night with the grass of the corn-yard under my feet, the awful vault of heaven over my head, and those shadowy ricks around me. It was a relief to lay my hand on one of them, and feel that it was solid. I half groped my way through them, and got out into the open field, by creeping through between the stems of what had once been a hawthorn hedge, but had in the course of a hundred years grown into the grimmest, largest, most grotesque trees I have ever seen of the kind. I had always been a little afraid of them, even in the daytime, but they did me no hurt, and I stood in the vast hall of the silent night—alone: there lay the awfulness of it. I had never before known what the night was. The real sting of its fear lay in this—that there was nobody else in it. Everybody besides me was asleep all over the world, and had abandoned me to my fate, whatever might come out of the darkness to seize me. When I got round the edge of the stone wall, which on another side bounded

the corn-yard, there was the moon—crescent, as I saw her in my dream, but low down towards the horizon, and lying almost upon her rounded back. She looked very disconsolate and dim. Even she would take no heed of me, abandoned child! The stars were high up, away in the heavens. They did not look like the children of the sun and moon at all, and *they* took no heed of me. Yet there was a grandeur in my desolation that would have elevated my heart but for the fear. If I had had one living creature nigh me—if only the stupid calf, whose dull sleepy low startled me so dreadfully as I stood staring about me! It was not dark out here in the open field, for at this season of the year it is not dark there all night long, when the sky is unclouded. Away in the north was the Great Bear. I knew that constellation, for by it one of the men had taught me to find the pole-star. Nearly under it was the light of the sun, creeping round by the north towards the spot in the east where he would rise again. But I learned only afterwards to understand this. I gazed at that pale faded light, and all at once I remembered that God was near me. But I did not know what God is then as I know now, and when I thought about him then, which was neither much nor often, my idea of him was not like him; it was merely a confused mixture of other people's fancies about him and my own. I had not learned how beautiful God is; I had only learned that he is strong. I had been told that he was angry with those that did wrong; I had not understood that he loved them all the time, although he was displeased with them, and must punish them to make them good. When I thought of

him now in the silent starry night, a yet greater terror seized me, and I ran stumbling over the uneven field.

Does my reader wonder whither I fled? Whither should I fly but home? True, Mrs. Mitchell was there, but there was another there as well. Even Kirsty would not do in this terror. Home was the only refuge, for my father was there. I sped for the manse.

But as I approached it a new apprehension laid hold of my trembling heart. I was not sure, but I thought the door was always locked at night. I drew nearer. The place of possible refuge rose before me. I stood on the grass-plot in front of it. There was no light in its eyes. Its mouth was closed. It was silent as one of the ricks. Above it shone the speechless stars. Nothing was alive. Nothing would speak. I went up the few rough-hewn granite steps that led to the door. I laid my hand on the handle, and gently turned it. Joy of joys! the door opened. I entered the hall. Ah! it was more silent than the night. No footsteps echoed; no voices were there. I closed the door behind me, and, almost sick with the misery of a being where no other being was to comfort it, I groped my way to my father's room. When I once had my hand on his door, the warm tide of courage began again to flow from my heart. I opened this door too very quietly, for was not the dragon asleep down below?

"Papa! papa!" I cried, in an eager whisper. "Are you awake, papa?"

No voice came in reply, and the place was yet more silent than the night or the hall. He must be asleep. I was afraid to call

louder. I crept nearer to the bed. I stretched out my hands to feel for him. He must be at the farther side. I climbed up on the bed. I felt all across it. Utter desertion seized my soul—my father was not there! Was it a horrible dream? Should I ever awake? My heart sank totally within me. I could bear no more. I fell down on the bed weeping bitterly, and wept myself asleep.

Years after, when I was a young man, I read Jean Paul's terrible dream that there was no God, and the desolation of this night was my key to that dream.

Once more I awoke to a sense of misery, and stretched out my arms, crying, "Papa! papa!" The same moment I found my father's arms around me; he folded me close to him, and said—

"Hush, Ranald, my boy! Here I am! You are quite safe."

I nestled as close to him as I could go, and wept for blessedness.

"Oh, papa!" I sobbed, "I thought I had lost you."

"And I thought I had lost you, my boy. Tell me all about it."

Between my narrative and my replies to his questionings he had soon gathered the whole story, and I in my turn learned the dismay of the household when I did not appear. Kirsty told what she knew. They searched everywhere, but could not find me; and great as my misery had been, my father's had been greater than mine. While I stood forsaken and desolate in the field, they had been searching along the banks of the river. But the herd had had an idea, and although they had already searched the barn and every place they could think of, he left them and ran back for a

further search about the farm. Guided by the scattered straw, he soon came upon my deserted lair, and sped back to the riverside with the news, when my father returned, and after failing to find me in my own bed, to his infinite relief found me fast asleep on his; so fast, that he undressed me and laid me in the bed without my once opening my eyes—the more strange, as I had already slept so long. But sorrow is very sleepy.

Having thus felt the awfulness and majesty of the heavens at night, it was a very long time before I again dreamed my childish dream.

