GEORGE MACDONALD

THE ELECT LADY

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I. LANDLORD'S DAUGHTER AND TENANT'S SON

In a kitchen of moderate size, flagged with slate, humble in its appointments, yet looking scarcely that of a farmhouse—for there were utensils about it indicating necessities more artificial than usually grow upon a farm—with the corner of a white deal table between them, sat two young people evidently different in rank, and meeting upon no level of friendship. The young woman held in her hand a paper, which seemed the subject of their conversation. She was about four- or five-and-twenty, well grown and not ungraceful, with dark hair, dark hazel eyes, and rather large, handsome features, full of intelligence, but a little hard, and not a little regnant—as such features must be, except after prolonged influence of a heart potent in self-subjugation. As to her social expression, it was a mingling of the gentlewoman of education, and the farmer's daughter supreme over the household

and its share in the labor of production.

As to the young man, it would have required a deeper-seeing eye than falls to the lot of most observers, not to take him for a weaker nature than the young woman; and the deference he showed her as the superior, would have enhanced the difficulty of a true judgment. He was tall and thin, but plainly in fine health; had a good forehead, and a clear hazel eye, not overlarge or prominent, but full of light; a firm mouth, with a curious smile; a sun-burned complexion; and a habit when perplexed of pinching his upper lip between his finger and thumb, which at the present moment he was unconsciously indulging. He was the son of a small farmer—in what part of Scotland is of little consequence—and his companion for the moment was the daughter of the laird.

"I have glanced over the poem," said the lady, "and it seems to me quite up to the average of what you see in print."

"Would that be reason for printing it, ma'am?" asked the man, with amused smile.

"It would be for the editor to determine," she answered, not perceiving the hinted objection.

"You will remember, ma'am, that I never suggested—indeed I never thought of such a thing!"

"I do not forget. It was your mother who drew my attention to the verses."

"I must speak to my mother!" he said, in a meditative way.

"You can not object to *my* seeing your work! She does not

show it to everybody. It is most creditable to you, such an employment of your leisure."

"The poem was never meant for any eyes but my own—except my brother's."

"What was the good of writing it, if no one was to see it?"

"The writing of it, ma'am."

"For the exercise, you mean?"

"No; I hardly mean that."

"I am afraid then I do not understand you."

"Do *you* never write anything but what you publish?"

"Publish! *I* never publish! What made you think of such a thing?"

"That you know so much about it, ma'am."

"I know people connected with the papers, and thought it might encourage you to see something in print. The newspapers publish so many poems now!"

"I wish it hadn't been just that one my mother gave you!"

"Why?"

"For one thing, it is not finished—as you will see when you read it more carefully."

"I did see a line I thought hardly rhythmical, but—"

"Excuse me, ma'am; the want of rhythm there was intentional."

"I am sorry for that. Intention is the worst possible excuse for wrong! The accent should always be made to fall in the right place."

"Beyond a doubt—but might not the right place alter with the sense?"

"Never. The rule is strict"

"Is there no danger of making the verse monotonous?"

"Not that I know."

"I have an idea, ma'am, that our great poets owe much of their music to the liberties they take with the rhythm. They treat the rule as its masters, and break it when they see fit."

"You must be wrong there! But in any case you must not presume to take the liberties of a great poet."

"It is a poor reward for being a great poet to be allowed to take liberties. I should say that, doing their work to the best of their power, they were rewarded with the discovery of higher laws of verse. Every one must walk by the light given him. By the rules which others have laid down he may learn to walk; but once his heart is awake to truth, and his ear to measure, melody and harmony, he must walk by the light, and the music God gives him."

"That is dangerous doctrine, Andrew!" said the lady, with a superior smile. "But," she continued, "I will mark what faults I see, and point them out to you."

"Thank you, ma'am, but please do not send the verses anywhere."

"I will not, except I find them worthy. You need not be afraid. For my father's sake I will have an eye to your reputation."

"I am obliged to you, ma'am," returned Andrew, but with his

curious smile, hard to describe. It had in it a wonderful mixing of sweetness and humor, and a something that seemed to sit miles above his amusement. A heavenly smile it was, knowing too much to be angry. It had in it neither offense nor scorn. In respect of his poetry he was shy like a girl, but he showed no rejection of the patronage forced upon him by the lady.

He rose and stood a moment.

"Well, Andrew, what is it?"

"When will you allow me to call for the verses?"

"In the course of a week or so. By that time I shall have made up my mind. If in doubt, I shall ask my father."

"I wouldn't like the laird to think I spend my time on poetry."

"You write poetry, Andrew! A man should not do what he would not have known."

"That is true, ma'am; I only feared an erroneous conclusion."

"I will take care of that. My father knows that you are a hard-working young man. There is not one of his farms in better order than yours. Were it otherwise, I should not be so interested in your poetry."

Andrew wished her less interested in it. To have his verses read was like having a finger poked in his eye. He had not known that his mother looked at his papers. But he showed little sign of his annoyance, bade the lady good-morning, and left the kitchen.

Miss Fordyce followed him to the door, and stood for a moment looking out. In front of her was a paved court, surrounded with low buildings, between two of which was

visible, at the distance of a mile or so, a railway line where it approached a viaduct. She heard the sound of a coming train, and who in a country place will not stand to see one pass!

CHAPTER II. AN ACCIDENT

While the two were talking, a long train, part carriages, part trucks, was rattling through a dreary country, where it could never have been were there not regions very different on both sides of it. For miles in any direction, nothing but humpy moorland was to be seen, a gathering of low hills, with now and then a higher one, its sides broken by occasional torrents, in poor likeness of a mountain. No smoke proclaimed the presence of human dwelling; but there were spots between the hills where the hand of man had helped the birth of a feeble fertility; and in front was a small but productive valley, on the edge of which stood the ancient house of Potlurg, with the heath behind it: over a narrow branch of this valley went the viaduct.

It was a slow train, with few passengers. Of these one was looking from his window with a vague, foolish sense of superiority, thinking what a forgotten, scarce created country it seemed. He was a well-dressed, good-looking fellow, with a keen but pale-gray eye, and a fine forehead, but a chin such as is held to indicate weakness. More than one, however, of the strongest women I have known, were defective in chin. The young man was in the only first-class carriage of the train, and alone in it. Dressed in a gray suit, he was a little too particular in the smaller points of his attire, and lacked in consequence something of the look of a gentleman. Every now and then he would take off his

hard round hat, and pass a white left hand through his short-cut mousey hair, while his right caressed a far longer mustache, in which he seemed interested. A certain indescribable heaviness and lack of light characterized his pale face.

It was a lovely day in early June. The air was rather cold, but youth and health care little about temperature on a holiday, with the sun shining, and that sweetest sense—to such at least as are ordinarily bound by routine—of having nothing to do. To many men and women the greatest trouble is to choose, for self is the hardest of masters to please; but as yet George Crawford had not been troubled with much choosing.

A crowded town behind him, the loneliness he looked upon was a pleasure to him. Compelled to spend time in it, without the sense of being on the way out of it, his own company would soon have grown irksome to him; for however much men may be interested in themselves, there are few indeed who are interesting to themselves. Those only whose self is aware of a higher presence can escape becoming bores and disgusts to themselves. That every man is endlessly greater than what he calls himself, must seem a paradox to the ignorant and dull, but a universe would be impossible without it. George had not arrived at the discovery of this fact, and yet was for the present contented both with himself and with his circumstances.

The heather was not in bloom, and the few flowers of the heathy land made no show. Brown and darker brown predominated, with here and there a shadow of green; and, weary

of his outlook, George was settling back to his book, when there came a great bang and a tearing sound. He started to his feet, and for hours knew nothing more. A truck had run off the line and turned over; the carriage in which he was had followed it, and one of the young man's legs was broken.

