J. M. Barrie

The Little Minister

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Chapter One.
THE LOVE-LIGHT.

Long ago, in the days when our caged blackbirds never saw a king's soldier without whistling impudently, "Come ower the water to Charlie," a minister of Thrums was to be married, but something happened, and he remained a bachelor. Then, when he was old, he passed in our square the lady who was to have been his wife, and her hair was white, but she, too, was still unmarried. The meeting had only one witness, a weaver, and he said solemnly afterwards, "They didna speak, but they just gave one another a look, and I saw the love-light in their een." No more is remembered of these two, no being now living ever saw them, but the poetry that was in the soul of a battered weaver makes them human to us for ever.

It is of another minister I am to tell, but only to those who know that light when they see it. I am not bidding good-bye to many readers, for though it is true that some men, of whom Lord Rintoul was one, live to an old age without knowing love, few of us can have met them, and of women so incomplete I never heard.

Gavin Dishart was barely twenty-one when he and his mother came to Thrums, light-hearted like the traveller who knows not what awaits him at the bend of the road. It was the time of year when the ground is carpeted beneath the firs with brown needles, when split-nuts patter all day from the beech, and children lay yellow corn on the dominie's desk to remind him that now they are needed in the fields. The day was so silent that carts could be heard rumbling a mile away. All Thrums was out in its wynds and closes—a few of the weavers still in knee-breeches—to look at the new Auld Licht minister. I was there too, the dominie of Glen Quharity, which is four miles from Thrums; and heavy was my heart as I stood afar off so that Gavin's mother might not have the pain of seeing me. I was the only one in the crowd who looked at her more than at her son.

Eighteen years had passed since we parted. Already her hair had lost the brightness of its youth, and she seemed to me smaller and more fragile; and the face that I loved when I was a hobbledehoy, and loved when I looked once more upon it in Thrums, and always shall love till I die, was soft and worn. Margaret was an old woman, and she was only forty-three; and I am the man who made her old. As Gavin put his eager boyish face out at the carriage window, many saw that he was holding her hand, but none could be glad at the sight as the dominie was glad, looking on at a happiness in which he dared not mingle. Margaret was crying because she was so proud of her boy. Women do that. Poor sons to be proud of, good mothers, but I would not have you dry those tears.

A STREET IN THRUMS.

When the little minister looked out at the carriage window, many of the people drew back humbly, but a little boy in a red frock with black spots pressed forward and offered him a sticky parly, which Gavin accepted, though not without a tremor, for children were more terrible to him then than bearded men. The boy's mother, trying not to look elated, bore him away, but her face said that he was made for life. With this little incident Gavin's career in Thrums began. I remembered it suddenly the other day when wading across the wynd where it took place. Many scenes in the little minister's life come back to me in this way. The first time I ever thought of writing his love story as an old man's gift to a little maid since grown tall, was one night while I sat alone in the school-house; on my knees a fiddle that has been my only living companion since I sold my hens. My mind had drifted back to the first time I saw Gavin and the Egyptian together, and what set it wandering to that midnight meeting was my garden gate shaking in the wind. At a gate on the hill I had first encountered these two. It rattled in his hand, and I looked up and saw them, and neither knew why I had such cause to start at the sight. Then the gate swung to. It had just such a click as mine.

These two figures on the hill are more real to me than things that happened yesterday, but I do not know that I can make them live to others. A ghost-show used to come yearly to Thrums on the merry Muckle Friday, in which the illusion was contrived by hanging a glass between the onlookers and the stage. I cannot deny that the comings and goings of the ghost were highly diverting, yet the farmer of T'nowhead only laughed because he had paid his money at the hole in the door like the rest of us. T'nowhead sat at the end of a form where he saw round the glass and so saw no ghost. I fear my public may be in the same predicament. I see the little minister as he was at one-and-twenty, and the little girl to whom this story is to belong sees him, though the things I have to tell happened before she came into the world. But there are reasons why she should see; and I do not know that I can provide the glass for others. If they see round it, they will neither laugh nor cry with Gavin and Babbie.

When Gavin came to Thrums he was as I am now, for the pages lay before him on which he was to write his life. Yet he was not quite as I am. The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story, and writes another; and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it. But the biographer sees the last chapter while he is still at the first, and I have only to write over with ink what Gavin has written in pencil.

How often is it a phantom woman who draws the man from the way he meant to go? So was man created, to hunger for the ideal that is above himself, until one day there is magic in the air, and the eyes of a girl rest upon him. He does not know that it is he himself who crowned her, and if the girl is as pure as he, their love is the one form of idolatry that is not quite ignoble. It is the joining of two souls on their way to God. But if the woman be bad, the test of the man is when he wakens from his dream. The nobler his ideal, the further will he have been hurried down the wrong way, for those who only run after little things will not go far. His love may now sink into passion, perhaps only to stain its wings and rise again, perhaps to drown.

Babbie, what shall I say of you who make me write these things? I am not your judge. Shall we not laugh at the student who chafes when between him and his book comes the song of the thrushes, with whom, on the mad night you danced into Gavin's life, you had more in common than with Auld Licht ministers? The gladness of living was in your step, your voice was melody, and he was wondering what love might be.

"BABBIE."

You were the daughter of a summer night, born where all the birds are free, and the moon

christened you with her soft light to dazzle the eyes of man. Not our little minister alone was stricken by you into his second childhood. To look upon you was to rejoice that so fair a thing could be; to think of you is still to be young. Even those who called you a little devil, of whom I have been one, admitted that in the end you had a soul, though not that you had been born with one. They said you stole it, and so made a woman of yourself. But again I say I am not your judge, and when I picture you as Gavin saw you first, a bare-legged witch dancing up Windyghoul, rowan berries in your black hair, and on your finger a jewel the little minister could not have bought with five years of toil, the shadows on my pages lift, and I cannot wonder that Gavin loved you.

Often I say to myself that this is to be Gavin's story, not mine. Yet must it be mine too, in a manner, and of myself I shall sometimes have to speak; not willingly, for it is time my little tragedy had died of old age. I have kept it to myself so long that now I would stand at its grave alone. It is true that when I heard who was to be the new minister I hoped for a day that the life broken in Harvie might be mended in Thrums, but two minutes' talk with Gavin showed me that Margaret had kept from him the secret which was hers and mine, and so knocked the bottom out of my vain hopes. I did not blame her then, nor do I blame her now, nor shall any one who blames her ever be called friend by me; but it was bitter to look at the white manse among the trees and know that I must never enter it. For Margaret's sake I had to keep aloof, yet this new trial came upon me like our parting at Harvie. I thought that in those eighteen years my passions had burned like a ship till they sank, but I suffered again as on that awful night when Adam Dishart came back, nearly killing Margaret and tearing up all my ambitions by the root in a single hour. I waited in Thrums until I had looked again on Margaret, who thought me dead, and Gavin, who had never heard of me, and then I trudged back to the school-house. Something I heard of them from time to time during the winter—for in the gossip of Thrums I was well posted—but much of what is to be told here I only learned afterwards from those who knew it best. Gavin heard of me at times as the dominie in the glen who had ceased to attend the Auld Licht kirk, and Margaret did not even hear of me. It was all I could do for them.

