

Choice Literature.

THE MINISTER'S FACTOTUM.

BY "CRAIGQUORN."

He stood, to use the phrase of the countryside, six feet seven inches and three quarters in his hand knit, ribbed stockings of gray wool, taken from the backs of his own mountain sheep. Round the chest he measured fully fifty-three inches; and his strong, well shaped neck, which was almost ever bared to the winds, and was as hairy as the skins put on smooth-fleshed Jacob by his lying mother to cheat her old blind man, carried a finely shaped head, massive and round as a cannon ball. His hands gripped like a machinist's vice, but his soft blue eyes smiled on you like a gentle spring sky. Ready to laugh at all fun, he was as ready to take away the heavy bundle from the tottering old woman and console the crying child by tossing him up on his brawny shoulders for a ride across the moor. When he shouted, the storm blast on the hillside was lost for the moment; and when he sang in the Sabbath school "The Lord's my Shepherd," his tones were low and tender and humble as a child's. Farmer, horse dealer (and honest at even that trying business), carrier for the district, general trader, liveryman, chairman of school committee, superintendent, unpaid relief officer, elder and minister's factotum—everything and anything to make fair gains or to do a kindness to every one who wanted a service, whether the applicant was "gentle or semple"—without him the parish would have been nothing, and the minister crippled beyond recovery. A big man physically, metaphysically, morally, and in all dimensions, was my factotum.

Not always, by any means, had he been the help of the minister; nay, rather his horror. But a few years ago he was the first in the fray and the last to cry, "Hold, enough!" His old oaken staff, which he had hung up in his bedroom with this verse under it, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," would have reminded any boy reading the *Æneid* of the Cyclops' pine, and was dark stained all round. The parish firesides were often stirred to hear the tales of the giant's mad doings when he and "John Barleycorn" were partners, and there were men who wrought nobly beside him in all good deeds carrying to their graves the scars he had left on their faces and forms. All that had passed from his life. But it never passed from his memory or from his prayers, or from his new zeal and new service. He was, as even the young scoffers of the parish, who didn't believe in anything, confessed, undeniably and wholly another from what he had been. In his case "the fruits were meet for repentance." His fresh life did not, indeed, lie inside, and was not spent in piously applied and upturned hands, in eyes high rolled till nothing but white could be seen, in whining tones and canting phrases; he was just his own old, natural, unaffected self, but he was a good man, and not a bad, drunken and quarrelsome.

His big head carried a big and closely convoluted brain. That brain must have wasted a vast amount of phosphorus. It did hard work and constant, as its owner tried to make up for almost no education. He had made largely a language for himself, to express most original thinking. The words were of no tongue I knew, nor any of my philological friends could affiliate; but they always set straight out before me the man's meaning, though often the question was how they should be spelled and in what characters. He made a new mental field for himself, and lived his own peculiar mental life and fought his own mental battles, economic, philosophical, ethical and theological. He was always pondering some problem. Often, as I was riding homeward to my manse, would I hear a billowy voice and see a form like Polyphemus striding with five feet stretches across the fresh ploughed lea, and as the dike was stepped over as though it were but a big field stone, out would come some question, plumbing down toward the depths of politics or morals or dogma; the words all *bizarre* and grotesque and self-minted, but stating a vital matter and demanding, at least, a manly and honest answer, though often defying an offhand reply that was either satisfactory or exhaustive. And what a will the great fellow had, as big and strong as his frame! Not one letter in the alphabet did he know when he faced right about to the light and to the right. Yet he resolved at once to gather the poorest village children and the bairns of some squatters and outcast women into a Sabbath school, and he learned to read by making these unkempt urchins "say their letters and their a-b abs" to him; and he taught himself "to figger" by making the older ones teach the younger, while he sat by, forsooth, to keep order! though at first he did not know whether the figures were upside down or not.