CHAPTER III. HELP

"Papa! papa! there is an accident on the line!" cried Miss Fordyce, running into her father's study, where he sat surrounded with books. "I saw it from the door!"

"Hush!" returned the old man, and listened. "I hear the train going on," he said, after a moment.

"Part of it is come to grief, I am certain," answered his daughter. "I saw something fall."

"Well, my dear?"

"What *shall* we do?"

"What would you have us do?" rejoined her father, without a movement toward rising. "It is too far off for us to be of any use."

"We ought to go and see."

"I am not fond of such seeing, Alexa, and will not go out of my way for it. The misery I can not avoid is enough for me."

But Alexa was out of the room, and in a moment more was running, in as straight a line as she could keep, across the heath to the low embankment. Andrew caught sight of her running. He could not see the line, but convinced that something was the matter, turned and ran in the same direction.

It was a hard and long run for Alexa, over such ground. Troubled at her father's indifference, she ran the faster—too fast for thinking, but not too fast for the thoughts that came of themselves. What had come to her father? Their house was

the nearest! She could not shut out the conviction that, since succeeding to the property, he had been growing less and less neighborly.

She had caught up a bottle of brandy, which impeded her running. Yet she made good speed, her dress gathered high in the other hand. Her long dark hair broken loose and flying in the wind, her assumed dignity forgotten, and only the woman awake, she ran like a deer over the heather, and in little more than a quarter of an hour, though it was a long moor-mile, reached the embankment, flushed and panting.

Some of the carriages had rolled down, and the rails were a wreck. But the engine and half the train had kept on: neither driver nor stoker was hurt, and they were hurrying to fetch help from the next station. At the foot of the bank lay George Crawford insensible, with the guard of the train doing what he could to bring him to consciousness. He was on his back, pale as death, with no motion and scare a sign of life.

Alexa tried to give him brandy, but she was so exhausted, and her hand shook so, that she had to yield the bottle to the guard, and, hale and strong as she was, could but drag herself a little apart before she fainted.

In the meantime, as the train approached the station, the driver, who belonged to the neighborhood, saw the doctor, slackened speed, and set his whistle shrieking wildly. The doctor set spurs to his horse, and came straight over everything to his side.

"You go on," he said, having heard what had happened; "I shall be there sooner than you could take me."

He came first upon Andrew trying to make Miss Fordyce swallow a little of the brandy.

"There's but one gentleman hurt, sir," said the guard. "The other's only a young lady that's run till she's dropped."

"To bring brandy," supplemented Andrew.

The doctor recognized Alexa, and wondered what reception her lather would give his patient, for to Potlurg he must go! Suddenly she came to herself, and sat up, gazing wildly around. "Out of breath, Miss Fordyce; nothing worse!" said the doctor, and she smiled.

He turned to the young man, and did for him what he could without splints or bandages; then, with the help of the guard and Andrew, constructed, from pieces of the broken carriages, a sort of litter on which to carry him to Potlurg.

"Is he dead?" asked Alexa.

"Not a bit of it. He's had a bad blow on the head, though. We must get him somewhere as fast as we can!"

"Do you know him?"

"Not I. But we must take him to your house. I don't know what else to do with him!"

"What else should you want to do with him?"

"I was afraid it might bother the laird."

"You scarcely know my father, Doctor Pratt!"

"It would bother most people to have a wounded man

quartered on them for weeks!" returned the doctor. "Poor fellow! A good-looking fellow too!"

A countryman who had been in the next carriage, but had escaped almost unhurt, offering his service, Andrew and he took up the litter gently, and set out walking with care, the doctor on one side, leading his horse, and Miss Fordyce on the other.

It was a strange building to which, after no small anxiety, they drew near; nor did it look the less strange the nearer they came. It was unsheltered by a single tree; and but for a low wall and iron rail on one side, inclosing what had been a garden, but was now a grass-plot, it rose straight out of the heather. From this plot the ground sloped to the valley, and was under careful cultivation. The entrance to it was closed with a gate of wrought iron, of good workmanship, but so wasted with rust that it seemed on the point of vanishing. Here at one time had been the way into the house; but no door, and scarce a window, was now to be seen on this side of the building. It was very old, and consisted of three gables, a great half-round between two of them, and a low tower with a conical roof.

Crawford had begun to recover consciousness, but when he came to himself he was received by acute pain. The least attempt to move was torture, and again he fainted.

CHAPTER IV. THE LAIRD

Conducted by the lady, they passed round the house to the court, and across the court to a door in one of the gables. It was a low, narrow door, but large enough for the man that stood there —a little man, with colorless face, and quiet, abstracted look. His eyes were cold and keen, his features small, delicate, and regular. He had an erect little back, and was dressed in a long-tailed coat, looking not much of a laird, and less of a farmer, as he stood framed in the gray stone wall, in which odd little windows, dotted here and there at all heights and distances, revealed a wonderful arrangement of floors and rooms inside.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fordyce!" said the doctor. "This is a bad business, but it might have been worse! Not a soul injured but one!"

"Souls don't commonly get injured by accident!" returned the laird, with a cold smile that was far from discourteous. "Stick to the body, doctor! There you know something!"

"It's a truth, laird!" answered the doctor—but added to himself—"Well! it's awful to hear the truth from some mouths!"

The laird spoke no word of objection or of welcome. They carried the poor fellow into the house, following its mistress to a room, where, with the help of her one domestic, and instructed by the doctor, she soon had a bed prepared for him. Then away rode the doctor at full speed to fetch the appliances necessary, leaving

the laird standing by the bed, with a look of mild dissatisfaction, but not a whisper of opposition.

It was the guest-chamber to which George Crawford had been carried, a room far more comfortable than a stranger might, from the aspect of the house, have believed possible. Everything in it was old-fashioned, and, having been dismantled, it was not in apple-pie order; but it was rapidly and silently restored to its humble ideal; and when the doctor, after an incredibly brief absence, returned with his assistant, he seemed both surprised and pleased at the change.

"He must have some one to sit up with him, Miss Fordyce," he said, when all was done.

"I will myself," she answered. "But you must give me exact directions, for I have done no nursing."

"If you will walk a little way with me, I will tell you all you need know. He will sleep now, I think—at least till you get back: I shall not keep you beyond a few minutes. It is not a very awkward fracture," he continued, as they went. "It might have been much worse! We shall have him about in a few weeks. But he will want the greatest care while the bones are uniting."

The laird turned from the bed, and went to his study, where he walked up and down, lost and old and pale, the very Bibliad of the room with its ancient volumes all around. Whatever his eyes fell upon, he turned from, as if he had no longer any pleasure in it, and presently stole back to the room where the sufferer lay. On tiptoe, with a caution suggestive of a wild beast asleep, he

crept to the bed, looked down on his unwelcome guest with an expression of sympathy crossed with dislike, and shook his head slowly and solemnly, like one injured but forgiving.

His eye fell on the young man's pocket-book. It had fallen from his coat as they undressed him, and was on a table by the bedside. He caught it up just ere Alexa reentered.

"How is he, father?" she asked.

"He is fast asleep," answered the laid. "How long does the doctor think he will have to be here?"

"I did not ask him," she replied.

"That was an oversight, my child," he returned. "It is of consequence we should know the moment of his removal."

"We shall know it in good time. The doctor called it an affair of weeks—or months—I forget. But you shall not be troubled, father. I will attend to him."

"But I *am* troubled, Alexa! You do not know how little money I have!"

Again he retired—slowly, shut his door, locked it, and began to search the pocket-book. He found certain banknotes, and made a discovery concerning its owner.