Chapter Two.
RUNS ALONGSIDE THE MAKING OF A MINISTER.

On the east coast of Scotland, hidden, as if in a quarry, at the foot of cliffs that may one day fall forward, is a village called Harvie. So has it shrunk since the day when I skulked from it that I hear of a traveller's asking lately at one of its doors how far he was from a village; yet Harvie throve once and was celebrated even in distant Thrums for its fish. Most of our weavers would have thought it as unnatural not to buy harvies in the square on the Muckle Friday, as to let Saturday night pass without laying in a sufficient stock of halfpennies to go round the family twice.

Gavin was born in Harvie, but left it at such an early age that he could only recall thatched houses with nets drying on the roofs, and a sandy shore in which coarse grass grew. In the picture he could not pick out the house of his birth, though he might have been able to go to it had he ever returned to the village. Soon he learned that his mother did not care to speak of Harvie, and perhaps he thought that she had forgotten it too, all save one scene to which his memory still guided him. When his mind wandered to Harvie, Gavin saw the door of his home open and a fisherman enter, who scratched his head and then said, "Your man's drowned, missis." Gavin seemed to see many women crying, and his mother staring at them with a face suddenly painted white, and next to hear a voice that was his own saying, "Never mind, mother; I'll be a man to you now, and I'll need breeks for the burial." But Adam required no funeral, for his body lay deep in the sea.

Gavin thought that this was the tragedy of his mother's life, and the most memorable event of his own childhood. But it was neither. When Margaret, even after she came to Thrums, thought of Harvie, it was not at Adam's death she shuddered, but at the recollection of me.

It would ill become me to take a late revenge on Adam Dishart now by saying what is not true of him. Though he died a fisherman he was a sailor for a great part of his life, and doubtless his recklessness was washed into him on the high seas, where in his time men made a crony of death, and drank merrily over dodging it for another night. To me his roars of laughter without cause were as repellent as a boy's drum; yet many faces that were long in my company brightened at his coming, and women, with whom, despite my yearning, I was in no wise a favorite, ran to their doors to listen to him as readily as to the bell-man. Children scurried from him if his mood was savage, but to him at all other times, while me they merely disregarded. There was always a smell of the sea about him. He had a rolling gait, unless he was drunk, when he walked very straight, and before both sexes he boasted that any woman would take him for his beard alone. Of this beard he took prodigious care, though otherwise thinking little of his appearance, and I now see that he understood women better than I did, who had nevertheless reflected much about them. It cannot be said that he was vain, for though he thought he attracted women strangely, that, I maintain, is a weakness common to all men, and so no more to be marvelled at than a stake in a fence. Foreign oaths were the nails with which he held his talk together, yet I doubt not they were a curiosity gathered at sea, like his chains of shells, more for his own pleasure than for others' pain. His friends gave them no weight, and when he wanted to talk emphatically he kept them back, though they were then as troublesome to him as eggs to the bird-nesting boy who has to speak with his spoil in his mouth.

Adam was drowned on Gavin's fourth birthday, a year after I had to leave Harvie. He was blown off his smack in a storm, and could not reach the rope his partner flung him. "It's no go, lad," he shouted; "so long, Jim," and sank.

A month afterwards Margaret sold her share in the smack, which was all Adam left her, and the furniture of the house was rouped. She took Gavin to Glasgow, where her only brother needed a housekeeper, and there mother and son remained until Gavin got his call to Thrums. During those seventeen years I lost knowledge of them as completely as Margaret had lost knowledge of me. On hearing of Adam's death I went back to Harvie to try to trace her, but she had feared this, and so told no one where she was going.

According to Margaret, Gavin's genius showed itself while he was still a child. He was born with a brow whose nobility impressed her from the first. It was a minister's brow, and though Margaret herself was no scholar, being as slow to read as she was quick at turning bannocks on the girdle, she decided, when his age was still counted by months, that the ministry had need of him. In those days the first question asked of a child was not, "Tell me your name," but "What are you to be?" and one child in every family replied, "A minister." He was set apart for the Church as doggedly as the shilling a week for the rent, and the rule held good though the family consisted of only one boy. From his earliest days Gavin thought he had been fashioned for the ministry as certainly as a spade for digging, and Margaret rejoiced and marvelled thereat, though she had made her own puzzle. An enthusiastic mother may bend her son's mind as she chooses if she begins at once; nay, she may do stranger things. I know a mother in Thrums who loves "features," and had a child born with no chin to speak of. The neighbors expected this to bring her to the dust, but it only showed what a mother can do. In a few months that child had a chin with the best of them.

Margaret's brother died, but she remained in his single room, and, ever with a picture of her son in a pulpit to repay her, contrived to keep Gavin at school. Everything a woman's fingers can do Margaret's did better than most, and among the wealthy people who employed her—would that I could have the teaching of the sons of such as were good to her in those hard days!—her gentle manner was spoken of. For though Margaret had no schooling, she was a lady at heart, moving and almost speaking as one even in Harvie, where they did not perhaps like her the better for it.

At six Gavin hit another boy hard for belonging to the Established Church, and at seven he could

not lose himself in the Shorter Catechism. His mother expounded the Scriptures to him till he was eight, when he began to expound them to her. By this time he was studying the practical work of the pulpit as enthusiastically as ever medical student cut off a leg. From a front pew in the gallery Gavin watched the minister's every movement, noting that the first thing to do on ascending the pulpit is to cover your face with your hands, as if the exalted position affected you like a strong light, and the second to move the big Bible slightly, to show that the kirk officer, not having had a university education, could not be expected to know the very spot on which it ought to lie. Gavin saw that the minister joined in the singing more like one countenancing a seemly thing than because he needed it himself, and that he only sang a mouthful now and again after the congregation was in full pursuit of the precentor. It was noteworthy that the first prayer lasted longer than all the others, and that to read the intimations about the Bible-class and the collection elsewhere than immediately before the last Psalm would have been as sacrilegious as to insert the dedication to King James at the end of Revelation. Sitting under a minister justly honoured in his day, the boy was often some words in advance of him, not vainglorious of his memory, but fervent, eager, and regarding the preacher as hardly less sacred than the Book. Gavin was encouraged by his frightened yet admiring mother to saw the air from their pew as the minister sawed it in the pulpit, and two benedictions were pronounced twice a Sabbath in that church, in the same words, the same manner, and simultaneously.

