

The Family Circle.

ONLY.

Only a violet,
Blue as the skies;
But it mirrors the spring
In its azure eyes.

Only a lark,
High in the air;
But it sings of hope,
As the world grows fair.

Only the patter
Of April showers;
But it wakes to life
The sweet May flowers.

Only a sunset—
Earth glorified;
But it sweetens the rest
Of the eventide.

Only a word,
Tenderly spoken;
But it comforts a heart
That is well-nigh broken.

Only a song
From a fresh young heart
But it cheers a life
That is lived apart.

Only a friend
In a time of need;
But it saves a soul
From an evil deed.

And song and bird,
And April shower,
And friend and word,
And sweet May flower,

Are only a part
Of God's great plan
To teach the lessons
Of life to man.
Edith Virginia Bradt.

A FOOTSTEP FROM THE UN- SEEN

BY IAN MACLAREN, AUTHOR OF "BESIDE
THE BONNIE BRIAR BUSH."

As I have no explanation to offer of the following experience, and something of that kind, more or less ingenious, is expected of any one daring to tell what seems supernatural, it is only right to relate, by way of compensation, various circumstances which may have influenced my mind. Christmas fell that year on Friday, and Wednesday night I had slept at the Lodge, as I often did in those days when the general and Kate Carnegie were living there, and the old house had still a roof and a warm hearthstone. The colonel was a guest at the time, who had been a very desperate fighter—Clelland's Horse are still confounded with Satan on the Indian frontier—and now was a very poor preacher, affording an endless source of amusement to Drumtochty. There was also another soldier—five feet nine in height, and forty-four inches round the chest, and as genial a soul as any man could wish to meet—who had obtained the Victoria Cross for killing eleven sepoys in a room at Lucknow, to save a woman's life. Winter was very beautiful and heartening with us, and the colonels had come to spend Christmas with their old companion in arms, as they had spent it together in strange places of the past, where they swallowed a make-believe plum pudding buckling on their sword belts. One could not see the old warriors without a fierce curiosity; and Kate came to my help that evening with cunning allusions, that ought to have been irresistible, but nothing would induce one of them to open his mouth about the things he had done or seen in those years when, with his fellows, he had guarded the borders of the empire. The colonel could not be weaned from the Beast in Revelation, on which he had got some new light that very morning, and the general was full of Jamie Soutar's last story. Drum-

tochty, he declared, was the place for humor, also for scenery and men. As for Victoria Cross, he could speak only of the curry, which Kate had seen to herself, and which he solemnly averred—challenging the others to deny it if they dared—was monumental in its excellence and such as no mortal could have deserved. We had our two standard toasts on great occasions, "The Queen, God bless her," and "Kate Carnegie," and well did the old fellows show, standing erect over the silver candlesticks, and against the black oak woodwork, with their close-cropped grey hair and bronzed faces. Then Kate toasted them, standing up with her glass in her hand, for she was a gallant lass and a bonnie, as became Carnegie's daughter, and couple each man's name with a certain battle-field, till the veterans were utterly abashed and severally besought me to understand that all this was only a girl's daffing. It struck me, however, that they were wonderfully pleased, and when V.C. opened the door for Kate he told her boldly he wished he were forty years younger, whereat Kate threatened to box his ears, but thought the better of it and kissed him instead.

"Kate kissed me first when she was a little toddle and I was a young dog of a subaltern."

"That was in Lucknow, Kinloch," said the general, "and a shell broke five minutes afterwards in the room;" and nothing more was said by any man till we went to the smoking-room.