With the help of her old woman, and noiselessly, while Crawford lay in a half slumber, Alexa continued making the chamber more comfortable. Chintz curtains veiled the windows, which, for all their narrowness, had admitted too much light; and an old carpet deadened the sound of footsteps on the creaking boards—for the bones of a house do not grow silent with age; a

fire burned in the antique grate, and was a soul to the chamber, which was chilly, looking to the north, with walls so thick that it took half the summer to warm them through. Old Meg, moving to and fro, kept shaking her head like her master, as if she also were in the secret of some house-misery; but she was only indulging the funereal temperament of an ancient woman. As Alexa ran through the heather in the morning, she looked not altogether unlike a peasant; her shoes were strong, her dress was short; but now she came and went in a soft-colored gown, neither ill-made nor unbecoming. She did not seem to belong to what is called society, but she looked dignified, at times almost stately, with an expression of superiority, not strong enough to make her handsome face unpleasing. It resembled her father's, but, for a woman's, was cast in a larger mold.

The day crept on. The invalid was feverish. His nurse obeyed the doctor minutely, to a single drop. She had her tea brought her, but when the supper hour arrived went to join her father in the kitchen.

CHAPTER V. AFTER SUPPER

They always eat in the kitchen. Strange to say, there was no dining-room in the house, though there was a sweetly old-fashioned drawing-room. The servant was with the sufferer, but Alexa was too much in the sick-room, notwithstanding, to know that she was eating her porridge and milk. The laird partook but sparingly, on the ground that the fare tended to fatness, which affliction of age he congratulated himself on having hitherto escaped. They eat in silence, but not a glance of her father that might indicate a want escaped the daughter. When the meal was ended, and the old man had given thanks, Alexa put on the table a big black Bible, which her father took with solemn face and reverent gesture. In the course of his nightly reading of the New Testament, he had come to the twelfth chapter of St. Luke, with the Lord's parable of the rich man whose soul they required of him: he read it beautifully, with an expression that seemed to indicate a sense of the Lord's meaning what He said.

"We will omit the psalm this evening—for the sake of the sufferer," he said, having ended the chapter. "The Lord will have mercy and not sacrifice."

They rose from their chairs and knelt on the stone floor. The old man prayed with much tone and expression, and I think meant all he said, though none of it seemed to spring from fresh need or new thankfulness, for he used only the old stock phrases,

which flowed freely from his lips. He dwelt much on the merits of the Saviour; he humbled himself as the chief of sinners, whom it must be a satisfaction to God to cut off, but a greater satisfaction to spare for the sake of one whom he loved. Plainly the man counted it a most important thing to stand well with Him who had created him. When they rose, Alexa looked formally solemn, but the wan face of her father shone: the Psyche, if not the Ego, had prayed—and felt comfortable. He sat down, and looked fixedly, as if into eternity, but perhaps it was into vacancy; they are much the same to most people.

"Come into the study for a moment, Lexy, if you please," he said, rising at length. His politeness to his daughter, and indeed to all that came near him, was one of the most notable points in his behavior.

Alexa followed the black, slender, erect little figure up the stair, which consisted of about a dozen steps, filling the entrance from wall to wall, a width of some twelve feet. Between it and the outer door there was but room for the door of the kitchen on the one hand, and that of a small closet on the other. At the top was a wide space, a sort of irregular hall, more like an out-of-door court, paved with large flat stones into which projected the other side of the rounded mass, bordered by the grassy inclosure.

The laird turned to the right, and through a door into a room which had but one small window hidden by bookcases. Naturally it smelled musty, of old books and decayed bindings, an odor not unpleasant to some nostrils. He closed the door behind him,

placed a chair for his daughter, and set himself in another by a deal table, upon which were books and papers.

"This is a sore trial, Alexa!" he said with a sigh.

"It is indeed, father—for the poor young man!" she returned.

"True; but it would be selfish indeed to regard the greatness of his suffering as rendering our trial the less. It is to us a more serious matter than you seem to think. It will cost much more than, in the present state of my finances, I can afford to pay. You little think—"

"But, father," interrupted Alexa, "how could we help it?"

"He might have been carried elsewhere!"

"With me standing there! Surely not, father! Even Andrew Ingram offered to receive him."

"Why did he not take him then?"

"The doctor wouldn't hear of it. And I wouldn't hear of it either."

"It was ill-considered, Lexy. But what's done is done—though, alas! not paid for."

"We must take the luck as it comes, father!"

"Alexa," rejoined the laird with solemnity, "you ought never to mention luck. There is no such thing. It was either for the young man's sins, or to prevent worse, or for necessary discipline, that the train was overturned. The cause is known to *Him*. All are in His hands—and we must beware of attempting to take any out of His hands, for it can not be done."

"Then, father, if there be no chance, our part was ordered too.

So there is the young man in our spare room, and we must receive our share of the trouble as from the hand of the Lord."

"Certainly, my dear! it was the expense I was thinking of. I was only lamenting—bear me witness, I was not opposing—the will of the Lord. A man's natural feelings remain."

"If the thing is not to be helped, let us think no more about it!"

"It is the expense, my dear! Will you not let your mind rest for a moment upon the fact? I am doing my utmost to impress it upon you. For other expenses there is always something to show; for this there will be nothing, positively nothing!"

"Not the mended leg, father?"

"The money will vanish, I tell you, as a tale that is told."

"It is our life that vanishes that way!"

"The simile suits either. So long as we do not use the words of Scripture irreverently, there is no harm in making a different application of them. There is no irreverence here: next to the grace of God, money is the thing hardest to get and hardest to keep. If we are not wise with it, the grace—I mean money—will not go far."

"Not so far as the next world, anyhow!" said Alexa, as if to herself.

"How dare you, child! The Redeemer tells us to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when we die it may receive us into everlasting habitations!"

"I read the passage this morning, father: it is *they*, not *it*, will receive you. And I have heard that it ought to be translated, 'make

friends *with*, or *by means of* the mammon of unrighteousness."

"I will reconsider the passage. We must not lightly change even the translated word!"

The laird had never thought that it might be of consequence to him one day to have friends in the other world. Neither had he reflected that the Lord did not regard the obligation of gratitude as ceasing with this life.

Alexa had reason to fear that her father made a friend *of*, and never a friend *with* the mammon of unrighteousness. At the same time the half-penny he put in the plate every Sunday must go a long way if it was not estimated, like that of the poor widow, according to the amount he possessed, but according to the difficulty he found in parting with it.

"After weeks, perhaps months of nursing and food and doctor's stuff," resumed the laird, "he will walk away, and we shall see not a plack of the money he carries with him. The visible will become the invisible, the present the absent!"

"The little it will cost you, father—"

"Hold there, my child! If you call any cost little, I will not hear a word more: we should be but running a race from different points to different goals! It will cost—that is enough! How much it will cost *me*, you can not calculate, for you do not know what money stands for in my eyes. There are things before which money is insignificant!"

"Those dreary old books!" said Alexa to herself, casting a glance on the shelves that filled the room from floor to ceiling,

and from wall to wall.

"What I was going to say, father," she returned, "was, that I have a little money of my own, and this affair shall cost you nothing. Leave me to contrive. Would you tell him his friends must pay his board, or take him away? It would be a nice anecdote in the annals of the Fordyces of Potlurg!"

"At the same time, what more natural?" rejoined her father. "His friends must in any case be applied to! I learn from his pocket-book—"

"Father!"

"Content yourself, Alexa. I have a right to know whom I receive under my roof. Besides, have I not learned thereby that the youth is a sort of connection!"

"You don't mean it, father?"