There was a black year when the things of this world, especially its pastimes, took such a grip of Gavin that he said to Margaret he would rather be good at the high jump than the author of "The Pilgrim's Progress." That year passed, and Gavin came to his right mind. One afternoon Margaret was at home making a glengarry for him out of a piece of carpet, and giving it a tartan edging, when the boy bounded in from school, crying, "Come quick, mother, and you'll see him." Margaret reached the door in time to see a street musician flying from Gavin and his friends. "Did you take stock of him, mother?" the boy asked when he reappeared with the mark of a muddy stick on his back. "He's a Papist!—a sore sight, mother, a sore sight. We stoned him for persecuting the noble Martyrs."

When Gavin was twelve he went to the university, and also got a place in a shop as errand boy. He used to run through the streets between his work and his classes. Potatoes and salt fish, which could then be got at two pence the pound if bought by the half-hundred weight, were his food. There was not always a good meal for two, yet when Gavin reached home at night there was generally something ready for him, and Margaret had supped "hours ago." Gavin's hunger urged him to fall to, but his love for his mother made him watchful.

"What did you have yourself, mother?" he would demand suspiciously.

"Oh, I had a fine supper, I assure you."

"What had you?"

"I had potatoes, for one thing."

"And dripping?"

"You may be sure."

"Mother, you're cheating me. The dripping hasn't been touched since yesterday."

"I dinna—don't—care for dripping—no much."

Then would Gavin stride the room fiercely, a queer little figure.

“Do you think I’ll stand this, mother? Will I let myself be pampered with dripping and every delicacy while you starve?”

“Gavin, I really dinna care for dripping.”

“Then I’ll give up my classes, and we can have butter.”

“I assure you I’m no hungry. It’s different wi’ a growing laddie.”

“I’m not a growing laddie,” Gavin would say, bitterly; “but, mother, I warn you that not another bite passes my throat till I see you eating too.”

So Margaret had to take her seat at the table, and when she said “I can eat no more,” Gavin retorted sternly, “Nor will I, for fine I see through you.”

These two were as one far more than most married people, and, just as Gavin in his childhood reflected his mother, she now reflected him. The people for whom she sewed thought it was contact with them that had rubbed the broad Scotch from her tongue, but she was only keeping pace with Gavin. When she was excited the Harvie words came back to her, as they come back to me. I have taught the English language all my life, and I try to write it, but everything I say in this book I first think to myself in the Doric. This, too, I notice, that in talking to myself I am broader than when gossiping with the farmers of the glen, who send their children to me to learn English, and then jeer at them if they say “old lights” instead of “auld lichts.”

To Margaret it was happiness to sit through the long evenings sewing, and look over her work at Gavin as he read or wrote or recited to himself the learning of the schools. But she coughed every time the weather changed, and then Gavin would start.

“You must go to your bed, mother,” he would say, tearing himself from his books; or he would sit beside her and talk of the dream that was common to both—a dream of a manse where Margaret was mistress and Gavin was called the minister. Every night Gavin was at his mother’s bedside to wind her shawl round her feet, and while he did it Margaret smiled.

“Mother, this is the chaff pillow you’ve taken out of my bed, and given me your feather one.”

“Gavin, you needna change them. I winna have the feather pillow.”

“Do you dare to think I’ll let you sleep on chaff? Put up your head. Now, is that soft?”

“It’s fine. I dinna deny but what I sleep better on feathers. Do you mind, Gavin, you bought this pillow for me the moment you got your bursary money?”

The reserve that is a wall between many of the Scottish poor had been broken down by these two. When he saw his mother sleeping happily, Gavin went back to his work. To save the expense of a lamp, he would put his book almost beneath the dying fire, and, taking the place of the fender, read till he was shivering with cold.

“Gavin, it is near morning, and you not in your bed yet! What are you thinking about so hard?”

“Oh, mother, I was wondering if the time would ever come when I would be a minister, and you would have an egg for your breakfast every morning.”

So the years passed, and soon Gavin would be a minister. He had now sermons to prepare, and

every one of them was first preached to Margaret. How solemn was his voice, how his eyes flashed, how stern were his admonitions.

“Gavin, such a sermon I never heard. The spirit of God is on you. I’m ashamed you should have me for a mother.”

“God grant, mother,” Gavin said, little thinking what was soon to happen, or he would have made this prayer on his knees, “that you may never be ashamed to have me for a son.”

“Ah, mother,” he would say wistfully, “it is not a great sermon, but do you think I’m preaching Christ? That is what I try, but I’m carried away and forget to watch myself.”

“The Lord has you by the hand, Gavin; and mind, I dinna say that because you’re my laddie.”

“Yes, you do, mother, and well I know it, and yet it does me good to hear you.”

That it did him good I, who would fain have shared those days with them, am very sure. The praise that comes of love does not make us vain, but humble rather. Knowing what we are, the pride that shines in our mother’s eyes as she looks at us is about the most pathetic thing a man has to face, but he would be a devil altogether if it did not burn some of the sin out of him.

Not long before Gavin preached for our kirk and got his call, a great event took place in the little room at Glasgow. The student appeared for the first time before his mother in his ministerial clothes. He wore the black silk hat, that was destined to become a terror to evil-doers in Thrums, and I dare say he was rather puffed up about himself that day. You would probably have smiled at him.

“It’s a pity I’m so little, mother,” he said with a sigh.

“You’re no what I would call a particularly long man,” Margaret said, “but you’re just the height I like.”

Then Gavin went out in his grandeur, and Margaret cried for an hour. She was thinking of me as well as of Gavin, and as it happens, I know that I was thinking at the same time of her. Gavin kept a diary in those days, which I have seen, and by comparing it with mine, I discovered that while he was showing himself to his mother in his black clothes, I was on my way back from Tilliedrum, where I had gone to buy a sand-glass for the school. The one I bought was so like another Margaret had used at Harvie that it set me thinking of her again all the way home. This is a matter hardly worth mentioning, and yet it interests me.

Busy days followed the call to Thrums, and Gavin had difficulty in forcing himself to his sermons when there was always something more to tell his mother about the weaving town they were going to, or about the manse or the furniture that had been transferred to him by the retiring minister. The little room which had become so familiar that it seemed one of a family party of three had to be stripped, and many of its contents were sold. Among what were brought to Thrums was a little exercise book, in which Margaret had tried, unknown to Gavin, to teach herself writing and grammar, that she might be less unfit for a manse. He found it accidentally one day. It was full of “I am, thou art, he is,” and the like, written many times in a shaking hand. Gavin put his arms round his mother when he saw what she had been doing. The exercise book is in my desk now, and will be my little maid’s when I die.