We talked of various things, and at last we lighted upon ghosts. Of course every man announced ostentatiously that he did not believe in such nonsense, except myself, who am a Highlander and soaked in superstition, but finally we agreed, upon a mutual understanding of infidelity, to describe any incident in our lives that ignorant people might call supernatural. Our host led off with one that left us thoughtful, and the colonel deepened the impression, but the V.C.'s story was so wonderful that none was asked from me. We kept close together going up the stair to the old wing, and when the turret door slammed, it was not the civilian that dropped his candlestick. Next morning the general was closely questioned why he had opened and shut various doors in his room, and admitted that he did not relish an ambushade, preferring to meet his foe in the open, and I thought it only fair to confess my suspicions of a large black chest, whose lid looked as if it had begun to rise. The light was failing as I walked home to the Cottage after luncheon, through the woods on the other side of the Tochty, and all the horror of the V.C.'s story was in my mind—a face appearing at the foot of your bed. My little house looked eerie as I came up the garden, and I started when a man opened the door in place of my housekeeper. "It's me, sir," said Jamie Soutar, "yir housekeeper askit me tae wait till ye cam in, for she's aff wi' a bottle o' wine tae Barbara Stewart. A juist happened tae gie a cry in passing," and Jamie settled himself down in my big chair by the study fire for a talk.

Now, no man's conversation I have ever known had such a smack, and ordinarily it was full of dry, biting humor, but this evening Jamie was gruesome. He would speak of nothing but the "resurrection" days, when a guard kept watch over the kirkyard by night that the bodies of the dead might not be lifted, and every man had to take his turn.

"The Drumtochty fouk are no' push-in," said Jamie, "at ony time, and their humility about gairdin' the kirkyaird was by ordinar'. As sure as a'm sittin' here, they juist quarrelled hoo tae pit the honor on ano anither."

"It was the smith's father 'at keepit the key o' the dead house an' gied us oor directions. He had an awfu' tongue, an' naebody cud complain 'at he wasna faith fu' afore he left the twa men for the nicht."

"Man, a was juist a bit birkie at the time. But a hear him fine laying doon the law tae auld Hillocks an' Tammas Mitchell's father, an' a can see them shiverin' in their claithees."

"Ye'll be fine an' comfortable in here—but ye mauna dronie nor sleep. There's the lid of a coffin for a seat in the corner; dinna shut the door or ye'll no hear the clink o' the spades, and ye'll need tae gae yir roonds aince in the oor."

"Here's twa sticks, in case ye catch then at a grave, an' a gun wi' a charge o' sma' scattering shot for emergencies. Dinna be feared tae shoot gin they wull na listen tae reason. Half-a-dizzin' pellets in their legs 'ill be a lesson; but for ony sake dinna be wystin' yir poother on ghaists, an' sic like. It's no chancy, an' it costs money."

"Gin ye see onything white when ye're dawnderin' round, dinna be hysty; it might be a sheep or a lamb—slip up quiet an' tak' a conjunct view. It's no likely the 'ill be mair nor ye can maister atween ye, but gin ye be hard pit tae't, gie a cry an' I'll maybe hear ye doon bye, an' come up. Weel, that's a', an' a'll be gaein' hame. Ye're lookin' rael couthy in there in this dark blawy nicht."

"A watched him gae doon the road, an' a declare the smith was shaking wi' the sicht of auld Hillocks sittin' in the back end o' the deid hoose, no able tae say ae word, wi' a stick on either side o' him an' a gun in his hand."

"Sall, they were clever lads though, thae lifters," continued Jamie—who was now in great fettle—"gin they didna raise a wumman frae the heich glen 'at had been buried the day afore. There were twa men in the hoose an' they kent naethin' about it."

"She might never hae been missed but a Pitscorrie man 'at was sittin' up wi' an unweal horse, saw a gig come doon frae Drumtochty in the grey o' the mornin'. There were twa men in it an' a wumman 'atween them wi' a veil on her face; he didna like the wy she was sittin', an' he cam up in the afternoon."

"Is that Jess back?" and Jamie listened. "A thocht a heard a step in the kitchen." But it ceased, and we concluded that it had been our mistake.