"I do mean it. His mother and yours were first cousins."

"That is not a connection; it's a close kinship!"

"Is it?" said the laird, dryly.

"Anyhow," pursued Alexa, "I give you my word you shall hear nothing more of the expense."

She bade her father good-night, and returning to the bedside of her patient, released Meg.

CHAPTER VI. ABOUT THE LAIRD

Thomas Fordyce was a sucker from the root of a very old family tree, born in poverty, and, with great pinching of father and mother, brothers and sisters, educated for the Church. But from pleasure in scholarship, from archaeological tastes, a passion for the arcana of history, and a love of literature, strong, although not of the highest kind, he had settled down as a school-master, and in his calling had excelled. By all who knew him he was regarded as an accomplished, amiable, and worthy man.

When his years were verging on the undefined close of middle age he saw the lives between him and the family property, one by one wither at the touch of death, until at last there was no one but himself and his daughter to succeed. He was at the time the head of a flourishing school in a large manufacturing town; and it was not without some regret, though with more pleasure, that he yielded his profession and retired to Potlurg.

Greatly dwindled as he found the property, and much and long as it had been mismanaged, it was yet of considerable value, and worth a wise care. The result of the labor he spent upon it was such that it had now for years yielded him, if not a large rental, one far larger at least than his daughter imagined. But the sinking of the school-master in the laird seemed to work ill for the man, and good only for the land. I say *seemed*, because what we call degeneracy is often but the unveiling of what was there all the

time; and the evil we could become, we are. If I have in me the tyrant or the miser, there he is, and such am I—as surely as if the tyrant or the miser were even now visible to the wondering dislike of my neighbors. I do not say the characteristic is so strong, or would be so hard to change as by the revealing development it must become; but it is there, alive, as an egg is alive; and by no means inoperative like a mere germ, but exercising real though occult influence on the rest of my character. Therefore, except the growing vitality be in process of killing these ova of death, it is for the good of the man that they should be so far developed as to show their existence. If the man do not then starve and slay them they will drag him to the judgment-seat of a fiery indignation.

For the laird, nature could ill replace the human influences that had surrounded the school-master; while enlargement both of means and leisure enabled him to develop by indulgence a passion for a peculiar kind of possession, which, however refined in its objects, was yet but a branch of the worship of Mammon. It suits the enemy just as well, I presume, that a man should give his soul for coins as for money. In consequence he was growing more and more withdrawn, ever filling less the part of a man—which is to be a hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest. He was more and more for himself, and thereby losing his life. Dearly as he loved his daughter, he was, by slow fallings away, growing ever less of a companion, less of a comfort, less of a necessity to her, and requiring less and less of her for the

good or ease of his existence. We wrong those near us in being independent of them. God himself would not be happy without His Son. We ought to lean on each other, giving and receiving—not as weaklings, but as lovers. Love is strength as well as need. Alexa was more able to live alone than most women; therefore it was the worse for her. Too satisfied with herself, too little uneasy when alone, she did not know that then she was not in good enough company. She was what most would call a strong nature, nor knew what weaknesses belong to, and grow out of, such strength as hers.

The remoter scions of a family tree are not seldom those who make most account of it; the school-master's daughter knew more about the Fordyces of Potlurg, and cared more for their traditions, than any who of later years had reaped its advantages or shared its honors. Interest in the channel down which one has slid into the world is reasonable, and may be elevating; with Alexa it passed beyond good, and wrought for evil. Proud of a family with a history, and occasionally noted in the annals of the country, she regarded herself as the superior of all with whom she had hitherto come into relation. To the poor, to whom she was invariably and essentially kind, she was less condescending than to such as came nearer her own imagined standing; she was constantly aware that she belonged to the elect of the land! Society took its revenge; the rich trades-people looked down upon her as the school-master's daughter. Against their arrogance her indignation buttressed her lineal with her mental superiority.

At the last the pride of family is a personal arrogance. And now at length she was in her natural position as heiress of Potlurg!

She was religious—if one may be called religious who felt no immediate relation to the source of her being. She felt bound to defend, so far as she honestly could, the doctrines concerning God and His ways transmitted by the elders of her people; to this much, and little more, her religion toward God amounted. But she had a strong sense of obligation to do what was right.

Her father gave her so little money to spend that she had to be very careful with her housekeeping, and they lived in the humblest way. For her person she troubled him as little as she could, believing him, from the half statements and hints he gave, and his general carriage toward life, not a little oppressed by lack of money, nor suspecting his necessities created and his difficulties induced by himself. In this regard it had come to be understood between them that the produce of the poultry-yard was Alexa's own; and to some little store she had thus gathered she mainly trusted for the requirements of her invalid. To this her father could not object, though he did not like it; he felt what was hers to be his more than he felt what was his to be hers.

Alexa had not learned to place value on money beyond its use, but she was not therefore free from the service of Mammon; she looked to it as to a power essential, not derived; she did not see it as God's creation, but merely as an existence, thus making of a creature of God the mammon of unrighteousness. She did not, however, cling to it, but was ready to spend it. At

the same time, had George Crawford looked less handsome or less of a gentleman, she would not have been so ready to devote the contents of her little secret drawer.

The discovery of her relationship to the young man waked a new feeling. She had never had a brother, never known a cousin, and had avoided the approach of such young men as, of inferior position in her eyes, had sought to be friendly with her; here was one thrown helpless on her care, with necessities enough to fill the gap between his real relation to her, and that of the brother after whom she had sighed in vain! It was a new and delightful sensation to have a family claim on a young man—a claim, the material advantage of which was all on his side, the devotion all on hers. She was invaded by a flood of tenderness toward the man. Was he not her cousin, a gentleman, and helpless as any new-born child? Nothing should be wanting that a strong woman could do for a powerless man.

CHAPTER VII. THE COUSINS

George Crawford was in excellent health when the accident occurred, and so when he began to recover, his restoration was rapid. The process, however, was still long enough to compel the cousins to know more of each other than twelve months of ordinary circumstance would have made possible.

George, feeling neither the need, nor, therefore, the joy of the new relationship so much as Alexa, disappointed her by the coolness of his response to her communication of the fact; and as they were both formal, that is, less careful as to the reasonable than as to the conventional, they were not very ready to fall in love. Such people may learn all about each other, and not come near enough for love to be possible between them. Some people approximate at once, and at once decline to love, remaining friends the rest of their lives. Others love at once; and some take a whole married life to come near enough, and at last love. But the reactions of need and ministration can hardly fail to breed tenderness, and disclose the best points of character.

The cousins were both handsome, and—which was of more consequence—each thought the other handsome. They found their religious opinions closely coincident—nor any wonder, for they had gone for years to the same church every Sunday, had been regularly pumped upon from the same reservoir, and had drunk the same arguments concerning things true and untrue.

George found that Alexa had plenty of brains, a cultivated judgment, and some knowledge of literature; that there was no branch of science with which she had not some little acquaintance, in which she did not take some small interest. Her father's teaching was beyond any he could have procured for her, and what he taught she had learned; for she had a love of knowing, a tendency to growth, a capacity for seizing real points, though as yet perceiving next to nothing of their relation to human life and hope. She believed herself a judge of verse, but in truth her knowledge of poetry was limited to its outer forms, of which she had made good studies with her father. She had learned the *how* before the *what*, knew the body before the soul —could tell good binding but not bad leather—in a word, knew verse but not poetry.

She understood nothing of music, but George did not miss that; he was more sorry she did not know French—not for the sake of its literature, but because of showing herself an educated woman.