“Gavin, Gavin,” Margaret said many times in those last days at Glasgow, “to think it has all come true!”

“Let the last word you say in the house be a prayer of thankfulness,” she whispered to him when they were taking a final glance at the old home.

In the bare room they called the house, the little minister and his mother went on their knees, but, as it chanced, their last word there was not addressed to God.

“Gavin,” Margaret whispered as he took her arm, “do you think this bonnet sets me?”

Chapter Three.
THE NIGHT-WATCHERS.

What first struck Margaret in Thrums was the smell of the caddis. The town smells of caddis no longer, but whiffs of it may be got even now as one passes the houses of the old, where the lay still swings at little windows like a great ghost pendulum. To me it is a homely smell, which I draw in with a great breath, but it was as strange to Margaret as the weavers themselves, who, in their colored nightcaps and corduroys streaked with threads, gazed at her and Gavin. The little minister was trying to look severe and old, but twenty-one was in his eye.

“Look, mother, at that white house with the green roof. That is the manse.”

The manse stands high, with a sharp eye on all the town. Every back window in the Tenements has a glint of it, and so the back of the Tenements is always better behaved than the front. It was in the front that Jamie Don, a pitiful bachelor all his life because he thought the women proposed, kept his ferrets, and here, too, Beattie hanged himself, going straight to the clothes-posts for another rope when the first one broke, such was his determination. In the front Sanders Gilruth openly boasted (on Don’s potato-pit) that by having a seat in two churches he could lie in bed on Sabbath and get the credit of being at one or other. (Gavin made short work of him.) To the right-minded the Auld Licht manse was as a family Bible, ever lying open before them, but Beattie spoke for more than himself when he said, “Dagone that manse! I never gie a swear but there it is glowering at me.”

The manse looks down on the town from the north-east, and is reached from the road that leaves Thrums behind it in another moment by a wide, straight path, so rough that to carry a fraught of water to the manse without spilling was to be superlatively good at one thing. Packages in a cart it set leaping like trout in a fishing-creel. Opposite the opening of the garden wall in the manse, where for many years there had been an intention of putting up a gate, were two big stones a yard apart, standing ready for the winter, when the path was often a rush of yellow water, and this the only bridge to the glebe dyke, down which the minister walked to church.

When Margaret entered the manse on Gavin’s arm, it was a whitewashed house of five rooms, with a garret in which the minister could sleep if he had guests, as during the Fast week. It stood with its garden within high walls, and the roof facing southward was carpeted with moss that shone in the sun in a dozen shades of green and yellow. Three firs guarded the house from west winds, but blasts from the north often tore down the steep fields and skirled through the manse, banging all its doors at once. A beech, growing on the east side, leant over the roof as if to gossip with the well in the courtyard. The garden was to the south, and was over full of gooseberry and currant bushes. It contained a summer seat, where strange things were soon to happen.

Margaret would not even take off her bonnet until she had seen through the manse and opened all the presses. The parlour and kitchen were downstairs, and of the three rooms above, the study was so small that Gavin’s predecessor could touch each of its walls without shifting his position. Every room save Margaret’s had long-lidded beds, which close as if with shutters, but hers was coff-fronted, or comparatively open, with carving on the wood like the ornamentation of coffins.

Where there were children in a house they liked to slope the boards of the closed-in bed against the dresser, and play at sliding down mountains on them.

But for many years there had been no children in the manse. He in whose ways Gavin was to attempt the heavy task of walking had been a widower three months after his marriage, a man narrow when he came to Thrums, but so large-hearted when he left it that I, who know there is good in all the world because of the lovable souls I have met in this corner of it, yet cannot hope that many are as near to God as he. The most gladsome thing in the world is that few of us fall very low; the saddest that, with such capabilities, we seldom rise high. Of those who stand perceptibly above their fellows I have known very few; only Mr. Carfrae and two or three women.

Gavin only saw a very frail old minister who shook as he walked, as if his feet were striking against stones. He was to depart on the morrow to the place of his birth, but he came to the manse to wish his successor God-speed. Strangers were so formidable to Margaret that she only saw him from her window.

"May you never lose sight of God, Mr. Dishart," the old man said in the parlour. Then he added, as if he had asked too much, "May you never turn from Him as I often did when I was a lad like you."

As this aged minister, with the beautiful face that God gives to all who love Him and follow His commandments, spoke of his youth, he looked wistfully around the faded parlour.

"It is like a dream," he said. "The first time I entered this room the thought passed through me that I would cut down that cherry-tree, because it kept out the light, but, you see, it outlives me. I grew old while looking for the axe. Only yesterday I was the young minister, Mr. Dishart, and to-morrow you will be the old one, bidding good-bye to your successor."

His eyes came back to Gavin's eager face.

"You are very young, Mr. Dishart?"

"Nearly twenty-one."

"Twenty-one! Ah, my dear sir, you do not know how pathetic that sounds to me. Twenty-one! We are children for the second time at twenty-one, and again when we are grey and put all our burden on the Lord. The young talk generously of relieving the old of their burdens, but the anxious heart is to the old when they see a load on the back of the young. Let me tell you, Mr. Dishart, that I would condone many things in one-and-twenty now that I dealt hardly with at middle age. God Himself, I think, is very willing to give one-and-twenty a second chance."

"I am afraid," Gavin said anxiously, "that I look even younger."

"I think," Mr. Carfrae answered, smiling, "that your heart is as fresh as your face; and that is well. The useless men are those who never change with the years. Many views that I held to in my youth and long afterwards are a pain to me now, and I am carrying away from Thrums memories of errors into which I fell at every stage of my ministry. When you are older you will know that life is a long lesson in humility."

He paused.

"I hope," he said nervously, "that you don't sing the Paraphrases?"

Mr. Carfrae had not grown out of all his prejudices, you see; indeed, if Gavin had been less

bigoted than he on this question they might have parted stiffly. The old minister would rather have remained to die in his pulpit than surrender it to one who read his sermons. Others may blame him for this, but I must say here plainly that I never hear a minister reading without wishing to send him back to college.

"I cannot deny," Mr. Carfrae said, "that I broke down more than once to-day. This forenoon I was in Tillyloss, for the last time, and it so happens that there is scarcely a house in it in which I have not had a marriage or prayed over a coffin. Ah, sir, these are the scenes that make the minister more than all his sermons. You must join the family, Mr. Dishart, or you are only a minister once a week. And remember this, if your call is from above, it is a call to stay. Many such partings in a lifetime as I have had to-day would be too heartrending."

"And yet," Gavin said, hesitatingly, "they told me in Glasgow that I had received a call from the mouth of hell."