CHAPTER VII
Mrs. Mitchell is Defeated

After this talk with my father I fell into a sleep of perfect contentment, and never thought of what might be on the morrow till the morrow came. Then I grew aware of the danger I was in of being carried off once more to school. Indeed, except my father interfered, the thing was almost inevitable. I thought he would protect me, but I had no assurance. He was gone again, for, as I have mentioned already, he was given to going out early in the mornings. It was not early now, however; I had slept much longer than usual. I got up at once, intending to find him; but, to my horror, before I was half dressed, my enemy, Mrs. Mitchell, came into the room, looking triumphant and revengeful.

"I'm glad to see you're getting up," she said; "it's nearly school-time."

The tone, and the emphasis she laid on the word *school*, would have sufficed to reveal the state of her mind, even if her eyes had not been fierce with suppressed indignation.

"I haven't had my porridge," I said.

"Your porridge is waiting you—as cold as a stone," she answered. "If boys will lie in bed so late, what can they expect?"

"Nothing from you," I muttered, with more hardihood than I had yet shown her.

"What's that you're saying?" she asked angrily.

I was silent.

"Make haste," she went on, "and don't keep me waiting all day."

"You needn't wait, Mrs. Mitchell. I am dressing as fast as I can. Is papa in his study yet?"

"No. And you needn't think to see him. He's angry enough with you, I'll warrant"

She little knew what had passed between my father and me already. She could not imagine what a talk we had had.

"You needn't think to run away as you did yesterday. I know all about it Mrs. Shand told me all about it I shouldn't wonder if your papa's gone to see her now, and tell her how sorry he is you were so naughty."

"I'm not going, to school."

"We'll see about that"

"I tell you I won't go."

"And I tell you we'll see about it"

"I won't go till I've seen papa. If he says I'm to go, I will of course; but I won't go for you."

"You *will*, and you *won't*!" she repeated, standing staring at me, as I leisurely, but with hands trembling partly with fear, partly with rage, was fastening my nether garments to my waistcoat. "That's all very fine, but I know something a good deal finer. Now wash your face."

"I won't, so long as you stand there," I said, and sat down on

the floor. She advanced towards me.

"If you touch me, I'll scream," I cried.

She stopped, thought for a moment, and bounced out of the room. But I heard her turn the key of the door.

I proceeded with my dressing as fast as I could then; and the moment I was ready, opened the window, which was only a few feet from the ground, scrambled out, and dropped. I hurt myself a little, but not much, and fled for the harbour of Kirsty's arms. But as I turned the corner of the house I ran right into Mrs. Mitchell's, who received me with no soft embrace. In fact I was rather severely scratched with a. pin in the bosom of her dress.

"There! that serves you right," she cried. "That's a judgment on you for trying to run away again. After all the trouble you gave us yesterday too! You are a bad boy."

"Why am I a bad boy?" I retorted.

"It's bad not to do what you are told."

"I will do what my papa tells me."

"Your papa! There are more people than your papa in the world."

"I'm to be a bad boy if I don't do what anybody like you chooses to tell me, am I?"

"None of your impudence!"

This was accompanied by a box on the ear. She was now dragging me into the kitchen. There she set my porridge before me, which I declined to eat.

"Well, if you won't eat good food, you shall go to school

without it."

"I tell you I won't go to school."

She caught me up in her arms. She was very strong, and I could not prevent her carrying me out of the house. If I had been the bad boy she said I was, I could by biting and scratching have soon compelled her to set me down; but I felt that I must not do that, for then I should be ashamed before my father. I therefore yielded for the time, and fell to planning. Nor was I long in coming to a resolution. I drew the pin that had scratched me from her dress. I believed she would not carry me very far; but if she did not set me down soon, I resolved to make her glad to do so. Further I resolved, that when we came to the foot-bridge, which had but one rail to it, I would run the pin into her and make her let me go, when I would instantly throw myself into the river, for I would run the risk of being drowned rather than go to that school. Were all my griefs of yesterday, overcome and on the point of being forgotten, to be frustrated in this fashion? My whole blood was boiling. I was convinced my father did not want me to go. He could not have been so kind to me during the night, and then send me to such a place in the morning. But happily for the general peace, things did not arrive at such a desperate pass. Before we were out of the gate, my heart leaped with joy, for I heard my father calling, "Mrs. Mitchell! Mrs. Mitchell!" I looked round, and seeing him coming after us with his long slow strides, I fell to struggling so violently in the strength of hope that she was glad to set me down. I broke from her, ran to my father, and burst

out crying.

"Papa! papa!" I sobbed, "don't send me to that horrid school. I can learn to read without that old woman to teach me."

"Really, Mrs. Mitchell," said my father, taking me by the hand and leading me towards her, where she stood visibly flaming with rage and annoyance, "really, Mrs. Mitchell, you are taking too much upon you! I never said the child was to go to that woman's school. In fact I don't approve of what I hear of her, and I have thought of consulting some of my brethren in the presbytery on the matter before taking steps myself. I won't have the young people in my parish oppressed in such a fashion. Terrified with dogs too! It is shameful."

"She's a very decent woman, Mistress Shand," said the housekeeper.

"I don't dispute her decency, Mrs. Mitchell; but I doubt very much whether she is fit to have the charge of children; and as she is a friend of yours, you will be doing her a kindness to give her a hint to that effect. It *may* save the necessity for my taking further and more unpleasant steps."