He was a stern and steadfast churchman of the Presbyterian order. The Shorter and the Larger Catechisms, which had been committed by his listening to their continual recitals in his school gave him, as he put it, his "cud for chewing" and as he ruminated he extracted the pith and nutriment. His illustrations were often striking and original "You laddies in the corner, stand up! What is the question the day?" With one voice they make answer: "Sin." "Na, na; that's nae question; naethin' but a word. What's the question? tell me it richt noo." Then it came, straight as a chain shot: "What is sin?" After the answer had been given by each, and had been "cut into all its parts" to the satisfaction of the catechetical anatomist, the illustrations began after this fashion: "'Conformity unto the law of God!' Mark that, my laddies, and do not forget it, for there are fowk wha'll tell ye breaking awa' is the hale thing. Noo, let's see. Come awa' wi' me to the train; ye see the twa tracks; why, if yon big, guldherin' body of iron disna ever conform to the law of the twa tracks (and ye ken, lads, that the Scripthers teach twa things—your duty till God and till man), why, the hale big, strong, gran' thing will be spattered into a thousand whamjiffies." Then we were brought face to face with "the transgression of the law" after this fashion: "Trawnsgression—that's a lang-nebbed word; weel, it just means gangin' ower whaur ye always ought to keep inside. Now jist look at poor wee

Tam here afore me. I tell't him last ploughin' time no to gang ower the quarry-fence, but he did it, and he had sore pain for a wheen o' months and will be a lameter a' his life. Boys, dinna gang ower any of the Loard's fences, that is, His laws, or ye'll be a lameter like mysel' a' your days."

He loved men to be honest in their faith life, and had no patience with any sort of lax discipline in church rule. One church there was which was always ready to open its doors to any comer. "Well, I suppose there must always be a slop-bowl around for the dirty water we throw out! But, man, I dinna like to see any kirk like my hopper yondher, that can mak' nae scatterment atween the fushionless chaff and bread-makin' grain, atween the deil's dirty husks and the Maister's clean wheat!" The "five points of Calvinism" were to him as sure as his own identity—yes, more so; for, as he put it once, "I could easily fancy mysel' anither; and at times I think I'm a legion, and often wish I were only dear old Molly M.; but I canna fancy God's word wrang." And for him there was but the Bible and his own strong-framed and firm-fixed faith on the one side, and what he called "the ooter darkness and the roarin' lion" on the other.

The men and women of all Scotch parishes that I have ever known are nothing if they be not theological, and can only be truly seen in their own every day light and on their own soil as theological disputants. Theology was a favourite and very frequent theme with my factotum; and this was so, first, because everybody around talked and discussed its grave certainties and its dread possibilities; but, secondly and chiefly, because this strength-taxing field, with its stiff hills and deep hollows, its dazzling lights and thick clouds, exactly suited this sturdy student of mysteries in the home-spun, with his big brain and his iron will. He had here as elsewhere his own points of vision, and they showed new views or threw old scenes out with fresh lights. Ian Mohr—so my huge helper shall be called, had one special antagonist, "Weaver Tam"; who, thrown again and again, and often badly, on by no means soft places, would always most gamely renew the combat. Weaver Tam was ever the assailant. A curiosity he was every way. He was a "Methody body" in the stiffest of Calvinistic quarters; though I could never find out clearly how he had got his hold on grand old Wesley, Ian explained it to me once on the principle of the "general thawnness of the body," which meant his constant twistedness, or, as some in our land would call it, "cussedness." And Tam was every way twisted. His odd, pinched, pock-marked, weazened face, with its mummy-like skin, was twisted; his little, peering, deep-set, "fussy" eyes were twisted, for one was higher up than its fellow, and the upper orb studied you in a green light and the under orb regarded you in a gray; his body was twisted, for the left shoulder hitched up to his ear and the right seemed to be falling off behind; and his legs were twisted, like the old fashioned bandy-legged tongs, one limb making due east and its twin-brother direct west; and his ways of looking at things were twisted, yes, the most twisted of all.