Diligent in business, not fervent in spirit, she was never idle. But there are other ways than idleness of wasting time. Alexa was continually "improving herself," but it was a big phrase for a small matter; she had not learned that to do the will of God is the *only* way to improve one's self. She would have scorned the narrowness of any one who told her so, not understanding what the will of God means.

She found that her guest and cousin was a man of some

position, and wondered that her father should never have mentioned the relationship. The fact was that, in a time of poverty, the school-master had made to George's father the absurd request of a small loan without security, and the banker had behaved as a rich relation and a banker was pretty sure to behave.

George occupied a place of trust in the bank, and, though not yet admitted to a full knowledge of its more important transactions, hoped soon to be made a partner.

When his father came to Potlurg to see him the laird declined to appear, and the banker contented himself thereafter with Alexa's bulletins.

CHAPTER VIII. GEORGE AND THE LAIRD

Alexa's money was nearly exhausted, and most of her chickens had been devoured by the flourishing convalescent, but not yet would the doctor allow him to return to business.

One night the electric condition of the atmosphere made it heavy, sultry and unrefreshing, and George could not sleep. There came a terrible burst of thunder; then a bannered spear of vividest lightning seemed to lap the house in its flashing folds, and the simultaneous thunder was mingled with the sound, as it seemed, of the fall of some part of the building. George sat up in bed and listened. All was still. He must rise and see what had happened, and whether any one was hurt. He might meet Alexa, and a talk with her would be a pleasant episode in his sleepless night. He got into his dressing-gown, and taking his stick, walked softly from the room.

His door opened immediately on the top of the stair. He stood and listened, but was aware of no sequel to the noise. Another flash came, and lighted up the space around him, with its walls of many angles. When the darkness was returned and the dazzling gone, and while the thunder yet bellowed, he caught the glimmer of a light under the door of the study, and made his way toward it over the worn slabs. He knocked, but there was no answer. He pushed the door, and saw that the light came from behind a

projecting book-case. He hesitated a moment, and glanced about him.

A little clinking sound came from somewhere. He stole nearer the source of the light; a thief might be there. He peeped round the end of the book-case. With his back to him the laird was kneeling before an open chest. He had just counted a few pieces of gold, and was putting them away. He turned over his shoulder a face deathly pale, and his eyes for a moment stared blank. Then with a shivering smile he rose. He had a thin-worn dressing-gown over his night-shirt, and looked a thread of a man.

"You take me for a miser?" he said, trembling, and stood expecting an answer.

Crawford was bewildered: what business had he there?

"I am *not* a miser!" resumed the laird. "A man may count his money without being a miser!"

He stood and stared, still trembling, at his guest, either too much startled or too gentle to find fault with his intrusion.

"I beg your pardon, laird," said George. "I knocked, but receiving no answer, feared something was wrong."

"But why are you out of bed—and you an invalid?" returned Mr. Fordyce.

"I heard a heavy fall, and feared the lightning had done some damage."

"We shall see about that in the morning, and in the meantime you had better go to bed," said the laird.

They turned together toward the door.

"What a multitude of books, you have, Mr. Fordyce!" remarked George. "I had not a notion of such a library in the county!"

"I have been a lover of books all my life," returned the laird. "And they gather, they gather!" he added.

"Your love draws them," said George.

"The storm is over, I think," said the laird.

He did not tell his guest that there was scarcely a book on those shelves not sought after by book-buyers—not one that was not worth money in the book-market. Here and there the dulled gold of a fine antique binding returned the gleam of the candle, but any gathering of old law or worthless divinity would have looked much the same.

"I should like to glance over them," said George. "There must be some valuable volumes among so many!"

"Rubbish! rubbish!" rejoined the old man, testily, almost hustling him from the room. "I am ashamed to hear it called a library."

It seemed to Crawford, as again he lay awake in his bed, altogether a strange incident. A man may count his money when he pleases, but not the less must it seem odd that he should do so in the middle of the night, and with such a storm flashing and roaring around him, apparently unheeded. The next morning he got his cousin to talk about her father, but drew from her nothing to cast light on what he had seen.

CHAPTER IX. IN THE GARDEN

Of the garden which had been the pride of many owners of the place, only a small portion remained. It was strangely antique, haunted with a beauty both old and wild, the sort of garden for the children of heaven to play in when men sleep.

In a little arbor constructed by an old man who had seen the garden grow less and less through successive generations, a tent of honeysuckle in a cloak of sweet pease, sat George and Alexa, two highly respectable young people, Scots of Scotland, like Jews of Judaea, well satisfied of their own worthiness. How they found their talk interesting, I can scarce think. I should have expected them to be driven by very dullness to love-making; but the one was too prudent to initiate it, the other too staid to entice it. Yet, people on the borders of love being on the borders of poetry, they had got talking about a certain new poem, concerning which George, having read several notices of it, had an opinion to give.

"You should tell my father about it, George," said Alexa; "he is the best judge I know."

She did not understand that it was a little more than the grammar of poetry the school-master had ever given himself to understand. His best criticism was to show phrase calling to phrase across gulfs of speech.

The little iron gate, whose hinges were almost gone with rust, creaked and gnarred as it slowly opened to admit the approach of

a young countryman. He advanced with the long, slow, heavy step suggestive of nailed shoes; but his hazel eye had an outlook like that of an eagle from its eyrie, and seemed to dominate his being, originating rather than directing its motions. He had a russet-colored face, much freckled; hair so dark red as to be almost brown; a large, well-shaped nose; a strong chin; and a mouth of sweetness whose smile was peculiarly its own, having in it at once the mystery and the revelation of Andrew Ingram. He took off his bonnet as he drew near, and held it as low as his knee, while with something of the air of an old-fashioned courtier, he stood waiting. His clothes, all but his coat, which was of some blue stuff, and his Sunday one, were of a large-ribbed corduroy. For a moment no one spoke. He colored a little, but kept silent, his eyes on the lady.

"Good-morning, Andrew!" she said at length. "There was something, I forget what, you were to call about! Remind me—will you?"

"I did not come before, ma'am, because I knew you were occupied. And even now it does not greatly matter."

"Oh, I remember!—the poem! I am very sorry, but I had so much to think of that it went quite out of my mind."

An expression half amused, half shy, without trace of mortification, for an instant shadowed the young man's face.

"I wish you would let me have the lines again, ma'am! Indeed I should be obliged to you!" he said.

"Well, I confess they might first be improved! I read them one

evening to my father, and he agreed with me that two or three of them were not quite rhythmical. But he said it was a fair attempt, and for a working-man very creditable."

What Andrew was thinking, it would have been hard to gather from his smile; but I believe it was that, if he had himself read the verses aloud, the laird would have found no fault with their rhythm. His carriage seemed more that of a patient, respectful amusement than anything else.

Alexa rose, but resumed her seat, saying:

"As the poem is a religious one, there can be no harm in handing it you on Sunday after church!—that is," she added, meaningly, "if you will be there!"

"Give it to Dawtie, if you please, ma'am," replied Andrew.

"Ah!" rebuked Miss Fordyce, in a tone almost of rebuke.

"I seldom go to church, ma'am," said Andrew, reddening a little, but losing no sweetness from his smile.

"I understand as much! It is very wrong! *Why* don't you?"

Andrew was silent.

"I wish you to tell me," persisted Alexa, with a peremptoriness which came of the school-master. She had known him too as a pupil of her father's!

"If you will have it, ma'am, I not only learn nothing from Mr. Smith, but I think much that he says is not true."

"Still you ought to go for the sake of example."

"Do wrong to make other people follow my example? Can that be to do right?"

"*Wrong* to go to church! What *do* you mean? Wrong to pray with your fellow-men?"

