

The Family Circle.

DOWN TO SLEEP.

November woods are bare and still ;
November days are clear and bright ;
Each noon burns up the morn'g's chill ;
The morning's snow is gone by night ;
Each day my steps grow slow, grow light,
As through the woods I reverent creep,
Watching all things lie "down to sleep."

I never knew before what beds,
Fragrant to smell and soft to touch,
The forest silts and shapes and spreads ;
I never knew before how much
Of human sound there is in such
Low tones as through the forest sweep
When all wild things lie "down to sleep."

Each day I find new coverlids
Tucked in and more sweet eyes shut tight ;
Sometimes the viewless mother bids
Her ferns kneel down, full in my sight ;
I hear their chorus of "Good night,
And half I smile and half I weep,
Listening while they lie "down to sleep."

November woods are bare and still ;
November days are bright and good ;
Life's noon burn up life's morning chill ;
Life's night rests feet which long have stood ;
Some warm, soft bed, in field or wood,
The mother will not fail to keep,
Where we can lay us "down to sleep."

—Helen Hunt

JANET CAIRNS' "GUID-DOCHTER."

"My idea of an earthly paradise," said Wardrop, as he ran his fingers wearily through his hair, "is a place where it is possible to lock the door and keep it locked."

I did not wonder at his mild grumbling—nay, I wondered that it was mild.

"Some men can do it; why can't you?" I asked, bluntly. "If you invest me with authority, I'll undertake to hold this door against a siege if you like."

"Well, you see," said Wardrop, with a whimsical smile, "I lost the key at the beginning, and it's no use hunting for it now. And after all, the work does get done; we get warstled through somehow, in spite of the interruptions."

"Yes," I admitted, grudgingly, "but at what expense. Your time and strength are fretted away by dozens of petty affairs and pettier folk, when there's no need for it. I wish you'd let me turn over the leaf for you, or interview them when they come—anything to save you, sir."

Wardrop smiled, but shook his head. "I'm something like a doctor, David; you know how people kick at a strange doctor. It's me they want. Well, I've given away seven pound ten this morning, and promised to look for situations for three lads and a young woman."

I groaned, for I had heard him, and felt wroth within. Also the heinousness of my own offence in having once added to the burden on this good man's shoulders rose up before me accusingly. Yet now I would seek to expiate that offence by closing the door on others who were perhaps more needful than I had been! Human nature all over, that; and I felt myself a poor, mean wretch as I spoke. But Wardrop did not seem to notice anything odd by suggestion or comparison.

"Here's somebody else, David. Well, I believe I will slip into the other room. Don't betray me if you can help it."

I said nothing, but inwardly resolved that for nobody less than the Queen herself would I knock at the inner door. I gave him ample time to disappear before I called "Come in" to the intruder at the outer door.

Great was my astonishment when a countrywoman, decently attired, and apparently just off a journey, stepped into the room. She was a bright, winsome-

looking woman, with rosy-red cheeks, kind blue eyes, and a certain alertness in her whole appearance which indicated good health and a fund of active energy in reserve. She was "purpose-like," as we say in Faulds, and that means a lot. I remember the details of her attire because its old-fashioned simplicity appealed to my heart in no ordinary fashion. She had on a skirt of purple merino, trimmed with rows of narrow black velvet at the hem, a plaid of shepherd's tartan, and a black lace bonnet with purple violets at the brim, and black velvet strings tied in a particularly neat bow under her chin. She carried over her arm a little bag of velvet plush with red roses on it, and her woollen-gloved hands were folded in front of her as she surveyed the room with a good deal of disappointment in her eyes.

"It's Maister Wardrop I want to see," she said, in rather a shrill voice. "Is he no in?"

Her tongue had the Forder twang, and I knew that if Wardrop could but catch its echo through the door it was all up with him. I waited half a moment just to see, and sure enough his head popped round the door.

"Hullo, Mrs. Cairns! What brings you here?" he asked, coming out with both hands outstretched, and a smile of no ordinary welcome on his face—a smile which was reflected on her face too, as they stood shaking each other by the hand.

"I've come to see Geordie. They tell me he's gotten mairret, an' he's never said a cheep to me about it. Do you think it's true, Robert?"

The smile faded from her face, and there came in her eyes a kind of hungry, anxious look I have seen in the eyes of many mothers in my time.

"It's quite true, Mrs. Cairns, I believe," Wardrop answered, and I fancied a stern note in his voice.

"It was Jeanie Nicoll, her that's in service wi' Lady Marchbank, that wrote to oor Bess, an' she even gied me the address."

She began to fumble in her velvet bag, and I observed her fingers trembling a little, and guessed that the confirmation of her fears Wardrop had just given was more than a disappointment to her. It was a shock. Wardrop saw it also, and taking her by the arm, set her down in a chair.

"I canna understand it," she went on, still fumbling in the bag. "It be true, what for did he no write? Surely his mither deserved that frae him at least."

"Yes, surely, but he would mean to write," answered Wardrop, and his voice was very tender. "Geordie was not a bad lad, only thoughtless."

"Eh, no, no a bad lad; naeboddy could say that," she answered. "But he micht hae written. Here's the address."

She produced a soiled scrap of paper from the bag and handed it to Wardrop.

"Seventeen Colwyn Avenue, Streatham," he read. "Um, that's a goodish bit out. Are you in a hurry, Mrs. Cairns?"

"No in sic a hurry, as long's I get there afore dark," she said. "If it be true that he is mairret, of course they'll be for me stoppin' a' night, an' maybe twa three days, wha kens?"