"Those were cruel words, but they only mean that people who are seldom more than a day's work in advance of want sometimes rise in arms for food. Our weavers are passionately religious, and so independent that they dare any one to help them, but if their wages were lessened they could not live. And so at talk of reduction they catch fire. Change of any kind alarms them, and though they call themselves Whigs, they rose a few years ago over the paving of the streets and stoned the workmen, who were strangers, out of the town."

"And though you may have thought the place quiet to-day, Mr. Dishart, there was an ugly outbreak only two months ago, when the weavers turned on the manufacturers for reducing the price of the web, made a bonfire of some of their doors, and terrified one of them into leaving Thrums. Under the command of some Chartists, the people next paraded the streets to the music of fife and drum, and six policemen who drove up from Tilliedrum in a light cart were sent back tied to the seats."

"No one has been punished?"

"Not yet, but nearly two years ago there was a similar riot, and the sheriff took no action for months. Then one night the square suddenly filled with soldiers, and the ringleaders were seized in their beds. Mr. Dishart, the people are determined not to be caught in that way again, and ever since the rising a watch has been kept by night on every road that leads to Thrums. The signal that the soldiers are coming is to be the blowing of a horn. If you ever hear that horn, I implore you to hasten to the square."

"The weavers would not fight?"

"You do not know how the Chartists have fired this part of the country. One misty day, a week ago, I was on the hill; I thought I had it to myself, when suddenly I heard a voice cry sharply, 'Shoulder arms.' I could see no one, and after a moment I put it down to a freak of the wind. Then all at once the mist before me blackened, and a body of men seemed to grow out of it. They were not shadows; they were Thrums weavers drilling, with pikes in their hands.

"They broke up," Mr. Carfrae continued, after a pause, "at my entreaty, but they have met again since then."

"And there were Auld Lichts among them?" Gavin asked. "I should have thought they would be frightened at our precentor, Lang Tammas, who seems to watch for backsliding in the congregation as if he had pleasure in discovering it."

Gavin spoke with feeling, for the precentor had already put him through his catechism, and it was a stiff ordeal.

"The precentor!" said Mr. Carfrae. "Why, he was one of them."

The old minister, once so brave a figure, tottered as he rose to go, and reeled in a dizziness until he had walked a few paces. Gavin went with him to the foot of the manse road; without his hat, as all Thrums knew before bedtime.

"I begin," Gavin said, as they were parting, "where you leave off, and my prayer is that I may walk in your ways."

"Ah, Mr. Dishart," the white-haired minister said, with a sigh, "the world does not progress so quickly as a man grows old. You only begin where I began."

He left Gavin, and then, as if the little minister's last words had hurt him, turned and solemnly pointed his staff upward. Such men are the strong nails that keep the world together.

The twenty-one-years-old minister returned to the manse somewhat sadly, but when he saw his mother at the window of her bedroom, his heart leapt at the thought that she was with him and he had eighty pounds a year. Gaily he waved both his hands to her, and she answered with a smile, and then, in his boyishness, he jumped over a gooseberry bush. Immediately afterwards he reddened and tried to look venerable, for while in the air he had caught sight of two women and a man watching him from the dyke. He walked severely to the door, and, again forgetting himself, was bounding upstairs to Margaret, when Jean, the servant, stood scandalised in his way.

"I don't think she caught me," was Gavin's reflection, and "The Lord preserve's!" was Jean's.

Gavin found his mother wondering how one should set about getting a cup of tea in a house that had a servant in it. He boldly rang the bell, and the willing Jean answered it so promptly (in a rush and jump) that Margaret was as much startled as Aladdin the first time he rubbed his lamp.

Manse servants of the most admired kind move softly, as if constant contact with a minister were goloshes to them; but Jean was new and raw, only having got her place because her father might be an elder any day. She had already conceived a romantic affection for her master; but to say "sir" to him—as she thirsted to do—would have been as difficult to her as to swallow oysters. So anxious was she to please that when Gavin rang she fired herself at the bedroom, but bells were novelties to her as well as to Margaret, and she cried, excitedly, "What is 't?" thinking the house must be on fire.

"There's a curran folk at the back door," Jean announced later, "and their respects to you, and would you gie them some water out o' the well? It has been a drouth this aucht days, and the pumps is locked. Na," she said, as Gavin made a too liberal offer, "that would toom the well, and there's jimply enough for oursels. I should tell you, too, that three o' them is no Auld Lichts."

"Let that make no difference," Gavin said grandly, but Jean changed his message to: "A bowlful apiece to Auld Lichts; all other denominations one cupful."

"Ay, ay," said Snecky Hobart, letting down the bucket, "and we'll include atheists among other denominations." The conversation came to Gavin and Margaret through the kitchen doorway.

"Dinna class Jo Cruickshanks wi' me," said Sam'l Langlands the U. P.

"Na, na," said Cruickshanks the atheist, "I'm ower independent to be religious. I dinna gang to

the kirk to cry, ‘Oh, Lord, gie, gie, gie.’”

“Take tent o’ yoursel’, my man,” said Lang Tammas sternly, “or you’ll soon be whaur you would neifer the warld for a cup o’ that cauld water.”

“Maybe you’ve ower keen an interest in the devil, Tammas,” retorted the atheist; “but, ony way, if it’s heaven for climate, it’s hell for company.”

“Lads,” said Snecky, sitting down on the bucket, “we’ll send Mr. Dishart to Jo. He’ll make another Rob Dow o’ him.”

“Speak mair reverently o’ your minister,” said the precentor. “He has the gift.”

“I hinna naturally your solemn rasping word, Tammas, but in the heart I speak in all reverence. Lads, the minister has a word! I tell you he prays near like one giving orders.”

“At first,” Snecky continued, “I thocht yon lang candidate was the earnestest o’ them a’, and I dinna deny but when I saw him wi’ his head bowed-like in prayer during the singing I says to mysel’, ‘Thou art the man.’ Ay, but Betsy wraxed up her head, and he wasna praying. He was combing his hair wi’ his fingers on the sly.”

“You ken fine, Sneck,” said Cruickshanks, “that you said, ‘Thou art the man’ to ilka ane o’ them, and just voted for Mr. Dishart because he preached hinmost.”

“I didna say it to Mr. Urquhart, the ane that preached second,” Sneck said. “That was the lad that gaed through ither.”

“Ay,” said Susy Tibbits, nicknamed by Haggart “the Timidest Woman” because she once said she was too young to marry, “but I was fell sorry for him, just being over anxious. He began bonny, flinging himself, like ane inspired, at the pulpit door, but after Hendry Munn pointed at it and cried out, ‘Be cautious, the sneck’s loose,’ he a’ gaed to bits. What a coolness Hendry has, though I suppose it was his duty, him being kirk-officer.”