"Perhaps the hour may come, ma'am, when I shall be able to pray with my fellow-men, even though the words they use seem addressed to a tyrant, not to the Father of Jesus Christ. But at present I can not. I might endure to hear Mr. Smith say evil things concerning God, but the evil things he says to God make me quite unable to pray, and I feel like a hypocrite!"

"Whatever you may think of Mr. Smith's doctrines, it is presumptuous to set yourself up as too good to go to church."

"I most bear the reproach, ma'am. I can not consent to be a hypocrite in order to avoid being called one!"

Either Miss Fordyce had no answer to this, or did not choose to give any. She was not troubled that Andrew would not go to church, but offended at the unhesitating decision with which he set her counsel aside. Andrew made her a respectful bow, turned away, put on his bonnet, which he had held in his hand all the time, and passed through the garden gate.

"Who is the fellow?" asked George, partaking sympathetically of his companion's annoyance.

"He is Andrew Ingram, the son of a small farmer, one of my father's tenants. He and his brother work with their father on the farm. They are quite respectable people. Andrew is conceited, but has his good points. He imagines himself a poet, and indeed his work has merit. The worst of him is that he sets up for being better than other people."

“Not an unusual fault with the self-educated!”

“He does go on educating himself, I believe, but he had a good start to begin with. My father took much pains with him at school. He helped to carry you here after the accident—and would have taken you to his father’s if I would have let him.”

George cast on her a look of gratitude.

“Thank you for keeping me,” he said. “But I wish I had taken some notice of his kindness!”

CHAPTER X. ANDREW INGRAM

Of the persons in my narrative, Andrew Ingram is the simplest, therefore the hardest to be understood by an ordinary reader. I must take up his history from a certain point in his childhood.

One summer evening, he and his brother Sandy were playing together on a knoll in one of their father's fields. Andrew was ten years old, and Sandy a year younger. The two quarreled, and the spirit of ancestral borderers waking in them, they fell to blows. The younger was the stronger for his years, and they were punching each other with relentless vigor, when suddenly they heard a voice, and stopping their fight, saw before them an humble-looking man with a pack on his back. He was a peddler known in the neighborhood, and noted for his honesty and his silence, but the boys had never seen him. They stood abashed before him, dazed with the blows they had received, and not a little ashamed; for they were well brought up, their mother being an honest disciplinarian, and their father never interfering with what she judged right. The sun was near the setting, and shone with level rays full on the peddler; but when they thought of him afterward, they seemed to remember more light in his face than that of the sun. Their conscience bore him witness, and his look awed them. Involuntarily they turned from him, seeking refuge with each other: his eyes shone so! they said; but immediately

they turned to him again.

Sandy knew the pictures in the "Pilgrim's Progress," and Andrew had read it through more than once: when they saw the man had a book in his hand, open, and heard him, standing there in the sun, begin to read from it, they thought it must be Christian, waiting for Evangelist to come to him. It is impossible to say how much is fact and how much imagination in what children recollect; the one must almost always supplement the other; but they were quite sure that the words he read were these: "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world!" The next thing they remembered was their walking slowly down the hill in the red light, and all at once waking up to the fact that the man was gone, they did not know when or where. But their arms were round each other's necks, and they were full of a strange awe. Then Andrew saw something red on Sandy's face.

"Eh, Sandy!" he cried, "it's bluid!" and burst into tears.

It was his own blood, not Sandy's!—the discovery of which fact relieved Andrew, and did not so greatly discompose Sandy, who was less sensitive.

They began at length to speculate on what had happened. One thing was clear: it was because they were fighting that the man had come; but it was not so clear who the man was. He could not be Christian, because Christian went over the river! Andrew suggested it might have been Evangelist, for he seemed to be always about. Sandy added, as his contribution to the idea, that he might have picked up Christian's bundle and been carrying it

home to his wife. They came, however, to the conclusion, by no ratiocination, I think, but by a conviction which the idea itself brought with it, that the stranger was the Lord himself, and that the pack on His back was their sins, which He was carrying away to throw out of the world.

"Eh, wasna it fearfu' He should come by jist when we was fechtin'!" said Sandy.

"Eh, na! it was a fine thing that! We micht hae been at it yet! But we winna noo!—will we ever, Sandy?"

"Na, that we winna!"

"For," continued Andrew, "He said 'Lo, I am with you always!' And suppose He werena, we daurna be that ahint His back we would na be afore His face!"

"Do you railly think it *was* Him, Andrew?"

"Weel," replied Andrew, "gien the deevil be goin' aboot like a roarin' lion, seekin' whom he may devoor, as father says, it's no likely *He* would na be goin' aboot as weel, seekin' to haud him aff o' 's!"

"Ay!" said Sandy.

"And noo," said the elder, "what are we to do?"

For Andrew, whom both father and mother judged the dreamiest of mortals, was in reality the most practical being in the whole parish—so practical that by and by people mocked him for a poet and a heretic, because he did the things which they said they believed. Most unpractical must every man appear who genuinely believes in the things that are unseen. The man

called practical by the men of this world is he who busies himself building his house on the sand, while he does not even bespeak a lodging in the inevitable beyond.

"What are we to do?" said Andrew. "If the Lord is going about like that, looking after us, we've surely got something to do looking after *Him!*"

There was no help in Sandy; and it was well that, with the reticence of children, neither thought of laying the case before their parents; the traditions of the elders would have ill agreed with the doctrine they were now under! Suddenly it came into Andrew's mind that the book they read at *worship* to which he had never listened, told all about Jesus.

He began at the beginning, and grew so interested in the stories that he forgot why he had begun to read it One day, however, as he was telling Sandy about Jacob—"What a shame!" said Sandy; and Andrew's mind suddenly opened to the fact that he had got nothing yet out of the book. He threw it from him, echoing Sandy's words, "What's a shame!"—not of Jacob's behavior, but of the Bible's, which had all this time told them nothing about the man that was going up and down the world, gathering up their sins, and carrying them away in His pack! But it dawned upon him that it was the New Testament that told about Jesus Christ, and they turned to that. Here also I say it was well they asked no advice, for they would probably have been directed to the Epistle to the Romans, with explanations yet more foreign to the heart of Paul than false to his Greek. They began to read

the story of Jesus as told by his friend Matthew, and when they had ended it, went on to the gospel according to Mark. But they had not read far when Sandy cried out:

"Eh, Andrew, it's a' the same thing ower again!"

"No a'thegither," answered Andrew. "We'll gang on, and see!"

Andrew came to the conclusion that it was so far the same that he would rather go back and read the other again, for the sake of some particular things he wanted to make sure about So the second time they read St. Matthew, and came to these words:

"If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven."

"There's twa o' 's here!" cried Andrew, laying down the book. "Lat's try 't!"

"Try what?" said Sandy.

His brother read the passage again.

"Lat the twa o' 's speir Him for something!" concluded Andrew. "What wull't be?"

"I won'er if it means only ance, or may be three times, like 'The Three Wishes!'" suggested Sandy, who, like most Christians, would rather have a talk about it than do what he was told.

"We *might* ask for what would not be good for us!" returned Andrew.

"And make fools of ourselves!" assented Sandy, with "The Three Wishes" in his mind.

"Do you think He would give it us then?"

"I don't know."

"But," pursued Andrew, "if we were so foolish as that old man and woman, it would be better to find it out, and begin to grow wise!—I'll tell you what we'll do: we'll make it our first wish to know what's best to ask for; and then we can go on asking!"

"Yes, yes; let us!"

"I fancy we'll have as many wishes as we like! Doon upo' yer knees, Sandy!"

They knelt together.