"Speakin' about lifters," but I had not spoken of any such thing, and was anxious to abandon the subject, "a'll toll ye a story 'at's never passed ma lips afore, an' is kent tae nae livin' man." Jamie listened again, and then drew his chair closer to the fire.

"Div ye mind an auld man 'at livit at the end o' the clachan and deid in the big storm, where they had tae dig oot the Pairish Kirk so Sabbath, was never lookit ye in the face, an' said naething but grumph gin ye spoke tae him?"

"Weel so nicht, aboot the gloamin', Robert comes in an' sits doon by ma fire-side as a'm dacin' noo, but never a word did a get frae him for maybe half-an-oor, exceptin' :—

"Hoo's a' wi' ye the nicht, Jamie?"
"He was aifter something a saw fine for he lookit at me aince an' he shapit his mooth for speakin' twice, but naethin' cam, so a hiratled ma chair an' the scrap in' on the floor set him aff."

"Ye're a body, Jamie!" he said.
"Ay, ay, a wadna say but a wis."
"Ye can haud yir tongue at a time!"
"A've seen me manage," an' then he lookit at me again.

"Ye'll be easier when it's aff yir mind, Robert," but little a thocht what was comin'. Sall, there's times when a'm sittin' by masel' in the hoose a wush he had keepit it tae himsel'. What's yon? But it was only a loose spray of ivy swishin' on the window. You might have thought it was a knock.

"Div ye mind a gemkeeper, Jamie, an' he drew his chair nearer mine, 'at deid ae hairst time five-an'-forty year ago?"

"Fine, Robert, a buirdly man, an' he slippit aff sae sudden that the fouk were feared o' the cholera, an' he was beeried the same day. The doctor gied his first prayer that day, an' tho' it was only a beginnin' it promised weel."

"An' did ye ever see a young student, Robert speirs next, 'auld Gormack's sister's son, 'at cam tae Drumtochty aff an' on in the summer, a weel-built callant wi' a cast in ano nis een?"

"Weel, him an' me got chief ower the fishin' an' ither trokes, an' aifter the beerial he cam roond an' we gied up tae the burn. A jaloused he was aifter something, for he wadna fish but aye lookit at me."

"Juist the same as ye lookit at me, Robert," says I; but he didna hear.

"It's a peety we dinna ken what the gemkeeper died o'," says he tae me, 'it wud be a satisfaction tae his freends tae pit a name on't. A cud tell in half-an-oor, Robert, gin a hed him up, bui it 'ill need twa o's, for he's a heavy man.'

"Jamie, a got sic a turn 'at a near fell intae the Kelpie's hole, an' a telt him 'at a wud hae naethin' tae dae wi' his lifting tricks, but he got roond me in the end an'—a promised tae meet him at the kirkyaird that nicht."

"There was a wee licht frae a half mune, an' the grave was fresh happit. We werena lang o' haein' the coffin oot, but, Jamie," he said, 'a did nae mair, a turned me back when he began on the screws.'

"The student gied a screich an' Jamie, as sure's deith, here Robert grip-pit ma airm like a vice, 'the gemkeeper was sittin' up in his grave clothes an' lookin' 'at's wi' his eyes wide open."

"Lord's sake, man," a said tae Robert, 'what garred him flee the country then like a thief, an' div ye ken what cam ower him? It had been a swoon, a'm jidgin.'

"Jamie," says Robert, 'he's lyin' there yet, but a didna touch him, an' it was juist fricht on the student's pairt—the spade was lyin' tae his hand.'

"Div ye mean to say he—"
"Ay, Jamie, he did, an' a helpit tae bury the body again, an' little time was lost—he's deid that student noo, far from here, an' Jamie, a cudna keep it langor. 'Ave heard a step in ma hoose ilka nicht for a month, an' a ken ma time's no far off."

"But Jess is back noo," Jamie said, rising, "an' a'll juist be traivellin'. Gin ye'll excuse me a'll gang oot by the front