

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

WILLIAM AND MARY.

By David Lyall.

William and Robert were the twin children of Robert Greig, who kept the post-office and the grocery store in the village of Little Dumwhan. Robert was in a small way a collector of coins, and having in his possession a copper penny of the time of William and Mary, with the double heads thereon, had the happy inspiration to give the names to the twins.

Nothing if not argumentative Robert argued the wisdom of it in this wise. "We've a tribe of folk on both sides. Lisbeth has seven brithers and sisters, beside a falther an' mither, and numerous aunts. I'm better aff w' only three, but still, we should never please them a'. An' as Lisbeth is forty-two, we're no likely to have a big family. This wull dae awa' w' a discussion an' heart-burnin' for when they're ca'd efter naeboddy, so to speak, naeboddy can tak' offence. Besides, they're honest, guid-soundin' names, and Mary, onyway, is frequently mentioned in the Bible. So William an' Mary they shall be from this time henceforth."

This was delivered on the day of the twins' arrival in the little back bedroom above the shop, where poor Lisbeth's spent life was ebbing away. In giving William and Mary to the world, she gave herself, and after thirteen brief months of married life (an estate which he had too long delayed to enter, as he freely admitted afterwards), Robert was left as he was before, plus the added problem of William and Mary.

Robert Greig had the reputation of being the ugliest as well as the most thraven man in Dumwhan, and many had wondered how a sweet-faced, quiet, genteel person like Lisbeth Macintosh had ever made up her mind to take him for better or for worse. So far as the outward eye could discern, however, she had seemed happy enough, and it is certain that Robert mourned her sincerely and devotedly, and was never tired of praising her virtues, to any who would listen. And, contrary to the way of the inconsolable widower, he never sought to put another in her place.

Immediately on her demise, the tribe afore-mentioned by Robert descended on Dumwhan clamoring to be allowed a hand in the rearing of the twins. Regarding this, however, Robert showed himself a man of iron.

"They're my bairns," he said as he sat a melancholy-looking enough spectacle, with a red-faced bundle of clothes on each arm. "If ye can deny that, ye can tak' them awa', an' welcome. William an' Mary bide here, thank ye kindly. I've never been feart at anything yet, an' I'm no gaun to be scairt by a brace o' weans."

The tribe retired discomfitted, some of them so angry that they never came any more to Dumwhan, and all of them waited to behold the throes of Robert Greig, when he should be in the actual thick of the rearing of twins. But Robert warstled through.

William and Mary, by reason of their colossal demands on his patience and devotion, converted Robert Greig from a moderately selfish and slightly domineering man into a slave. He would have scorned the title, and sometimes raised the dangers of the Dumwhan mothers and matrons by lading out advice to them regarding the rearing of infants, but there was no gain-saying the fact that William and Mary were master and mistress of the situation, and had their father in complete subjugation. It was a pretty sight to watch the chubby pair.

I may mention in the by-going that all Dumwhan bairns are chubby. If any of them are born ill-nourished,

they quickly repent and walk in the way of improvement, not daring to destroy tradition, or to mar the reputation of the place as health-giving. It was a pretty sight to see the barefoot, bareheaded pair running hand-in-hand together, their pinafores filled with flowers or anything else they could pick up, but always filled with something. William and Mary had not one, but many homes, for every door in Dumwhan was opened to them and they ran fearlessly over the most austere threshold. And they grew up, if not exactly bonnie, at least sweet and well favored and extraordinarily clever. Then their devotion to one another often brought a tear to an unaccustomed eye. They never quarrelled, partly, it must be admitted, because Mary was of the gentlest disposition, and never presumed to contradict her brother.

Robert Greig prospered, and it was his ambition to rebuild the old shop and give it an imposing front, and print in gold letters on a blue ground above it the magic legend, R. Greig and Son, General Merchant. Then young William would marry, and live above the shop, as his father and mother had done, while the old man and Mary would retire to a little house on the summit of the brae which Robert had had in his mind's eye for a long time.

Many a fond parent has built such castles in the air, and very many of them have toppled to the ground. Long before the time for the renovations was ripe, William betrayed signs of restlessness, and of a roving disposition, as well as other faults, which occasioned his now grey-headed father deep anxiety. To Mary, William confided all his secret dreams, and it is not too much to say that but for her, he would have broken loose the traces long before he did. But it came at last. He tied his goods and chattels in the familiar red handkerchief one night, after a stiff tussle with his father over some small remission from the stern pathway of duty, as realized by the elder Greig, and shook the dust of Dumwhan from his feet for ever. When Robert Greig came down to breakfast he found Mary red-eyed and rather tremulous, late with the meal for the first time in his recollection.

