

He happily saw me not, but passed into the house. When I went in I was somewhat prepared for him, because my intuition seemed to whisper in my ear that he was looking for me. He evidently thought I had been in the fields, forgetting that ever since Adam ate the apple boys prefer dreaming on a summer day to toil. So, greeting me warmly, he said: "Well, Donald, I'm glad tae see ye have na' forgotten hoo toe work. Ye'll need muckle brawn as well as brain in the meenistry, and the farm offers a graum' post-graduate course for a classical man."

I felt under no obligation to disabuse his mind, as explanations are always odious, so he continued: "I hae just been thinking aboot ye, Donald; ye'll be going up tae the Seminary in the fall, and ye ken it's a law o' our kirk that each student preach a trial sermon before entering Theology, so I've just droppit in tae inform you to be prepared tae preach at the next meeting o' Presbytery."

I always felt bashful in the presence of the old Doctor, but at that moment I felt a combination of sensations that would bewilder the most expert psychologist. Science had told me that the world is to come to an end by a process of refrigeration, but at that moment I imagined I could see its finish in a much less scientific manner. The ride within me suggested a tirade against the injustice of Presbyterian popery, which to my mind contradicted the fundamental principles of Protestantism, but no—I stood there as speechless as though I had never learned a language.

There was a sort of psychic suggestion, however, which gave me to understand that to comply was inevitable. I had not been brought up in a Scotch home without realizing the hopelessness of argument. The Doctor was kindly, but stern, yes, stubborn, for was ever a Scotchman born without having woven into the curious but admirable complexity of his nature a large amount of "sheer obstinacy"? (I think it has added not a little to the glory of Scottish history.)

But to preach my first sermon in that old village church! Preposterous! I thought, and had I been asked my philosophy of life at that moment I would have answered likely, "A war of independence."

"But, Doctor," I ventured, meekly enough, "does the church expect me to preach a sermon before entering the Seminary? Is that not putting the cart before the horse?"

"Aye, my lad," he replied, "but we're supposed to ken hoo ye staun' in the doctrines o' the kirk. There's sae much heresy abroad these days that we hae till tak' every precaution. Besides, ye'r guid auld father has taught ye theology from your vera infancy, and ye need na' fear, we'll no be vera severe in oor crecticism."

That was final, and I knew it. But he had given me a hard task! Reflection, indeed, made it seem appalling. To preach my first sermon in that old church where as a boy I had eaten crackers, and where old and young would be filled with curiosity, was no sinecure. Besides, my familiarity with Scripture comfortingly suggested the words, "A prophet has no honor in his own country."

I went into dinner, but behold! no appetite. Had I been in love it could not have disappeared more mysteriously. There are great crises in one's life when barley soup is just as palatable as a dish of oysters—terrible moments those! Life had suddenly absorbed into its content an element of terrible seriousness.

After dinner I was out under by old tree again. The selection of a subject was a problem, too. My mind was

crowded with high-sounding topics, for during my last year in Arts I had kept my eye on the theological world a little. I had become interested also in Higher Criticism—I suppose a young mind enjoys the romance of adventure in theology as well as in love. Would I preach a brilliant discourse on the Pentateuch, and show those people that Moses had little to do with it? Would I play havoc with tradition by telling those lovers of the Psalms that David never even saw them, or would I bring upon the stage of their Biblical history two stalwart, brilliant, statesmanlike Isaiahs?

Self-preservation is the first law of life, and I had sufficient subtlety and political genius to avoid anything in the way of theological vagary in a Highland kirk. Ambition was teasing me: I wanted to mount upon eagle's wings and let the unsophisticated villagers realize that they had unconsciously given a genius to the world.

During the next few weeks I earned my bread by the sweat of both brow and brain. Ideas were foreign. If it is true that character is built upon struggle, I must have been quite a respectable little saint by the end of those weeks. At last my sermon was finished, and as I read it over I was not altogether ashamed of it. Perhaps a thing can scarcely be ill-done when it costs one his life-blood, and what joy can be compared to that which comes to a man when he has been productive, creative?

It was a trying time, during which I learned that suspense had a meaning of which Webster never dreamed. Wherever I went I felt conscious of public interest. How awkward one gets when being tumbled about in the crucible of village gossip! It is said (I'll not discover the name, that he may die in peace) that a woman has reached meridianal happiness when every eye is upon her, but a man loves to prowl about incognito. There seemed to be more joints than I could manage properly, and I had great difficulty in walking as though I were an organized whole. But the worst was yet to come.

And it came! It was a day of no little excitement in the village church. There was an atmosphere of subdued interest and curiosity as the people filed slowly to their seats. The stillness was almost paralyzing; it was suggestive of things catastrophic; there was a strange, psychic prophecy of the final judgment. I'll never forget that first sermon. It was an hour of reminiscence. The past was conjured up with uncomfortable vividness, and before me flashed all my sins of commission (a boy has very few sins of omission), known to every one in that church. It would be attempting the impossible to give a description of my feelings as I faced that congregation. If their thoughts were following my sermon—which I doubt—mine were perambulating all over creation, indulging all sorts of imaginations and ardently courting memory. It is wonderful how many things one can think of at once, especially if they are disagreeable things.

In the course of the discourse I was saying that every man should look not on his own things, but on the things of others, when my eye lit on the face of old Elder Thompson. There was a smile upon it, but it was hard smile, such as rarely plays across the face of a friend. I tried to see sympathy in it, but my eyes were honest and would not flatter me. He was thinking of the foot-races through his orchard, with me in the lead and himself following, a good second. Many a chase had I given him, and I remember that once he used language that I have ever since searched for in the poets in vain. My favorite maxim during these escapades I remember was, "It is