I fear there are not a few to say, "How ill-instructed the poor children were!—actually mingling the gospel and the fairy tales!" "Happy children," say I, "who could blunder into the very heart of the will of God concerning them, and *do* the thing at once that the Lord taught them, using the common sense which God had given and the fairy tale nourished!" The Lord of the promise is the Lord of all true parables and all good fairy tales.

Andrew prayed:

"Oh, Lord, tell Sandy and me what to ask for. We're unanimous."

They got up from their knees. They had said what they had to say: why say more!

They felt rather dull. Nothing came to them. The prayer was prayed, and they could not make the answer! There was no use in reading more! They put the Bible away in a rough box where they kept it among rose-leaves—ignorant priests of the lovely mystery

of Him who was with them always—and without a word went each his own way, not happy, for were they not leaving Him under the elder-tree, lonely and shadowy, where it was their custom to meet! Alas for those who must go to church to find Him, or who can not pray unless in their closet!

They wandered about disconsolate, at school and at home, the rest of the day—at least Andrew did; Sandy had Andrew to lean upon! Andrew had Him who was with them always, but He seemed at the other end of the world. They had prayed, and there was no more of it!

In the evening, while yet it was light, Andrew went alone to the elder-tree, took the Bible from its humble shrine, and began turning over its leaves.

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" He read, and sunk deep in thought.

This is the way his thoughts went:

"What things? What had He been saying? Let me look and see what He says, that I may begin to do it!"

He read all the chapter, and found it full of *tellings*. When he read it before he had not thought of doing one of the things He said, for as plainly as He told him! He had not once thought He had any concern in the matter!

"I see!" he said; "we must begin at once to do what He tells us!"

He ran to find his brother.

"I've got it!" he cried: "I've got it!"

"What?"

"What we've got to do"

"And what is it?"

"Just what He tells us."

"We were doing that," said Sandy, "when we prayed Him to tell us what to pray for!"

"So we were! That's grand!"

"Then haven't we got to pray for anything more?"

"We'll soon find out; but first we must look for something to do!"

They began at once to search for things the Lord told them to do. And of all they found, the plainest and easiest was: "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." This needed no explanation! it was as clear as the day to both of them!

The very next morning the school-master, who, though of a gentle disposition, was irritable, taking Andrew for the offender in a certain breach of discipline, gave him a smart box on the ear. Andrew, as readily as if it had been instinctively, turned to him the other cheek.

An angry man is an evil interpreter of holy things, and Mr. Fordyce took the action for one of rudest mockery, nor thought of the higher master therein mocked if it were mockery: he struck the offender a yet smarter blow. Andrew stood for a minute like one dazed; but the red on his face was not that of anger; he was perplexed as to whether he ought now to turn the former cheek

again to the striker. Uncertain, he turned away, and went to his work.

Stops a reader here to say: "But do you really mean to tell us we ought to take the words literally as Andrew did?" I answer: "When you have earned the right to understand, you will not need to ask me. To explain what the Lord means to one who is not obedient, is the work of no man who knows his work."

It is but fair to say for the school-master that, when he found he had mistaken, he tried to make up to the boy for it —not by confessing himself wrong—who could expect that of only a school-master?—but by being kinder to him than before. Through this he came to like him, and would teach him things out of the usual way—such as how to make different kinds of verse.

By and by Andrew and Sandy had a quarrel. Suddenly Andrew came to himself, and cried:

"Sandy! Sandy! He says we're to agree!"

"Does He?"

"He says we're to love one another, and we canna do that if we dinna agree!"

There came a pause.

"Perhaps after all you were in the right, Sandy!" said Andrew.

"I was just going to say that; when I think about it, perhaps I wasn't so much in the right as I thought I was!"

"It can't matter much which was in the right, when we were both in the wrong!" said Andrew. "Let's ask Him to keep us from caring which is in the right, and make us both try to be in the

right We don't often differ about what we are to ask for, Sandy!"

"No, we don't."

"It's me to take care of you, Sandy!"

"And me to take care of you, Andrew!"

Here was the nucleus of a church!—two stones laid on the foundation-stone.

"Luik here, Sandy!" said Andrew; "we maun hae anither, an' syne there'll be four o' 's!"

"How's that?" asked Sandy.

"I won'er 'at we never noticed it afore! Here's what He says: 'For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.' In that way, wharever He micht be walkin' aboot, we could aye get Him! He likes twa, an' His Father 'ill hear the 'greed prayer, but He likes three better—an' that stan's to rizzon, for three maun be better 'n twa! First ane maun lo'e Him; an' syne twa can lo'e Him better, because ilk ane is helpit by the ither, an' lo'es Him the mair that He lo'es the ither ane! An' syne comes the third, and there's mair an' mair throwin' o' lichts, and there's the Lord himsel' i' the mids' o' them! Three maks a better mids' than twa!"

Sandy could not follow the reasoning quite, but he had his own way of understanding.

"It's jist like the story o' Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!" he said. "There was three o' them, an' sae He made four! Eh, jist think o' Him bein' wi' 's His verra sel'!"

Here now was a church indeed: the idea of a third was the very

principle of growth! They would meet together and say: "Oh, Father of Jesus Christ, help us to be good like Jesus;" and then Jesus himself would make one of them, and worship the Father with them!

The next thing, as a matter of course, was to look about for a third.

"Dawtie!" cried both at once.

Dawtie was the child of a cotter pair, who had an acre or two of their father's farm, and helped him with it. Her real name has not reached me; *Dawtie* means *darling*, and is a common term of endearment—derived, Jamieson suggests, from the Gaelic *dalt*, signifying *a foster-child*. Dawtie was a dark-haired, laughing little darling, with shy, merry manners, and the whitest teeth, full of fun, but solemn in an instant. Her small feet were bare and black—except on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings—but full of expression, and perhaps really cleaner, from their familiarity with the sweet all-cleansing air, than such as hide the day-long in socks and shoes.

Dawtie's specialty was love of the creatures. She had an undoubting conviction that every one of them with which she came in contact understood and loved her. She was the champion of the oppressed, without knowing it. Every individual necessity stood on its own merits, and came to her fresh and sole, as if she had forgotten all that went before it. Like some boys she had her pockets as well as her hands at the service of live things; but unlike any boy, she had in her love no admixture of natural

history; it was not interest in animals with her, but an individual love to the individual animal, whatever it might be, that presented itself to the love-power in her.

It may seem strange that there should be three such children together. But their fathers and mothers had for generations been poor—which was a great advantage, as may be seen in the world by him who has eyes to see, and heard in the parable of the rich man by him who has ears to hear. Also they were God-fearing, which was a far greater advantage, and made them honorable; for they would have scorned things that most Christians will do. Dawtie's father had a rarely keen instinct for what is mean, and that not in the way of abhorrence in others, but of avoidance in himself. To shades and *nuances* of selfishness, which men of high repute and comfortable conscience would neither be surprised to find in their neighbors nor annoyed to find in themselves, he would give no quarter. Along with Andrew's father, he had, in childhood and youth, been under the influence of a simple-hearted pastor, whom the wise and prudent laughed at as one who could not take care of himself, incapable of seeing that, like his master, he laid down his life that he might take it again. He left God to look after him, that he might be free to look after God.

Little Dawtie had learned her catechism, but, thank God, had never thought about it or attempted to understand it—good negative preparation for becoming, in a few years more, able to understand the New Testament with the heart of a babe.

The brothers had not long to search before they came upon

her, where she sat on the ground at the door of the turf-built cottage, feeding a chicken with oatmeal paste.

"What are you doin', Dawtie?" they asked.

"I'm tryin'," she answered, without looking up, "to haud the life i' the chuckie."

"What's the matter wi' 't?"

"Naething but the want o' a mither."

"Is the mither o' 't deid?"