"Indeed, sir, by your leave, it would be hard lines to take the bread out of the mouth of a lone widow woman, and bring her upon the parish with a bad name to boot. She's supported herself for years with her school, and been a trouble to nobody."

"Except the lambs of the flock, Mrs. Mitchell.—I like you for standing up for your friend; but is a woman, because she is lone and a widow, to make a Moloch of herself, and have the children

sacrificed to her in that way? It's enough to make idiots of some of them. She had better see to it. You tell her that—from me, if you like. And don't you meddle with school affairs. I'll take my young men," he added with a smile, "to school when I see fit."

"I'm sure, sir," said Mrs. Mitchell, putting her blue striped apron to her eyes, "I asked your opinion before I took him."

"I believe I did say something about its being time he were able to read, but I recollect nothing more.—You must have misunderstood me," he added, willing to ease her descent to the valley of her humiliation.

She walked away without another word, sniffing the air as she went, and carrying her hands folded under her apron. From that hour I believe she hated me.

My father looked after her with a smile, and then looked down on me, saying—

"She's short in the temper, poor woman! and we mustn't provoke her."

I was too well satisfied to urge my victory by further complaint. I could afford to let well alone, for I had been delivered as from the fiery furnace, and the earth and the sky were laughing around me. Oh! what a sunshine filled the world! How glad the larks, which are the praisers amongst the birds, were that blessed morning! The demon of oppression had hidden her head ashamed, and fled to her den!

CHAPTER VIII
A New Schoolmistress

"But, Ranald," my father continued, "what are we to do about the reading? I fear I have let you go too long. I didn't want to make learning a burden to you, and I don't approve of children learning to read too soon; but really, at your age, you know, it is time you were beginning. I have time to teach you some things, but I can't teach you everything. I have got to read a great deal and think a great deal, and go about my parish a good deal. And your brother Tom has heavy lessons to learn at school, and I have to help him. So what's to be done, Ranald, my boy? You can't go to the parish school before you've learned your letters."

"There's Kirsty, papa," I suggested.

"Yes; there's Kirsty," he returned with a sly smile. "Kirsty can do everything, can't she?"

"She can speak Gaelic," I said with a tone of triumph, bringing her rarest accomplishment to the forefront.

"I wish you could speak Gaelic," said my father, thinking of his wife, I believe, whose mother tongue it was. "But that is not what you want most to learn. Do you think Kirsty could teach you to read English?"

"Yes, I do."

My father again meditated.

"Let us go and ask her," he said at length, taking my hand.

I capered with delight, nor ceased my capering till we stood on Kirsty's earthen floor. I think I see her now, dusting one of her deal chairs, as white as soap and sand could make it, for the minister to sit on. She never called him *the master*, but always *the minister*. She was a great favourite with my father, and he always behaved as a visitor in her house.

"Well, Kirsty," he said, after the first salutations were over, "have you any objection to turn schoolmistress?"

"I should make a poor hand at that," she answered, with a smile to me which showed she guessed what my father wanted. "But if it were to teach Master Ranald there, I should like dearly to try what I could do."

She never omitted the *Master* to our names; Mrs. Mitchell by no chance prefixed it. The natural manners of the Celt and Saxon are almost diametrically opposed in Scotland. And had Kirsty's speech been in the coarse dialect of Mrs. Mitchell, I am confident my father would not have allowed her to teach me. But Kirsty did not speak a word of Scotch, and although her English was a little broken and odd, being formed somewhat after Gaelic idioms, her tone was pure and her phrases were refined. The matter was very speedily settled between them.

"And if you want to beat him, Kirsty, you can beat him in Gaelic, and then he won't feel it," said my father, trying after a joke, which was no common occurrence with him, whereupon Kirsty and I laughed in great contentment.

The fact was, Kirsty had come to the manse with my mother, and my father was attached to her for the sake of his wife as well as for her own, and Kirsty would have died for the minister or any one of his boys. All the devotion a Highland woman has for the chief of her clan, Kirsty had for my father, not to mention the reverence due to the minister.

After a little chat about the cows and the calves, my father rose, saying—

"Then I'll just make him over to you, Kirsty. Do you think you can manage without letting it interfere with your work, though?"

"Oh yes, sir—well that! I shall soon have him reading to me while I'm busy about. If he doesn't know the word, he can spell it, and then I shall know it—at least if it's not longer than Hawkie's tail."

Hawkie was a fine milker, with a bad temper, and a comically short tail. It had got chopped off by some accident when she was a calf.

"There's something else short about Hawkie—isn't there, Kirsty?" said my father.

"And Mrs. Mitchell," I suggested, thinking to help Kirsty to my father's meaning.

"Come, come, young gentleman! We don't want your remarks," said my father pleasantly.

"Why, papa, you told me so yourself, just before we came up."

"Yes, I did; but I did not mean you to repeat it. What if Kirsty were to go and tell Mrs. Mitchell?"

Kirsty made no attempt at protestation. She knew well enough that my father knew there was no danger. She only laughed, and I, seeing Kirsty satisfied, was satisfied also, and joined in the laugh.