"Weelyum's awa', father," she said quickly.

"Awa' where, lass?" asked Robert sharply.

She shook her head sadly.

"Jist awa'. He's been gaun for a long time, but as he's been sayin' less about it lately, I thoct he had ta'en a better thoct."

"Mary," said the old man, and his voice trembled very much, "d'ye think I was ower hard on him last night? I thoct it was my duty."

"No," answered Mary quite decidedly, "ye had the richt to speak. But it's like this, father, Dumwhan canna' heud Weelyum. It's no' big enough. We canna' dae naething, but we'll hear o' him yet. Gle him time, an' we needna' worry. He's different frae ye an' me, falther. A terrible yin for seein' an' daein' things. He must hae room to see an' dae mair!"

There was something pathetic in the old man's acquiescence in his daughter's verdict, but the days immediately ensuing were hard upon him, for in a small place tongues are not always kindly, but have a probing and stinging quality sometimes hard to encounter. And being in "the public way," as Dumwhan expressed it, Robert Greig had to run the gauntlet, and it must be added that the matrons whom he had presumed to instruct in their particular domain were specially hard on him.

They missed William in the quiet little home beyond all telling, and nobody knew how many secret tears were shed by Mary, who felt as if the

half of her life had been torn away. But she preserved her invincible faith in the future achievement and glory of her twin, and, unlike much of the faith which props the world, and keeps human hearts from despair, hers was justified. Nothing can ever explain or justify, however, the silence of William, who left his father and his sister absolutely without news of him for seven long years. When he did come back, he said he did not want to write until he had something worth while to tell them, which is a young man's mistaken idea of dignity and pride.

In the sixth year after William had gone away, the South African war broke out, and then Mary said quite quietly to her father one day:

"That's where William is, and where we'll hear about him. Wait or ye see."

The war dragged its unspeakable length away; Magersfontein, Spion Kop, and the rest, with their ghastly records, made inglorious history, but in all the study of the lists, no such name as William Greig was found. Mary remained tranquil, however, and convinced.

"The time hasna come, father, but it is comin'. Wait an' see."

It was near the end of the war when the record was illumined by occasional spurts of heroism and individual examples of splendid courage and resource that William Greig of the ranks and nowhere else in particular, suddenly leaped into glory. Before the war a weekly paper had been considered sufficient for the needs of the little household, but afterwards the Scotsman was ordered daily, and eagerly devoured. It was brought by the bus from the train, and one morning, so convinced was Mary that the day had come for news of William, that she left the shop and wandered over the brae to meet it. The busman gave her the paper without asking any questions, though he might have wondered a good deal. She waited till the lumbering old vehicle had disappeared over the braeface, then unfolded the paper and turned to the first page. Her face was a little pale, but her hand was perfectly steady. It did not even tremble when she came to these words:

"The disaster of the day was averted by the incredible courage, smartness, and resource of one of these humble units who are indispensable to the sum total of events, and who so often redeem the situation. A mounted infantryman, Sergeant William Greig, seeing how things were going, rode straight across the field in the face of the enemy's fire, in their very teeth as it were, succeeded in getting clear, and in less than an hour's time came up with Shardsloe's Camp, from which reinforcements were quickly sent forward. But for this man's gallant action, it is beyond all doubt that a whole regiment would have been wiped out. Fortunately, we know how to reward such conspicuous gallantry, and more will be heard of Sergeant William Greig."

Mary very quietly wiped a tear from her eye, folded up the paper, and went home. That was a great day in Dumwhan, only eclipsed by a greater, when, covered with wounds and glory, William came home. He was not caring, as he bluntly said, for the bokerious welcome of the village folks; all he wanted or needed was the assured welcome of the little house above the shop, where he was forgiven and taken once more to their hearts. Once more, did I say? Nay, because he had never been ousted from their hearts.

And when the neighbors saw William and Mary wandering together on the braes, they would smile to one another, remembering the days when they ran, little barefoot bairns, filling their pinafores with the summer daisies, or the autumn rowans that made their blaze of glory by the side of the burn.—British Weekly.