“We didna want a man,” Lang Tammas said, “that could be put out by sic a sma’ thing as that. Mr. Urquhart was in sic a ravel after it that when he gies out the first line o’ the hunder and nineteenth psalm for singing, says he, ‘And so on to the end.’ Ay, that finished his chance.”

“The noblest o’ them to look at,” said Tibbie Birse, “was that ane frae Aberdeen, him that had sic a saft side to Jacob.”

“Ay,” said Snecky, “and I speired at Dr. McQueen if I should vote for him. ‘Looks like a genius, does he?’ says the Doctor. ‘Weel, then,’ says he, ‘dinna vote for him, for my experience is that there’s no folk sic idiots as them that looks like geniuses.’”

“Sal,” Susy said, “it’s a guid thing we’ve settled, for I enjoyed sitting like a judge upon them so muckle that I sair doubt it was a kind o’ sport to me.”

“It was no sport to them, Susy, I’se uphaud, but it is a blessing we’ve settled, and ondoubtedly we’ve got the pick o’ them. The only thing Mr. Dishart did that made me oneasy was his saying the word Cæsar as if it began wi’ a *k*.”

“He’ll startle you mair afore you’re done wi’ him,” the atheist said maliciously. “I ken the ways o’ thae ministers preaching for kirks. Oh, they’re cunning. You was a’ pleased that Mr. Dishart spoke

about looms and webs, but, lathies, it was a trick. Ilka ane o' thae young ministers has a sermon about looms for weaving congregations, and a second about beating swords into ploughshares for country places, and another on the great catch of fishes for fishing villages. That's their stock-in-trade; and just you wait and see if you dinna get the ploughshares and the fishes afore the month's out. A minister preaching for a kirk is one thing, but a minister placed in't may be a very different berry."

"Joseph Cruickshanks," cried the precentor, passionately, "none o' your d——d blasphemy!"

They all looked at Whamond, and he dug his teeth into his lips in shame.

"Wha's swearing now?" said the atheist.

But Whamond was quick.

"Matthew, twelve and thirty-one," he said.

"Dagont, Tammas," exclaimed the baffled Cruickshanks, "you're aye quoting Scripture. How do you no quote Feargus O'Connor?"

"Lads," said Snecky, "Jo hasna heard Mr. Dishart's sermons. Ay, we get it scalding when he comes to the sermon. I canna thole a minister that preaches as if heaven was round the corner."

"If you're hitting at our minister, Snecky," said James Cochrane, "let me tell you he's a better man than yours."

"A better curler, I dare say."

"A better prayer."

"Ay, he can pray for a black frost as if it was ane o' the Royal Family. I ken his prayers, 'O Lord, let it haud for anither day, and keep the snaw awa'.' Will you pretend, Jeames, that Mr. Duthie could make onything o' Rob Dow?"

"I admit that Rob's awakening was an extraordinary thing, and sufficient to gie Mr. Dishart a name. But Mr. Carfrae was baffled wi' Rob too."

"Jeames, if you had been in our kirk that day Mr. Dishart preached for't you would be wearying the now for Sabbath, to be back in't again. As you ken, that wicked man there, Jo Cruickshanks, got Rob Dow, drucken, cursing, poaching Rob Dow, to come to the kirk to annoy the minister. Ay, he hadna been at that work for ten minutes when Mr. Dishart stopped in his first prayer and ga'e Rob a look. I couldna see the look, being in the precentor's box, but as sure as death I felt it boring through me. Rob is hard wood, though, and soon he was at his tricks again. Weel, the minister stopped a second time in the sermon, and so awful was the silence that a heap o' the congregation couldna keep their seats. I heard Rob breathing quick and strong. Mr. Dishart had his arm pointed at him a' this time, and at last he says sternly, 'Come forward.' Listen, Joseph Cruickshanks, and tremble. Rob gripped the board to keep himsel' frae obeying, and again Mr. Dishart says, 'Come forward,' and syne Rob rose shaking, and tottered to the pulpit stair like a man suddenly shot into the Day of Judgment. 'You hulking man of sin,' cries Mr. Dishart, not a tick fleid, though Rob's as big as three o' him, 'sit down on the stair and attend to me, or I'll step doun frae the pulpit and run you out of the house of God.'"

"And since that day," said Hobart, "Rob has worshipped Mr. Dishart as a man that has stepped

out o' the Bible. When the carriage passed this day we was discussing the minister, and Sam'l Dickie wasna sure but what Mr. Dishart wore his hat rather far back on his head. You should have seen Rob. 'My certie,' he roars, 'there's the shine frae Heaven on that little minister's face, and them as says there's no has me to fecht.'"

"Ay, weel," said the U. P., rising, "we'll see how Rob wears—and how your minister wears too. I wouldna like to sit in a kirk whaur they daurna sing a paraphrase."

"The Psalms of David," retorted Whamond, "mount straight to heaven, but your paraphrases sticks to the ceiling o' the kirk."

"You're a bigoted set, Tammas Whamond, but I tell you this, and it's my last words to you the nicht, the day'll come when you'll hae Mr. Duthie, ay, and even the U. P. minister, preaching in the Auld Licht kirk."

"And let this be my last words to you," replied the precentor, furiously; "that rather than see a U. P. preaching in the Auld Licht kirk I would burn in hell fire for ever!"

This gossip increased Gavin's knowledge of the grim men with whom he had now to deal. But as he sat beside Margaret after she had gone to bed, their talk was pleasant.

"You remember, mother," Gavin said, "how I almost prayed for the manse that was to give you an egg every morning. I have been telling Jean never to forget the egg."

"Ah, Gavin, things have come about so much as we wanted that I'm a kind o' troubled. It's hardly natural, and I hope nothing terrible is to happen now."

Gavin arranged her pillows as she liked them, and when he next stole into the room in his stocking soles to look at her, he thought she was asleep. But she was not. I dare say she saw at that moment Gavin in his first frock, and Gavin in knickerbockers, and Gavin as he used to walk into the Glasgow room from college, all still as real to her as the Gavin who had a kirk.

The little minister took away the lamp to his own room, shaking his fist at himself for allowing his mother's door to creak. He pulled up his blind. The town lay as still as salt. But a steady light showed in the south, and on pressing his face against the window he saw another in the west. Mr. Carfrae's words about the night-watch came back to him. Perhaps it had been on such a silent night as this that the soldiers marched into Thrums. Would they come again?

Chapter Four.
FIRST COMING OF THE EGYPTIAN WOMAN.