The result was that before many weeks were over, Allister and wee Davie were Kirsty's pupils also, Allister learning to read, and wee Davie to sit still, which was the hardest task within his capacity. They were free to come or keep away, but not to go: if they did come, Kirsty insisted on their staying out the lesson. It soon became a regular thing. Every morning in summer we might be seen perched on a form, under one of the tiny windows, in that delicious brown light which you seldom find but in an old clay-floored cottage. In a fir-wood I think you have it; and I have seen it in an old castle; but best of all in the house of mourning in an Arab cemetery. In the winter, we seated ourselves round the fire—as near it as Kirsty's cooking operations, which were simple enough, admitted. It was delightful to us boys, and would have been amusing to anyone, to see how Kirsty behaved when Mrs. Mitchell found occasion to pay her a visit during lesson hours. She knew her step and darted to the door. Not once did she permit her to enter. She was like a hen with her chickens.

"No, you'll not come in just now, Mrs. Mitchell," she would say, as the housekeeper attempted to pass. "You know we're busy."

"I want to hear how they're getting on."

"You can try them at home," Kirsty would answer.

We always laughed at the idea of our reading to her. Once I

believe she heard the laugh, for she instantly walked away, and I do not remember that she ever came again.

CHAPTER IX
We Learn Other Things

We were more than ever at the farm now. During the summer, from the time we got up till the time we went to bed, we seldom approached the manse. I have heard it hinted that my father neglected us. But that can hardly be, seeing that then his word was law to us, and now I regard his memory as the symbol of the love unspeakable. My elder brother Tom always had his meals with him, and sat at his lessons in the study. But my father did not mind the younger ones running wild, so long as there was a Kirsty for them to run to; and indeed the men also were not only friendly to us, but careful over us. No doubt we were rather savage, very different in our appearance from town-bred children, who are washed and dressed every time they go out for a walk: that we should have considered not merely a hardship, but an indignity. To be free was all our notion of a perfect existence. But my father's rebuke was awful indeed, if he found even the youngest guilty of untruth, or cruelty, or injustice. At all kinds of escapades, not involving disobedience, he smiled, except indeed there were too much danger, when he would warn and limit.

A town boy may wonder what we could find to amuse us all day long; but the fact is almost everything was an amusement, seeing that when we could not take a natural share in what

was going on, we generally managed to invent some collateral employment fictitiously related to it. But he must not think of our farm as at all like some great farm he may happen to know in England; for there was nothing done by machinery on the place. There may be great pleasure in watching machine-operations, but surely none to equal the pleasure we had. If there had been a steam engine to plough my father's fields, how could we have ridden home on its back in the evening? To ride the horses home from the plough was a triumph. Had there been a thrashing-machine, could its pleasures have been comparable to that of lying in the straw and watching the grain dance from the sheaves under the skilful flails of the two strong men who belaboured them? There was a winnowing-machine, but quite a tame one, for its wheel I could drive myself—the handle now high as my head, now low as my knee—and watch at the same time the storm of chaff driven like drifting snowflakes from its wide mouth. Meantime the oat-grain was flowing in a silent slow stream from the shelving hole in the other side, and the wind, rushing through the opposite doors, aided the winnower by catching at the expelled chaff, and carrying it yet farther apart. I think I see old Eppie now, filling her sack with what the wind blew her; not with the grain: Eppie did not covet that; she only wanted her bed filled with fresh springy chaff, on which she would sleep as sound as her rheumatism would let her, and as warm and dry and comfortable as any duchess in the land that happened to have the rheumatism too. For comfort is inside more than outside; and

eider down, delicious as it is, has less to do with it than some people fancy. How I wish all the poor people in the great cities could have good chaff beds to lie upon! Let me see: what more machines are there now? More than I can tell. I saw one going in the fields the other day, at the use of which I could only guess. Strange, wild-looking, mad-like machines, as the Scotch would call them, are growling and snapping, and clinking and clattering over our fields, so that it seems to an old boy as if all the sweet poetic twilight of things were vanishing from the country; but he reminds himself that God is not going to sleep, for, as one of the greatest poets that ever lived says, *he slumbereth not nor sleepeth*; and the children of the earth are his, and he will see that their imaginations and feelings have food enough and to spare. It is his business this—not ours. So the work must be done as well as it can. Then, indeed, there will be no fear of the poetry.

I have just alluded to the pleasure of riding the horses, that is, the work-horses: upon them Allister and I began to ride, as far as I can remember, this same summer—not from the plough, for the ploughing was in the end of the year and the spring. First of all we were allowed to take them at watering-time, watched by one of the men, from the stable to the long trough that stood under the pump. There, going hurriedly and stopping suddenly, they would drop head and neck and shoulders like a certain toy-bird, causing the young riders a vague fear of falling over the height no longer defended by the uplifted crest; and then drink and drink till the riders' legs felt the horses' bodies swelling under them; then up