She look round with a kind of confident enquiry which touched us both.

"Jeanie Nicoll said it was a terrible braw hoose, for she gaed out to see it

when it was her Sunday oot, an' she even spak till the servant at the door, spoirin' if George Cairns bade there, an' a' this afore she wraite a line to me ava."

"Well, Mrs. Cairns, I'm very much occupied just now, and won't be free for two hours. I want to take you there myself, so if you'll let David take you over to our house, the landlady will give you a bite, and you can rest there till I am ready."

"A' richt, I kent I wad be a' richt wi' you," said Mrs. Cairns, rising blithely, quite unconscious that she was taking up minutes of time as precious as fine gold. I rose too, but ere we passed out by the door, Wardrop called me back.

"See that she gets a good cup of tea and something to it, David, and be as kind to her as you can. Poor soul, poor soul, it would give me no small joy at this minute to kick Mr. George Cairns down that stair and into the street."

I took Mrs. Cairns over to Surrey Street, saw to her comfort, and left her content and cheerful. When I got back to the office, I found that Wardrop had been summoned to the House of Commons, and had left a note for me. It simply bade me take Mrs. Cairns out to the Streatham address, and to bring her right back again, unless I was assured by my own eyes and ears that she was made welcome there. I did his bidding joyfully, for it was another mark of his true confidence in me that he passed on the doing of such kindnesses to me, assured that I would not fail him. So I took Janet Cairns from Ludgate Hill to Streatham, and thence in a four-wheeler to her son's house in Colwyn Avenue.

It was one of those commodious and picturesque houses which abound in the suburbs of London, standing in its own grounds, and possessing all the attributes of the country, together with the advantages of proximity to the metropolis.

"Od sakes, man," observed Mrs. Cairns, as we drove up the avenue to the house. "My Geordie canna live here. It's a perfect pailace. But Jeanie Nicoll said it was a terrible braw place."

With that we came to the door, and bidding her sit still, I ran up the steps and rang the bell. And when the smart maid-servant answered my summons, I was not surprised to be told that Mr. Cairns was not yet returned from the city. Mrs. Cairns, however, was within. I hesitated a moment, not knowing what to do, and then, asking the maid to wait a moment, I went out to the cab.

"Your son lives here right enough, Mrs. Cairns," I said. "But he isn't home from business yet. Hadn't you better go back with me and write to him that you have come to London?"

"What for should I gang back wi' you, my man, if my son bides here?" she enquired in high scorn. "If he bides here, it maun be true that he has mairret a rich wife, for he had but twa hunder a year, an' that disna gang faur in toons. An' if he's mairret, then his wife is my guid-dochter, an' I wull see her, so there."

With that she began to get down in haste from the cab. I was sore put to it then to know how to act, and my chief, nay my sole desire, was to spare my countrywoman's feelings from being wounded, as I feared was most likely. I did what seemed best to me when we were admitted by asking the maid to take my card to her mistress and request private

speech with her. We were shown into the library of the house, which was small, but well furnished, with books and good pictures and fine bronzes. Mrs. Cairns, I saw, began to feel some weight on her spirits; she sat down on the edge of a chair, and did not look at home. The house was very quiet, but presently there sounded through the stillness the cry of a little child. Then Mrs. Cairns sprang from her chair, and the color came and went on her homely, kind face.

"Mercy me, there's a bairn! If that be Geordie's bairn an' me never kent, I'll never forgie him in this world."

Before I could reply, the maid-servant reappeared and asked me to step upstairs. I was intensely relieved at this, as I had feared that the lady of the house might answer my request in person. I whispered to Mrs. Cairns to wait a moment, but I saw that she resented being left. I hoped I was acting wisely. I feared the scene if the two women, who apparently were not aware of each other's existence, should be suddenly confronted with each other. I was taken up to the drawing-room, where Mrs. George Cairns awaited me. She was young, but not a mere girl, a very stately, lady-like woman, with a frank, pleasant manner, which relieved me a good deal. I knew she was a Londoner before she spoke, and I felt that never in my life had I encountered a more difficult task.

"There is a lady downstairs, madam," I began, "who has come a long way to see you, and whom I am sure you will be pleased to see. She has come unexpectedly, but I feel sure her welcome will not be lacking."

"A lady to see me? Let us go down at once. I was certainly not expecting any visitor to-day. What is her name?"

"Cairns. She is your husband's mother."

It was a blunt speech, but how could I put it otherwise? I could only answer her question as straightly as it was put.

Mrs. George Cairns flushed and looked distinctly distressed.

"My husband's mother!" she repeated with difficulty. "I—I was not aware that my husband had a mother alive. There has been some mistake. Sir, who are you? perhaps some relation also of whom I have not heard."

"No, madam, I am acting for an old friend of Mrs. Cairns, Mr. Robert Wardrop, of the *St. George's Gazette*, who intended to come himself with Mrs. Cairns, but was unavoidably detained."

I saw that she was hardly listening to me. Suddenly the child's cry rang through the house again, and without a word of apology she hurried from the room. I was at a loss what to do there, and thought I had better return to the room below. When I got down to the hall I heard some strange sounds, and through the half-open door I saw George Cairns' mother with the baby on her knee, and the "guid-dochter" she had come so far to see kneeling by her side, and the tears were streaming down her face. There were no tears in the eyes of Janet Cairns, but only a kind of yearning and glorified look which I remember to this day. They had forgotten me entirely, and something whispered that I could leave my charge without fear. The look on the face of the kneeling girl told me that her heart was in the right place, and that Janet Cairns would be welcome there so long as she elected to stay. So I slipped out by