

gone late at night, and perhaps"—she added half hesitatingly—"fallen asleep."

"No, there is no place of that kind. He had gone out, Tib. When I came down the library window was open to the back terrace. I don't know where he is, and I don't care. Everything is at an end. God has laid a curse on this house; let it burn. Only when it is burned right down to the ground will justice be done."

"Oh, Ailie, my dear, you are distraught," cried Tibbie, in a voice vibrating with compassion. At the moment, however, her attention and the attention of the crowd was arrested by the fierce onslaught of the fire engines which, with a great ringing of bells, swept up the avenue to the house. In their wake came the police, and when the ringleaders of the demonstration, which had had such a disastrous and unexpected close, saw the representatives of the law, they seemed inclined to slink away out of sight. They had come up, not with the intention of setting fire to the Old Hall, but merely to give its master a fright and, if possible, compel him to come to terms. The fire was merely a contributory accident to a scheme that had been badly organised and feebly carried out. Starving men are not good organisers, but are like wisps of straw in the wind, liable to be swept hither and thither. Most of them were so weak now that they were dismayed at what had fallen out. It was Tibbie who went up to the inspector of police to hold converse with him.

"No, I'm sure there was no deliberate attempt to set fire to the house," she said clearly. "I saw the demonstration from the moment of its arrival at the house. I am sure the fire was a mere accident arising from carelessness with the torches on a dry hot night. Their one idea was merely to force Mr. Crewe to come out and listen to the recital of their grievances, which they thought might be more effective under cover of the night."