

LIFE OF MANSIE WAUCH.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

Calf-Love.

EVERY noise I heard flustered me, but I calmed in time, though I went to my bed without my supper. When I was driving out the gaislings to the grass on the next morn, who was it my ill fate to meet but the blacksmith. "Oo, Mansie," said Jamie Coom, "are ye gaun to take me for your best man? I hear you are going to be cried in the kirk on Sunday?"

"Me!" answered I, shaking and staring.

"Yes!" said he. "Jess, the minister's maid, told me last night that you had been giving up your name at the manse. Ay, it's ower true—for she showed me the apples ye gied her in a present. This is a bonnie story, Mansie, my man, and you only at your prenticeship yet."

Terror and despair struck me dumb. I stood as still and as stiff as a web of buckram. My tongue was tied, and I could not contradict him. Jamie folded his arms and went away whistling, turning every now and then his sooty face over his shoulder, and mostly sticking his tongue as he could not keep his mouth screwed for laughing. What would I not have given to have laughed too?"

There was no time to be lost; this was the Saturday. The next rising sun would shine on the Sabbath. Ah, what a case I was in! I could mostly have drowned myself, had I not been frightened. What could I do? My love had vanished like lightning; but oh, I was in a terrible gliff! Instead of gundy, I sold my thrums to Mrs. Walnut for a penny, with which I bought at the counter a sheet of paper and a pen; so that in the afternoon I wrote out a letter to the minister telling him what I had been given to hear, and begging him for the sake of mercy, not to believe Jess's word, as I was not able to keep a wife, and as she was a leeing gypsy.

CHAPTER V.

CURSECOWL.

"From his red poll a redder cowl hung down;
His jacket, if through grease we guess, was brown;
A vigorous scamp, some forty summers old;
Rough Shetland stockings up his thighs were rolled;
While at his side horn-handled steels and knives
Gleamed through his pouch, and thirsted for sheep's lives."

—(*Doherty's Miscellaneous Classics.*)

But, losh me! I have come too far already, before mentioning a wonderful thing that happened to me when I was only seven years old. Few things in my eventful life have made a deeper impression on me than what I am going to relate.

It was the custom in those times, for the different schools to have cock-fighting on Fastern's E'en; and the victor, as he was called, treated the other scholars to a football. Many a dust have I seen rise out of that business—broken shins and broken heads, sore bones and sound duckings—but this was none of these.

Our next neighbour was a fletcher; and right before the window was a large stone, on which old wives with their weans would sometimes take a rest; so what does I, when I saw the whole hobbie-shaw coming fleeing down the street, with the kick-ba at their noses, but up I sped upon the stone (I was only a wee chap with a daidly, a ruffled shirt and

leather cap, edged with rabbit fur), that I might see all the fun. This one fell, and that one fell, and a third was knocked over, and a fourth got a bloody nose, and so on; and their was such a noise and din as would have deaved the workmen of Babel—when lo! and behold! the ball played bounce mostly at my feet, and the whole mob after it. I thought I should have been dune to pieces; so I pressed myself back with all my might, and through went my elbow into Cursecowl's kitchen. It did not stick long there. Before you could say Jack Robinson, out flew the fletcher in his killing clothes; his face was as red as fire, and he had his pouch full of bloody knives buck'd to his side. I skreighed out in his face when I looked at him, but he did not stop a moment for that. With a grin that was like to rive his mouth, he twisted his nieve in the back of my hair, and off with me hanging by the cuff of the neck, like a kittling. My eyes were like to loup out of my head, but I had no breath to cry. I heard him throw the key, for I could not look down, the skin of my face was pulled so tight; and he flang me like a pair of old boots into his booth, where I landed on my knees upon a raw bloody calf's skin. I thought I would have gone out of my wits, when I heard the door locked upon me, and looked round me in such an uncertain place. It had only one sparred window, and there was a garden behind, but how was I to get out? I danced round and round about, stamping my heels on the floor, and rubbing my begritten face with my coat sleeve. To make matters worse, it was wearing to the darkening. The floor was well covered with lappard blood, and sheep and calf skins. The calves and the sheep themselves, with their cuttit throats, and glazed een, and ghastly grinning faces, were hanging about on pins, heels uppermost. Losh me! I thought on Bluebeard and his wives in the bloody chamber!

And all the time it was growing darker and darker, and more dreary; and all was quiet as death itself. It looked, by all the world, like a grave, and rae buried alive within it; till the rottens came out of their holes to lick the blood and whisked about like wee evil sjirts. I thought on my father and my mother, and how I should never see them more; for I was sure that Cursecowl would come in the dark, tie my hands and feet together, and lay me across the killing-stool. I grew more and more frightened; and it grew more and more dark. I thought all the sheep heads were looking at me another, and then grin-girning at me. At last I grew desperate; and my hair was as stiff as wire, though it was wet as if I had been dunking in the Esk. I began to bite through the wooden spars with my teeth, and rugged at them with my nails, till they were like to come off—but no, it would not do. At length, when I had greeted myself mostly blind, and cried till I was as hoarse as a corbie, I saw auld Janet Hogg taking in her bit washing from the bushes, and I reeled and screamed till she heard me. It was like being transported into heaven; for, in less than no time, my mother, with her apron at her eyes, was at the door; and Cursecowl, with a candle in the front of his hat, had scarcely thrawn the key, when out I flew; and she lifted up her foot (I dare say it was the first and last time in her life, for she was a douce woman), and gave him such a kick and a push, that he played bleach over, head foremost, without being able to recover himself; and, as we ran down the close, we heard

him cursing and swearing in the dark like a devil incarnate.

(To be continued.)

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