and away with quick refreshed stride or trot towards the paradise of their stalls. But for us came first the somewhat fearful pass of the stable door, for they never stopped, like better educated horses, to let their riders dismount, but walked right in, and there was just room, by stooping low, to clear the top of the door. As we improved in equitation, we would go afield, to ride them home from the pasture, where they were fastened by chains to short stakes of iron driven into the earth. There was more of adventure here, for not only was the ride longer, but the horses were more frisky, and would sometimes set off at the gallop. Then the chief danger was again the door, lest they should dash in, and knock knees against posts and heads against lintels, for we had only halters to hold them with. But after I had once been thrown from back to neck, and from neck to ground in a clumsy but wild gallop extemporized by Dobbin, I was raised to the dignity of a bridle, which I always carried with me when we went to fetch them. It was my father's express desire that until we could sit well on the bare back we should not be allowed a saddle. It was a whole year before I was permitted to mount his little black riding mare, called Missy. She was old, it is true—nobody quite knew how old she was—but if she felt a light weight on her back, either the spirit of youth was contagious, or she fancied herself as young as when she thought nothing of twelve stone, and would dart off like the wind. In after years I got so found of her, that I would stand by her side flacking the flies from her as she grazed; and when I tired of that, would clamber upon her back, and lie there

reading my book, while she plucked on and ground and mashed away at the grass as if nobody were near her.

Then there was the choice, if nothing else were found more attractive, of going to the field where the cattle were grazing. Oh! the rich hot summer afternoons among the grass and the clover, the little lamb-daisies, and the big horse-daisies, with the cattle feeding solemnly, but one and another straying now to the corn, now to the turnips, and recalled by stern shouts, or, if that were unavailing, by vigorous pursuit and even blows! If I had been able to think of a mother at home, I should have been perfectly happy. Not that I missed her then; I had lost her too young for that. I mean that the memory of the time wants but that to render it perfect in bliss. Even in the cold days of spring, when, after being shut up all the winter, the cattle were allowed to revel again in the springing grass and the venturesome daisies, there was pleasure enough in the company and devices of the cowherd, a freckle-faced, white-haired, weak-eyed boy of ten, named—I forget his real name: we always called him Turkey, because his nose was the colour of a turkey's egg. Who but Turkey knew mushrooms from toadstools? Who but Turkey could detect earth-nuts—and that with the certainty of a truffle-hunting dog? Who but Turkey knew the note and the form and the nest and the eggs of every bird in the country? Who but Turkey, with his little whip and its lash of brass wire, would encounter the angriest bull in Christendom, provided he carried, like the bulls of Scotland, his most sensitive part, the nose, foremost? In our

eyes Turkey was a hero. Who but Turkey could discover the nests of hens whose maternal anxiety had eluded the *finesse* of Kirsty? and who so well as he could roast the egg with which she always rewarded such a discovery? Words are feeble before the delight we experienced on such an occasion, when Turkey, proceeding to light a fire against one of the earthen walls which divided the fields, would send us abroad to gather sticks and straws and whatever outcast combustibles we could find, of which there was a great scarcity, there being no woods or hedges within reach. Who like Turkey could rob a wild bee's nest? And who could be more just than he in distributing the luscious prize? In fine, his accomplishments were innumerable. Short of flying, we believed him capable of everything imaginable.

What rendered him yet dearer to us, was that there was enmity between him and Mrs. Mitchell. It came about in this way. Although a good milker, and therefore of necessity a good feeder, Hawkie was yet upon temptation subject to the inroads of an unnatural appetite. When she found a piece of an old shoe in the field, she would, if not compelled to drop the delicious mouthful, go on, the whole morning or afternoon, in the impossibility of a final deglutition, chewing and chewing at the savoury morsel. Should this have happened, it was in vain for Turkey to hope escape from the discovery of his inattention, for the milk-pail would that same evening or next morning reveal the fact to Kirsty's watchful eyes. But fortunately for us, in so far as it was well to have an ally against our only enemy, Hawkie's

morbid craving was not confined to old shoes. One day when the cattle were feeding close by the manse, she found on the holly-hedge which surrounded it, Mrs. Mitchell's best cap, laid out to bleach in the sun. It was a tempting morsel—more susceptible of mastication than shoe-leather. Mrs. Mitchell, who had gone for another freight of the linen with which she was sprinkling the hedge, arrived only in time to see the end of one of its long strings gradually disappearing into Hawkie's mouth on its way after the rest of the cap, which had gone the length of the string farther. With a wild cry of despair she flew at Hawkie, so intent on the stolen delicacy as to be more open to a surprise than usual, and laying hold of the string, drew from her throat the deplorable mass of pulp to which she had reduced the valued gaud. The same moment Turkey, who had come running at her cry, received full in his face the slimy and sloppy extract. Nor was this all, for Mrs. Mitchell flew at him in her fury, and with an outburst of abuse boxed his ears soundly, before he could recover his senses sufficiently to run for it. The degradation of this treatment had converted Turkey into an enemy before ever he knew that we also had good grounds for disliking her. His opinion concerning her was freely expressed to us if to no one else, generally in the same terms. He said she was as bad as she was ugly, and always spoke of her as *the old witch*.

But what brought Turkey and us together more than anything else, was that he was as fond of Kirsty's stories as we were; and in the winter especially we would sit together in the evening, as I

have already said, round her fire and the great pot upon it full of the most delicious potatoes, while Kirsty knitted away vigorously at her blue broad-ribbed stockings, and kept a sort of time to her story with the sound of her needles. When the story flagged, the needles went slower; in the more animated passages they would become invisible for swiftness, save for a certain shimmering flash that hovered about her fingers like a dim electric play; but as the story approached some crisis, their motion would at one time become perfectly frantic, at another cease altogether, as finding the subject beyond their power of accompanying expression. When they ceased, we knew that something awful indeed was at hand.