Constantly was I overtaking these two cronies—for though they ever fought like dog and cat, they were cronies; and if was a delightful relief, after a hard and wearing day through my vast parish with its hundred responsibilities, pastoral and magisterial and medical, to "pick them up," and, as I drove them homeward, listen to their unceasing debates and their most quaint tales. The richest and rarest of old and new parish stories would be told me, which I would gladly rehearse to you; but they must be told in their own terse, fresh and vigorous "Doric," or not at all, for translation spoils them, and alas! translation for my hearers would be absolutely needful. Dean Ramsay never retailed more witty sayings and stories more redolent of the heather, and true to the fast-dying type of the unmixed and ever unique Lowland farmer, grazier, weaver, minister, doctor and "natural," than Weaver Tam and Big Ian were wont to tell as they came home, both sober, from the linen market or the fair. And how the debates and discussions went on fast and furious all the way, with constant appeals to the clerical empire, who was often deemed by the Calvinist champion as "unco balanced in his opeenions regairdin' tangled skeins"; till the minister's trap was pulled up at Tam's cottage, with its well-thatched roof. Then out would come his kindly old wife, of the sweet mother-face and the laughing blue eye, to say, "Hoot awa, Tam! at it again, deafenin' the minister with your haeversings as Ian and you dairken coonsil wi' words wi'oot knowledge."

And thus they would be at it; the subject is "falling from Grace." Tam has dealt his foe some pretty neat blows in his own unlooked-for style; and has given me good reason honestly to score some points to his credit. The weaver has been denouncing the idea of a man "makin' the A'michty dae all the haird wark o' carrying him surely lame while the mon daes all the sinfu' kickin' against the Loard's commands"; and he has just turned sharp round with one of his queer twists upon the farmer, "Man alive! can ye no see that your child o' grace is a poor, wakenly thing, scarce weel born? but jist like the wee birdie within its shell, no able to give one good scraich of itsel', jist leevin' and nae mair behind the shell: there's nae willin' and daein' yondher, let alane warking oot your ain salvation!" All the while this hot fusillade was being rained on him, the big man was watching a huge black horse coming with a wild rush down a pretty steep hill of the "old quarry-road," yet speeding on without stumble or halt, for on his back was far and away the finest and most daring rider of the whole countryside, easy in his seat, yet as firm as a rock, sweeping the keen eyes of youth over the wide stretch of rolling land, but watching his horse with all a huntsman's care, lifting him as only fox-hunters know how at each huge stride, and steadying him by the skillfully-tightened reins that held but never hampered. For me the sight of my young parishioner and his black steed was ever as good as a long breath of sea air; there was always freshness and freedom and dash there. "Jist doo maik ye that laddie! Hoo the chiel maks yon auld ramolossus spread himsel' ower the grun! I never see that vast carcass o' horseflesh I dinna

think o' an ellefant wi' the legs o' a deer and the wind o' a greyhound; whish, hoo he scoots on!" Thus solloiquized Ian after his own fashion as "Master Wullie" came up, greeted us merrily and sped on.

A short pause followed, which I may fill up by explaining "ramolossus," Ian's name for the big black horse just disappearing over the crest of the hill. This word puzzled me for many a day. At last I found the solution. My friend and factotum had been away to the "big town"; and while in London had gone to see the "wild beasts." He had been especially struck "wi' thawt moanster o' a baste which carries its hoarn on its snoot instead o' properly ahint its ears," and he had heard the keeper use the word "colossal," so he wrought up in his own way a new word out of rhinoceros and colossal which passed over to Master Wullie's black charger!