A learned man says in a book, otherwise beautiful with truth, that villages are family groups. To him Thrums would only be a village, though town is the word we have ever used, and this is not true of it. Doubtless we have interests in common, from which a place so near (but the road is heavy) as Tilliedrum is shut out, and we have an individuality of our own too, as if, like our red houses, we came from a quarry that supplies no other place. But we are not one family. In the old days, those of us who were of the Tenements seldom wandered to the Croft head, and if we did go there we saw men to whom we could not always give a name. To flit from the Tanage brae to Haggart's road was to change one's friends. A kirk-wynd weaver might kill his swine and Tillyloss not know of it until boys ran westward hitting each other with the bladders. Only the voice of the dulsemen could be heard all over Thrums at once. Thus even in a small place but a few outstanding persons are known to everybody.

In eight days Gavin's figure was more familiar in Thrums than many that had grown bent in it. He had already been twice to the cemetery, for a minister only reaches his new charge in time to attend a funeral. Though short of stature he cast a great shadow. He was so full of his duties, Jean said, that though he pulled to the door as he left the manse, he had passed the currant bushes before it snecked. He darted through courts, and invented ways into awkward houses. If you did not look up quickly he was round the corner. His visiting exhausted him only less than his zeal in the pulpit, from which, according to report, he staggered damp with perspiration to the vestry, where Hendry Munn wrung him like a wet cloth. A deaf lady, celebrated for giving out her washing, compelled him to hold her trumpet until she had peered into all his crannies, with the Shorter Catechism for a lantern. Janet Dundas told him, in answer to his knock, that she could not abide him, but she changed her mind when he said her garden was quite a show. The wives who expected a visit scrubbed their floors for him, cleaned out their presses for him, put diamond socks on their bairns for him, rubbed their hearthstones blue for him, and even tidied up the garret for him, and triumphed over the neighbours whose houses he passed by. For Gavin blundered occasionally by inadvertence, as when he gave dear old Betty Davie occasion to say bitterly—

"Ou ay, you can sail by my door and gang to Easie's, but I'm thinking you would stop at mine too if I had a brass handle on't."

So passed the first four weeks, and then came the fateful night of the seventeenth of October, and with it the strange woman. Family worship at the manse was over and Gavin was talking to his mother, who never crossed the threshold save to go to church (though her activity at home was among the marvels Jean sometimes slipped down to the Tenements to announce), when Wearyworld the policeman came to the door "with Rob Dow's compliments, and if you're no wi' me by ten o'clock I'm to break out again." Gavin knew what this meant, and at once set off for Rob's.

"You'll let me gang a bit wi' you," the policeman entreated, "for till Rob sent me on this errand not a soul has spoken to me the day; ay, mony a ane hae I spoken to, but not a man, woman, nor bairn would fling me a word."

"I often meant to ask you," Gavin said as they went along the Tenements, which smelled at that hour of roasted potatoes, "why you are so unpopular."

"It's because I'm police. I'm the first ane that has ever been in Thrums, and the very folk that appointed me at a crown a week looks upon me as a disgraced man for accepting. It's Gospel that my ain wife is short wi' me when I've on my uniform, though weel she kens that I would rather hae stuck to the loom if I hadna ha'en sic a queer richt leg. Nobody feels the shame o' my position as I do mysel', but this is a town without pity."

"It should be a consolation to you that you are discharging useful duties."

"But I'm no. I'm doing harm. There's Charles Dickson says that the very sicht o' my uniform rouses his dander so muckle that it makes him break windows, though a peaceably-disposed man till I was appointed. And what's the use o' their haeing a policeman when they winna come to the lock-up after I lay hands on them?"

"Do they say they won't come?"

"Say? Catch them saying onything! They just gie me a wap into the gutters. If they would speak I wouldna complain, for I'm nat'rally the sociablest man in Thrums."

"Rob, however, had spoken to you."

“Because he had need o’ me. That was ay Rob’s way, converted or no converted. When he was blind drunk he would order me to see him safe hame, but would he crack wi’ me? Na, na.”

Wearyworld, who was so called because of his forlorn way of muttering, “It’s a weary warld, and nobody bides in’t,” as he went his melancholy rounds, sighed like one about to cry, and Gavin changed the subject.

“Is the watch for the soldiers still kept up?” he asked.

“It is, but the watchers winna let me in aside them. I’ll let you see that for yoursel’ at the head o’ the Roods, for they watch there in the auld windmill.”

Most of the Thrums lights were already out, and that in the windmill disappeared as footsteps were heard.

“You’re desperate characters,” the policeman cried, but got no answer. He changed his tactics.

“A fine nicht for the time o’ year,” he cried. No answer.

“But I wouldna wonder,” he shouted, “though we had rain afore morning.” No answer.

“Surely you could gie me a word frae ahint the door. You’re doing an onlawful thing, but I dinna ken wha you are.”

“You’ll swear to that?” some one asked gruffly.

“I swear to it, Peter.”

Wearyworld tried another six remarks in vain.

“Ay,” he said to the minister, “that’s what it is to be an onpopular man. And now I’ll hae to turn back, for the very anes that winna let me join them would be the first to complain if I gaed out o’ bounds.”

Gavin found Dow at New Zealand, a hamlet of mud houses, whose tenants could be seen on any Sabbath morning washing themselves in the burn that trickled hard by. Rob’s son, Micah, was asleep at the door, but he brightened when he saw who was shaking him.

“My father put me out,” he explained, “because he’s daft for the drink, and was fleid he would curse me. He hasna cursed me,” Micah added, proudly, “for an aught days come Sabbath. Hearken to him at his loom. He daurna take his feet off the treadles for fear o’ running straucht to the drink.”

Gavin went in. The loom, and two stools, the one four-footed and the other a buffet, were Rob’s most conspicuous furniture. A shaving-strap hung on the wall. The fire was out, but the trunk of a tree, charred at one end, showed how he heated his house. He made a fire of peat, and on it placed one end of a tree trunk that might be six feet long. As the tree burned away it was pushed further into the fireplace, and a roaring fire could always be got by kicking pieces of the smouldering wood and blowing them into flame with the bellows. When Rob saw the minister he groaned relief and left his loom. He had been weaving, his teeth clenched, his eyes on fire, for seven hours.

“I wasna fleid,” little Micah said to the neighbours afterwards, “to gang in wi’ the minister. He’s a fine man that. He didna ca’ my father names. Na, he said, ‘You’re a brave fellow, Rob,’ and he took my father’s hand, he did. My father was shaking after his fecht wi’ the drink, and, says he, ‘Mr.

Dishart,' he says, 'if you'll let me break out nows and nans, I could bide straucht atween times, but I canna keep sober if I hinna a drink to look forrit to.' Ay, my father prigged sair to get one fou day in the month, and he said, 'Syne if I die sudden, there's thirty chances to one that I gang to heaven, so it's worth risking.' But Mr. Dishart wouldna hear o't, and he cries, 'No, by God,' he cries, 'we'll wrestle wi' the devil till we throttle him,' and down him and my father gaed on their knees.