In my next chapter I will give a specimen of her stories, choosing one which bears a little upon an after adventure.

CHAPTER X
Sir Worm Wymble

It was a snowy evening in the depth of winter. Kirsty had promised to tell us the tale of the armed knight who lay in stone upon the tomb in the church; but the snow was so deep, that Mrs. Mitchell, always glad when nature put it in her power to exercise her authority in a way disagreeable to us, had refused to let the little ones go out all day. Therefore Turkey and I, when the darkness began to grow thick enough, went prowling and watching about the manse until we found an opportunity when she was out of the way. The moment this occurred we darted into the nursery, which was on the ground floor, and catching up my two brothers, I wee Davie, he Allister, we hoisted them on our backs and rushed from the house. It was snowing. It came down in huge flakes, but although it was only half-past four o'clock, they did not show any whiteness, for there was no light to shine upon them. You might have thought there had been mud in the cloud they came from, which had turned them all a dark grey. How the little ones did enjoy it, spurring their horses with suppressed laughter, and urging us on lest the old witch should hear and overtake us! But it was hard work for one of the horses, and that was myself. Turkey scudded away with his load, and made nothing of it; but wee Davie pulled so hard with his little

arms round my neck, especially when he was bobbing up and down to urge me on, half in delight, half in terror, that he nearly choked me; while if I went one foot off the scarcely beaten path, I sunk deep in the fresh snow.

"Doe on, doe on, Yanal!" cried Davie; and Yanal did his very best, but was only halfway to the farm, when Turkey came bounding back to take Davie from him. In a few moments we had shaken the snow off our shoes and off Davie's back, and stood around Kirsty's "booful baze", as Davie called the fire. Kirsty seated herself on one side with Davie on her lap, and we three got our chairs as near her as we could, with Turkey, as the valiant man of the party, farthest from the centre of safety, namely Kirsty, who was at the same time to be the source of all the delightful horror. I may as well say that I do not believe Kirsty's tale had the remotest historical connection with Sir Worm Wymble, if that was anything like the name of the dead knight. It was an old Highland legend, which she adorned with the flowers of her own Celtic fancy, and swathed around the form so familiar to us all.

"There is a pot in the Highlands," began Kirsty, "not far from our house, at the bottom of a little glen. It is not very big, but fearfully deep; so deep that they do say there is no bottom to it."

"An iron pot, Kirsty?" asked Allister.

"No, goosey," answered Kirsty. "A pot means a great hole full of water—black, black, and deep, deep."

"Oh!" remarked Allister, and was silent.

“Well, in this pot there lived a kelpie.”

“What’s a kelpie, Kirsty?” again interposed Allister, who in general asked all the necessary questions and at least as many unnecessary.

“A kelpie is an awful creature that eats people.”

“But what is it like, Kirsty?”

“It’s something like a horse, with a head like a cow.”

“How big is it? As big as Hawkie?”

“Bigger than Hawkie; bigger than the biggest ox you ever saw.”

“Has it a great mouth?”

“Yes, a terrible mouth.”

“With teeth?”

“Not many, but dreadfully big ones.”

“Oh!”

“Well, there was a shepherd many years ago, who lived not far from the pot. He was a knowing man, and understood all about kelpies and brownies and fairies. And he put a branch of the rowan-tree (*mountain-ash*), with the red berries in it, over the door of his cottage, so that the kelpie could never come in.

“Now, the shepherd had a very beautiful daughter—so beautiful that the kelpie wanted very much to eat her. I suppose he had lifted up his head out of the pot some day and seen her go past, but he could not come out of the pot except after the sun was down.”

“Why?” asked Allister.

"I don't know. It was the nature of the beast. His eyes couldn't bear the light, I suppose; but he could see in the dark quite well.—One night the girl woke suddenly, and saw his great head looking in at her window."

"But how could she see him when it was dark?" said Allister.

"His eyes were flashing so that they lighted up all his head," answered Kirsty.

"But he couldn't get in!"

"No; he couldn't get in. He was only looking in, and thinking how he *should* like to eat her. So in the morning she told her father. And her father was very frightened, and told her she must never be out one moment after the sun was down. And for a long time the girl was very careful. And she had need to be; for the creature never made any noise, but came up as quiet as a shadow. One afternoon, however, she had gone to meet her lover a little way down the glen; and they stopped talking so long, about one thing and another, that the sun was almost set before she bethought herself. She said good-night at once, and ran for home. Now she could not reach home without passing the pot, and just as she passed the pot, she saw the last sparkle of the sun as he went down."

"I should think she ran!" remarked our mouthpiece, Allister.

"She did run," said Kirsty, "and had just got past the awful black pot, which was terrible enough day or night without such a beast in it, when—"

"But there *was* the beast in it," said Allister.