But now it immediately came out that the big Calvinist had shrewdly kept his straight-seeing blue eyes on the horse and his rider for the sake of his argument with Tam and for the defence of the faith in himself. Thus it came: "Tam! did ye watch, man, yon auld brute? Did ye maik hoo Maister Wullie never took his eyes aff him and never slacked the rein?" "Ech, man! I'm nae so bin' as no often to have maikred all thawt!" "Well! yon brute has eyesicht, has power (plenty o' it) and will; ay, man, as much will as had be far mair than enough for a dizen bastes, ye would say if ye had to shoe him." "Well, Ian! what o' all that?" "Oh, jist this! what for does Maister Wullie hold him so tight?" "Why, to keep him strait on the road an' no let him stumble." "Ezzactly! and he has never yet broken his knees, e'en when he dashes in yon gallopadin' way down the steepest brae; the big horse always has 'persevered' on his richt manner o' traivel jist because of the shairp eye and the stiff hand. Man! we need the eye and the bit and the bridle jist as muckle as yon stout horse; and what I undherstan' by ony saint's perseveirance is jist that the Loard—wha never slummers nor sleeps and never is weary—never takes His eyes nor His hands off His own, down hill or up brae!" There was silence—for Tam and I saw the big, bronzed, hairy, scarred hand steal stealthily across the blue eyes that had grown very moist; and I knew the humble soul was looking back at many a bad stumble ere he yielded to the Eye and Hand, and began his new way of not wearying in well-doing.

MR. PARNELL'S PARLIAMENTARY CAREER.

Mr. Parnell did not enter Parliament until 1875. Few, if any, then thought of him as the coming leader of a powerful party. A landlord himself, a Protestant, only half an Irishman, with aristocratic connection and English university training, he was less likely to become the advocate of a forward policy in Irish Nationalism. The early fears concerning him entertained by the Home Rulers are quite intelligible. But he has belied them in every way. He has all the qualities of an opposition leader. To him has been attracted a band of ardent spirits, young and old. He can fight if need be; he can diplomate if that be better. Cool, intrepid, with a keen mind and an unflinching purpose, he is an enemy to be avoided. No situation seems to baffle him, and whilst others may rise to white heat of passion, he remains calm. And yet there is a suppressed passion in his words which powerfully appeals to the hearer and reader. In the earlier part of his parliamentary career these qualities were either lacking or undeveloped, and he then lost many a point by his want of self-command. Yet Mr. Parnell cannot be said, as a rule, to bear too much the burden of his position. He rather directs; others work. He never makes himself too cheap. His strange disappearances from the scene of action, which baffle the on-looker, and more than once have appeared to endanger the success of his policy, have studied method in them. They lend an impressiveness to his utterances and appearances which might not otherwise be secured. He is always there when needed; and, if necessary, no one can throw more force into the work than Parnell.

Charles Stewart Parnell is the descendant of men who have won high positions in their country's records. His father, John Henry Parnell, of Avondale, County Wicklow, nephew of Lord Conington, who was, as Sir Henry Parnell, an ardent Liberal, married Miss Stewart, daughter of Rear-Admiral Stewart, of the American navy, "Old Ironsides," the hero of 1815. This lady is the Mrs. Parnell of to-day, mother of the Irish leader. He was born at Avondale in 1846. From an early age he was educated entirely in England, finally graduating at Cambridge. It is to be easily understood that his early learnings were conservative and aristocratic, but gradually, as he began to take interest in politics, he leaned to the Nationalist side.

We have already learned that Mr. Biggar was the originator of obstruction in the House of Commons, but this was merely an accident of the movement. To Parnell must be long the credit of making it a policy. For the first two years he spoke very seldom in the House, and not very acceptably. Butt's gentle temporizing did not suit him, and the germs of the present Parnell party then in the House determined upon a new departure. Hitherto the interference of Irish members in British or Imperial matters had been resented, whilst the proposals made by them for their own country were voted down. Parnell set himself to alter this state of things, and to take part in all the debates. The English Factory and Workshop Act of 1878, the Mutiny Bill of the same year and the Army Discipline and Regulation Act of 1879 all bear the marks of his influence. But there was also another movement set on foot, namely, that of making the Irish party independent of all the English factions, and using its influence solely to the advancement of Irish interests. The former policy was but to fulfil the duties involved in membership of the House of Commons; the latter has made the Irish party instrumental in the overthrow of two governments.

This forward policy was hailed with acclaim in Ireland. It led, however, to the deposition of Butt and the advent of Parnell to the leadership. The events of these later days of the struggle need not be recounted, so far as they concern