"The minister prayed a lang time till my father said his hunger for the drink was gone, 'but', he says, 'it swells up in me o' a sudden aye, and it may be back afore you're hame.' 'Then come to me at once,' says Mr. Dishart; but my father says, 'Na, for it would haul me into the public-house as if it had me at the end o' a rope, but I'll send the laddie.'

"You saw my father crying the minister back? It was to gie him twa pound, and, says my father, 'God helping me,' he says, 'I'll droon mysel in the dam rather than let the drink master me, but in case it should get haud o' me and I should die drunk, it would be a michty gratification to me to ken that you had the siller to bury me respectable without ony help frae the poor's rates.' The minister wasna for taking it at first, but he took it when he saw how earnest my father was. Ay, he's a noble man. After he gaed awa my father made me learn the names o' the apostles frae Luke sixth, and he says to me, 'Miss out Bartholomew,' he says, 'for he did little, and put Gavin Dishart in his place.'"

Feeling as old as he sometimes tried to look, Gavin turned homeward. Margaret was already listening for him. You may be sure she knew his step. I think our steps vary as much as the human face. My bookshelves were made by a blind man who could identify by their steps nearly all who passed his window. Yet he has admitted to me that he could not tell wherein my steps differed from others; and this I believe, though rejecting his boast that he could distinguish a minister's step from a doctor's, and even tell to which denomination the minister belonged.

I have sometimes asked myself what would have been Gavin's future had he gone straight home that night from Dow's. He would doubtless have seen the Egyptian before morning broke, but she would not have come upon him like a witch. There are, I dare say, many lovers who would never have been drawn to each other had they met for the first time, as, say, they met the second time. But such dreaming is to no purpose. Gavin met Sanders Webster, the mole-catcher, and was persuaded by him to go home by Caddam Wood.

Gavin took the path to Caddam, because Sanders told him the Wild Lindsays were there, a gypsy family that threatened the farmers by day and danced devilishly, it was said, at night. The little minister knew them by repute as a race of giants, and that not many persons would have cared to face them alone at midnight; but he was feeling as one wound up to heavy duties, and meant to admonish them severely.

Sanders, an old man who lived with his sister Nanny on the edge of the wood, went with him, and for a time both were silent. But Sanders had something to say.

"Was you ever at the Spittal, Mr. Dishart?" he asked.

"Lord Rintoul's house at the top of Glen Quharity? No."

"Hae you ever looked on a lord?"

"No."

"Or on an auld lord's young leddyship? I have."

"What is she?"

“You surely ken that Rintoul’s auld, and is to be married on a young leddyship. She’s no’ a leddyship yet, but they’re to be married soon, so I may say I’ve seen a leddyship. Ay, an impressive sicht. It was yestreen.”

“Is there a great difference in their ages?”

“As muckle as atween auld Peter Spens and his wife, wha was saxteen when he was saxty, and she was playing at dumps in the street when her man was waiting for her to make his porridge. Ay, sic a differ doesna suit wi’ common folk, but of course earls can please themsels. Rintoul’s so fond o’ the leddyship ’at is to be, that when she was at the school in Edinbury he wrote to her ilka day. Kaytherine Crummie telled me that, and she says aince you’re used to it, writing letters is as easy as skinning moles. I dinna ken what they can write sic a heap about, but I daur say he gies her his views on the Chartist agitation and the potato disease, and she’ll write back about the romantic sichts o’ Edinbury and the sermons o’ the grand preachers she hears. Sal, though, thae grand folk has no religion to speak o’, for they’re a’ English kirk. You’re no’ speiring what her leddyship said to me?”

“What did she say?”

“Weel, you see, there was a dancing ball on, and Kaytherine Crummie took me to a window whaur I could stand on a flower-pot and watch the critturs whirling round in the ball like teetotums. What’s mair, she pointed out the leddyship that’s to be to me, and I just glowered at her, for thinks I, ‘Take your fill, Sanders, and whaur there’s lords and leddyships, dinna waste a minute on colonels and honourable misses and sic like dirt.’ Ay, but what wi’ my een blinking at the blaze o’ candles, I lost sicht o’ her till all at aince somebody says at my lug, ‘Well, my man, and who is the prettiest lady in the room?’ Mr. Dishart, it was her leddyship. She looked like a star.”

“And what did you do?”

“The first thing I did was to fall aff the flower-pot; but syne I came to, and says I, wi’ a polite smirk, ‘I’m thinking your leddyship,’ says I, ‘as you’re the bonniest yourself.’”

“I see you are a cute man, Sanders.”

“Ay, but that’s no’ a’. She lauched in a pleased way and tapped me wi’ her fan, and says she, ‘Why do you think me the prettiest?’ I dinna deny but what that staggered me, but I thocht a minute, and took a look at the other dancers again, and syne I says, michty sly like, ‘The other leddies,’ I says, ‘has sic sma’ feet.’”

Sanders stopped here and looked doubtingly at Gavin.

“I canna make up my mind,” he said, “whether she liked that, for she rapped my knuckles wi’ her fan fell sair, and aff she gaed. Ay, I consulted Tammas Haggart about it, and he says, ‘The flirty crittur,’ he says. What would you say, Mr. Dishart?”

Gavin managed to escape without giving an answer, for here their roads separated. He did not find the Wild Lindsays, however. Children of whim, of prodigious strength while in the open, but destined to wither quickly in the hot air of towns, they had gone from Caddam, leaving nothing of themselves behind but a black mark burned by their fires into the ground. Thus they branded the earth through many counties until some hour when the spirit of wandering again fell on them, and they forsook their hearths with as little compunction as the bird leaves its nest.

Gavin had walked quickly, and he now stood silently in the wood, his hat in his hand. In the

moonlight the grass seemed tipped with hoar frost. Most of the beeches were already bare, but the shoots, clustering round them, like children at their mother’s skirts, still retained their leaves red and brown. Among the pines these leaves were as incongruous as a wedding-dress at a funeral. Gavin was standing on grass, but there were patches of heather within sight, and broom, and the leaf of the blaeberry. Where the beeches had drawn up the earth with them as they grew, their roots ran this way and that, slippery to the feet and looking like disinterred bones. A squirrel appeared suddenly on the charred ground, looked doubtfully at Gavin to see if he was growing there, and then glided up a tree, where it sat eyeing him, and forgetting to conceal its shadow. Caddam was very still. At long intervals came from far away the whack of an axe on wood. Gavin was in a world by himself, and this might be some one breaking into it.