"When," Kirsty went on without heeding him, "she heard a great *whish* of water behind her. That was the water tumbling off the beast's back as he came up from the bottom. If she ran before, she flew now. And the worst of it was that she couldn't hear him behind her, so as to tell whereabouts he was. He might be just opening his mouth to take her every moment. At last she reached the door, which her father, who had gone out to look for her, had set wide open that she might run in at once; but all the breath was out of her body, and she fell down flat just as she got inside."

Here Allister jumped from his seat, clapping his hands and crying—

"Then the kelpie didn't eat her!—Kirsty! Kirsty!"

"No. But as she fell, one foot was left outside the threshold, so that the rowan branch could not take care of it. And the beast laid hold of the foot with his great mouth, to drag her out of the cottage and eat her at his leisure."

Here Allister's face was a picture to behold! His hair was almost standing on end, his mouth was open, and his face as white as my paper.

"Make haste, Kirsty," said Turkey, "or Allister will go in a fit."

"But her shoe came off in his mouth, and she drew in her foot and was safe."

Allister's hair subsided. He drew a deep breath, and sat down again. But Turkey must have been a very wise or a very unimaginative Turkey, for here he broke in with—

"I don't believe a word of it, Kirsty."

"What!" said Kirsty—"don't believe it!"

"No. She lost her shoe in the mud. It was some wild duck she heard in the pot, and there was no beast after her. She never saw it, you know."

"She saw it look in at her window."

"Yes, yes. That was in the middle of the night. I've seen as much myself when I waked up in the middle of the night. I took a rat for a tiger once."

Kirsty was looking angry, and her needles were going even faster than when she approached the climax of the shoe.

"Hold your tongue, Turkey," I said, "and let us hear the rest of the story."

But Kirsty kept her eyes on her knitting, and did not resume.

"Is that all, Kirsty?" said Allister.

Still Kirsty returned no answer. She needed all her force to overcome the anger she was busy stifling. For it would never do for one in her position to lose her temper because of the unbelieving criticism of a herd-boy. It was a curious instance of the electricity flashed out in the confluence of unlike things—the Celtic faith and the Saxon works. For anger is just the electric flash of the mind, and requires to have its conductor of common sense ready at hand. After a few moments she began again as if she had never stopped and no remarks had been made, only her voice trembled a little at first.

"Her father came home soon after, in great distress, and there

he found her lying just within the door. He saw at once how it was, and his anger was kindled against her lover more than the beast. Not that he had any objection to her going to meet him; for although he was a gentleman and his daughter only a shepherd's daughter, they were both of the blood of the MacLeods."

This was Kirsty's own clan. And indeed I have since discovered that the original legend on which her story was founded belongs to the island of Rasay, from which she came.

"But why was he angry with the gentleman?" asked Allister.

"Because he liked her company better than he loved herself," said Kirsty. "At least that was what the shepherd said, and that he ought to have seen her safe home. But he didn't know that MacLeod's father had threatened to kill him if ever he spoke to the girl again."

"But," said Allister, "I thought it was about Sir Worm Wymble—not Mr. MacLeod."

"Sure, boy, and am I not going to tell you how he got the new name of him?" returned Kirsty, with an eagerness that showed her fear lest the spirit of inquiry should spread. "He wasn't Sir Worm Wymble then. His name was—"

Here she paused a moment, and looked full at Allister.

"His name was Allister—Allister MacLeod."

"Allister!" exclaimed my brother, repeating the name as an incredible coincidence.

"Yes, Allister," said Kirsty. "There's been many an Allister, and not all of them MacLeods, that did what they ought to do,

and didn't know what fear was. And you'll be another, my bonnie Allister, I hope," she added, stroking the boy's hair.

Allister's face flushed with pleasure. It was long before he asked another question.

"Well, as I say," resumed Kirsty, "the father of her was very angry, and said she should never go and meet Allister again. But the girl said she ought to go once and let him know why she could not come any more; for she had no complaint to make of Allister; and she had agreed to meet him on a certain day the week after; and there was no post-office in those parts. And so she did meet him, and told him all about it. And Allister said nothing much then. But next day he came striding up to the cottage, at dinner-time, with his claymore (*gladius major*) at one side, his dirk at the other, and his little skene dubh (*black knife*) in his stocking. And he was grand to see—such a big strong gentleman I And he came striding up to the cottage where the shepherd was sitting at his dinner.

"'Angus MacQueen,' says he, 'I understand the kelpie in the pot has been rude to your Nellie. I am going to kill him.' 'How will you do that, sir?' said Angus, quite short, for he was the girl's father. 'Here's a claymore I could put in a peck,' said Allister, meaning it was such good steel that he could bend it round till the hilt met the point without breaking; 'and here's a shield made out of the hide of old Rasay's black bull; and here's a dirk made of a foot and a half of an old Andrew Ferrara; and here's a skene dubh that I'll drive through your door, Mr. Angus. And so we're

fitted, I hope.' 'Not at all,' said Angus, who as I told you was a wise man and a knowing; 'not one bit,' said Angus. 'The kelpie's hide is thicker than three bull-hides, and none of your weapons would do more than mark it.' 'What am I to do then, Angus, for kill him I will somehow?' 'I'll tell you what to do; but it needs a brave man to do that.' 'And do you think I'm not brave enough for that, Angus?' 'I know one thing you are not brave enough for.' 'And what's that?' said Allister, and his face grew red, only he did not want to anger Nelly's father. 'You're not brave enough to marry my girl in the face of the clan,' said Angus. 'But you shan't go on this way. If my Nelly's good enough to talk to in the glen, she's good enough to lead into the hall before the ladies and gentlemen.'