"Na, she's alive eneuch, but she has ower mony bairns to hap them a'; her wings winna cower them, and she drives this ane awa', and winna lat it come near her."

"Sic a cruel mither!"

"Na, she's no' cruel. She only wants to gar't come to me! She kenned I would tak it. Na, na; Flappy's a guid mither! I ken her weel; she's ane o' our ain! She kens me, or she would hae keepit the puir thing, and done her best wi' her."

"I ken somebody," said Andrew, "that would fain spread oot wings, like a great big hen, ower a' the bairns, you an' me an' a', Dawtie!"

"That's my mither!" cried Dawtie, looking up, and showing her white teeth.

"Na, it's a man," said Sandy.

"It's my father, than!"

"Na, it's no. Would ye like to see Him?"

"Na, I'm no carin'."

"Sandy and me's gaein' to see Him some day."

"I'll gang wi' ye. But I maun tak' my chuckie!"

She looked down where she had set the little bird on the ground; it had hobbled away and she could not see it!

"Eh," she cried, starting up, "ye made me forget my chuckie wi' yer questions! It's mither 'ill peck it!"

She darted off, and forsook the tale of the Son of Man to look after her chicken. But presently she returned with it in her hands.

"Tell awa'," she said, resuming her seat "What do they ca' Him?"

"They ca' Him the Father o' Jesus Christ."

"I'll gang wi' ye," she answered.

So the church was increased by a whole half, and the fraction of a chicken—type of the groaning creation, waiting for the sonship.

The three gathered to read and pray. And almost always there was some creature with them in the arms or hands of Dawtie. And if the Lord was not there, too, then are we Christians most miserable, for we see a glory beyond all that man could dream, and it is but a dream! Whose dream?

They went on at other times with the usual employments and games of children. But there was this difference between them and most grown Christians, that when anything roused thought or question they at once referred it to the word of Jesus, and having discovered His will, made haste to do it. It naturally followed that, seeing He gives the spirit to them that obey Him, they grew rapidly in the modes of their Master, learning to look at things

as He looked at them, to think of them as He thought of them, to value what He valued, and despise what He despised—all in simplest order of divine development, in uttermost accord with highest reason, the whole turning on the primary and continuous effort to obey.

It was long before they came to have any regular time of meeting. Andrew always took the initiative in assembling the church. When he called they came together. Then he would read from the story, and communicate any discovery he had made concerning what Jesus would have them do. Next, they would consult and settle what they should ask for, and one of them, generally Andrew, but sometimes Sandy, would pray. They made no formal utterance, but simply asked for what they needed. Here are some specimens of their petitions:

"Oh, Lord, Sandy canna for the life o' 'im un'erstan' the rule o' three; please, Lord, help him."

"Oh, Lord, I dinna ken onything I want the day; please gi'e us what we need, an' what ye want us to hae, wi'oot our askin' it."

"Lord, help us; we're ill-natnr'd (*bad-tempered*) the day; an' ye wadna hae us that."

"Lord, Dawtie's mither has a sair heid (*headache*); mak her better, gien ye please."

When their prayers were ended Andrew would say: "Sandy, have you found anything He says?" and there-upon, if he had, Sandy would speak. Dawtie never said a word, but sat and listened with her big eyes, generally stroking some creature in

her lap.

Surely the part of every superior is to help the life in the lower!

Once the question arose, in their assembly of three and a bird, whose leg Dawtie had put in splints, what became of the creatures when they died. They concluded that the sparrow that God cared for must be worth caring for; and they could not believe He had made it to last only such a little while as its life in this world. Thereupon they agreed to ask the Lord that, when they died, they might have again a certain dog, an ugly little white mongrel, of which they had been very fond. All their days thereafter they were, I believe, more or less consciously, looking forward to the fulfillment of this petition. For their hope strengthened with the growth of their ideal; and when they had to give up any belief it was to take a better in its place.

They yielded at length the notion that the peddler was Jesus Christ, but they never ceased to believe that He was God's messenger, or that the Lord was with them always. They would not insist that He was walking about on the earth, but to the end of their days they cherished the uncertain hope that they might, even without knowing it, look upon the face of the Lord in that of some stranger passing in the street, or mingling in a crowd, or seated in a church; for they knew that all the shapes of man belong to Him, and that, after He rose from the dead there were several occasions on which He did not at first look like Himself to those to whom He appeared.

The child-like, the essential, the divine notion of serving, with

their every-day will and being, the will of the living One, who lived for them that they might live, as once He had died for them that they might die, ripened in them to a Christianity that saw God everywhere, saw that everything had to be done as God would have it done, and that nothing but injustice had to be forsaken to please Him. They were under no influence of what has been so well called *other-worldliness*, for they saw this world as much God's as that, saw that its work has to be done divinely, that it is the beginning of the world to come. It was to them all one world, with God in it, all in all; therefore the best work for the other world was the work of this world.

Such was the boyhood of that Andrew Ingram whom Miss Fordyce now reproved for not setting the good example of going to church.

The common sense of the children rapidly developed, for there is no teacher like obedience, and no obstruction like its postponement. When in after years their mothers came at length to understand that obedience had been so long the foundation of their life, it explained to them many things that had seemed strange, and brought them to reproach themselves that they should have seemed strange.

It ought not to be overlooked that the whole thing was wrought in the children without directed influence of kindred or any neighbor. They imitated none. The galvanism of imitation is not the life of the spirit; the use of form where love is not is killing. And if any one is desirous of spreading the truth let him apply

himself, like these children, to the doing of it; not obeying the truth, he is doubly a liar pretending to teach it; if he obeys it already, let him obey it more. It is life that awakes life. All form of persuasion is empty except in vital association with regnant obedience. Talking and not doing is dry rot.

Cottage children are sometimes more fastidious about their food than children that have a greater variety; they have a more delicate perception and discrimination in the simple dishes on which they thrive; much choice, though little refusal. Andrew had a great dislike to lumps in his porridge; and one day the mother having been less careful than usual in cooking it, he made a wry face at the first spoonful.

"Andrew," said Sandy, "take no thought for what ye eat."

It was a wrong interpretation, but a righteous use of the word. Happy the soul that mistakes the letter only to get at the spirit!

Andrew's face smoothed itself, began to clear up, and broke at last into a sunny smile. He said nothing, but eat his full share of the porridge without a frown. This was practical religion; and if any one judge it not worth telling, I count his philosophy worthless beside it. Such a doer knows more than such a reader will ever know, except he take precisely the same way to learn. The children of God do what He would have them do, and are taught of Him.

A report at length reached the pastor, now an old man, of ripe heart and true insight, that certain children in his parish "played at the Lord's Supper." He was shocked, and went to their

parents. They knew nothing of the matter. The three children were sought, and the pastor had a private interview with them. From it he reappeared with a solemn, pale face, and silent tongue. They asked him the result of his inquiry. He answered that he was not prepared to interfere: as he was talking with them, the warning came that there were necks and mill-stones. The next Sunday he preached a sermon from the text, "Out of the month of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise."

The fathers and mothers made inquisition, and found no desire to conceal. Wisely or not, they forbade the observance. It cost Andrew much thought whether he was justified in obeying them; but he saw that right and wrong in itself was not concerned, and that the Lord would have them obey their parents.

It was necessary to tell so much of the previous history of Andrew, lest what remains to be told should perhaps be unintelligible or seem incredible without it. A character like his can not be formed in a day; it must early begin to grow.

The bond thus bound between the children, altering in form as they grew, was never severed; nor was the lower creation ever cut off from its share in the petitions of any one of them. When they ceased to assemble as a community, they continued to act on the same live principles.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.