"Then Allister's face grew redder still, but not with anger, and he held down his head before the old man, but only for a few moments. When he lifted it again, it was pale, not with fear but with resolution, for he had made up his mind like a gentleman. 'Mr. Angus MacQueen,' he said, 'will you give me your daughter to be my wife?' 'If you kill the kelpie, I will,' answered Angus; for he knew that the man who could do that would be worthy of his Nelly."

"But what if the kelpie ate him?" suggested Allister.

"Then he'd have to go without the girl," said Kirsty, coolly. "But," she resumed, "there's always some way of doing a difficult thing; and Allister, the gentleman, had Angus, the shepherd, to teach him.

“So Angus took Allister down to the pot, and there they began. They tumbled great stones together, and set them up in two rows at a little distance from each other, making a lane between the rows big enough for the kelpie to walk in. If the kelpie heard them, he could not see them, and they took care to get into the cottage before it was dark, for they could not finish their preparations in one day. And they sat up all night, and saw the huge head of the beast looking in now at one window, now at another, all night long. As soon as the sun was up, they set to work again, and finished the two rows of stones all the way from the pot to the top of the little hill on which the cottage stood. Then they tied a cross of rowan-tree twigs on every stone, so that once the beast was in the avenue of stones he could only get out at the end. And this was Nelly’s part of the job. Next they gathered a quantity of furze and brushwood and peat, and piled it in the end of the avenue next the cottage. Then Angus went and killed a little pig, and dressed it ready for cooking.

“‘Now you go down to my brother Hamish,’ he said to Mr. MacLeod; ‘he’s a carpenter, you know,—and ask him to lend you his longest wimble.’”

“What’s a wimble?” asked little Allister.

“A wimble is a long tool, like a great gimlet, with a cross handle, with which you turn it like a screw. And Allister ran and fetched it, and got back only half an hour before the sun went down. Then they put Nelly into the cottage, and shut the door. But I ought to have told you that they had built up a great

heap of stones behind the brushwood, and now they lighted the brushwood, and put down the pig to roast by the fire, and laid the wimble in the fire halfway up to the handle. Then they laid themselves down behind the heap of stones and waited.

“By the time the sun was out of sight, the smell of the roasting pig had got down the avenue to the side of the pot, just where the kelpie always got out. He smelt it the moment he put up his head, and he thought it smelt so nice that he would go and see where it was. The moment he got out he was between the stones, but he never thought of that, for it was the straight way to the pig. So up the avenue he came, and as it was dark, and his big soft web feet made no noise, the men could not see him until he came into the light of the fire. ‘There he is!’ said Allister. ‘Hush!’ said Angus, ‘he can hear well enough.’ So the beast came on. Now Angus had meant that he should be busy with the pig before Allister should attack him; but Allister thought it was a pity he should have the pig, and he put out his hand and got hold of the wimble, and drew it gently out of the fire. And the wimble was so hot that it was as white as the whitest moon you ever saw. The pig was so hot also that the brute was afraid to touch it, and before ever he put his nose to it Allister had thrust the wimble into his hide, behind the left shoulder, and was boring away with all his might. The kelpie gave a hideous roar, and turned away to run from the wimble. But he could not get over the row of crossed stones, and he had to turn right round in the narrow space before he could run. Allister, however, could run as well as the kelpie, and he hung on to the

handle of the wimble, giving it another turn at every chance as the beast went floundering on; so that before he reached his pot the wimble had reached his heart, and the kelpie fell dead on the edge of the pot. Then they went home, and when the pig was properly done they had it for supper. And Angus gave Nelly to Allister, and they were married, and lived happily ever after."

"But didn't Allister's father kill him?"

"No. He thought better of it, and didn't. He was very angry for a while, but he got over it in time. And Allister became a great man, and because of what he had done, he was called Allister MacLeod no more, but Sir Worm Wymble. And when he died," concluded Kirsty, "he was buried under the tomb in your father's church. And if you look close enough, you'll find a wimble carved on the stone, but I'm afraid it's worn out by this time."

CHAPTER XI
The Kelpie

Silence followed the close of Kirsty's tale. Wee Davie had taken no harm, for he was fast asleep with his head on her bosom. Allister was staring into the fire, fancying he saw the whorls of the wimble heating in it. Turkey was cutting at his stick with a blunt pocket-knife, and a silent whistle on his puckered lips. I was sorry the story was over, and was growing stupid under the reaction from its excitement. I was, however, meditating a strict search for the wimble carved on the knight's tomb. All at once came the sound of a latch lifted in vain, followed by a thundering at the outer door, which Kirsty had prudently locked. Allister, Turkey, and I started to our feet, Allister with a cry of dismay, Turkey grasping his stick.

"It's the kelpie!" cried Allister.

But the harsh voice of the old witch followed, something deadened by the intervening door.

"Kirsty! Kirsty!" it cried; "open the door directly."

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