

as the auctioneer's pencil, which he used as a hammer, was falling, Gibbs was seized with a sudden fright at the bare possibility of something valuable being concealed somewhere in the unpromising heap. "Half a crown!" he called out in a great hurry, and the spoil was again his own. His surmise as to the Register was correct, but the green covers enclosed the "History of Little Henry and his Bearer,"—a work also by the amiable Mrs. Sherwood. When the next lot of books were put up the postmaster wheeled round and faced Gibbs, deserting the auctioneer, and as our friend saw that various neighbours were poking his opponent and whispering encouragement to him, he anticipated that the fight was to become warmer as it grew older.

"Ninepence," said the local champion, fixing a stern eye on Gibbs. "Five shillings!" replied the latter, thinking to choke him off. "Six!" cried the merchant, the word escaping him almost before he knew what he was about. "Ten!" called out Gibbs. Then there was a pause. It was evidently the wish of the audience that their representative should carry off the prize this time, and show the haughty stranger that he could not have it all his own way, that they, too, even in Ross-shire, knew something of the value of books. All those who were near enough to Mr. MacFayden, the postmaster, to nudge him and whisper encouragement to him did so. With a frowning, meditative face the old warrior, trying to keep one eye on Gibbs and the other on the auctioneer, and squinting frightfully in consequence, stood, revolving no doubt many things in his blameless mind. "And—threepence!" he gasped out at last, and there went a "sough" through the assembly, and some almost held their breath for a time, so awed were they at his persistence and at the magnitude of his offer. Gibbs, staring at the dusty heap, thought he would risk the loss of it,—a more hopeless-looking collection he had never seen. And it was perhaps advisable to let this old man have something, or he might grow desperate when desperation would be dangerous. So he smiled a bland refusal to the auctioneer, and that worthy, after trying in vain for about five minutes to get another threepence of an advance, had to let the heap go. The postmaster was at once surrounded by an eager circle of friends, and each book was carefully examined and criticised. They were for the most part old sermons, but an odd volume of Molière having got by chance in among them was at once pounced upon, and Gibbs could hardly keep from laughing outright at the reverence with which it was treated. "It's Latin!" whispered one. "Ay, or Greek!" suggested another. "If it's no Gaelic!" interposed a snuffy-faced old shepherd, who had arrived very early in the morning with three dogs, and examined and criticised everything in the house without the faintest intention of spending a farthing.

"Here is an elegant work," said the auctioneer, after he had allowed a long time for the inspection of the Gaelic treasure; "an elegant work by William Shakespeare"—Gibbs looked sharply up—"adorned with cuts—most suitable, with other beautiful and interesting volumes. Shall I say ten shillings again?" But no, he need not—at any rate no one would corroborate him, and the whole collection became the property of John Gibbs for the sum of one shilling. And so it went on—sometimes there was competition, sometimes not; the postmaster was inclined to rest on his laurels, and nearly every lot was knocked down to the Englishman. They worked along the shelves and at last reached the Cruikshanks. But by these happy country folk the drawings of the great artist were set on a level with those in the penny Encyclopedia; the Grimms attracted no attention; a little more respect was paid to the "Thrift" and the "Life of Napoleon" owing to the gaudy colouring, but yet Gibbs became the possessor of them for a few shillings, uncut, spotless copies as they were. Then they had to work along the last bottom shelf, but here, as the books were mostly folios and quartos and fat to boot, they were got quickly through. Gibbs let go Penn's "Quakers," and a Latin dictionary, and some old theological works. When the quarto on which his eyes had been glued so long was reached, his heart was beating so he felt afraid his neighbours would hear it. "Love's Labor Lost," slowly spelt out the auctioneer, "a comedy by William Shakespeare; a most"—he was at a loss for a suitable adjective, and fell back on the old one—"a most—elegant work—by William Shakespeare."

Then there was a pause and a hush. Perhaps the people were tired; the excitement of the sale was over,—for them. But to one man present there it almost seemed as if the quiet which fell for a little while over the crowd in that shabby room was due to something more than this, was in some way an act of homage paid unconsciously and invol-

untarily to the greatest of all the sons of men. It seemed a profanation to offer for that book the fraction of a shilling or a pound. It was the last, and, before the merchant could get out his offer, Gibbs made his own and electrified the room. "Five pounds!" he cried out in so loud a voice that his next neighbour—a meek old woman in a mutch—jumped as if a snake had bitten her. Some question as to the perfect sanity of the fisherman had found place in the minds of the wiser and more experienced people in the room as they listened to his rash offers, and thought of the perfect impossibility of any one wanting to have so many books at the one time. But all doubts were now dispelled, and three good-looking girls who had edged up close to Gibbs to have a quiet examination of him now shrunk away in obvious alarm. The moon-faced auctioneer was visibly affected—during his long experience he had never seen a book sold for the fifth part of such a price. And what sort of a man was this to offer it when, if he had waited a half minute longer, he would have secured what he wanted for a couple of shillings? But Gibbs cared for nothing of this now—they might call him and think him what they pleased—and he pushed up to the table and claimed the precious volume. He soon set the auctioneer's mind at rest, "I will wait," he said, "till you make out my account." Then he stood there—perhaps at that moment the happiest of mankind.

"I should like to have had that fine volume of Shakespeare for my daughters," said the auctioneer, as he handed Gibbs the receipt, "but you are such a determined bidder there is no standing against you. A London gentleman, I presume—might you be from London?"

"You are welcome to the Shakespeare," replied Gibbs, ignoring the question. "It is—an elegant volume. And it is a family edition, which adds to its value. You may safely trust it to your daughters." Profuse were the happy father's thanks for the gracious present.

An old lady had in the earlier part of the day purchased a large and substantial box for eighteenpence; Gibbs now hunted her out and offered her a sovereign for it. The old person was flustered almost out of her life at such a premium, and it evidently aroused some suspicion in her mind that the stranger might know more about its value than she did. It was not until she had examined every corner of it many times over, and taken counsel with all the friends and relations she could get hold of, that she consented to part with it—even then following up-stairs for one more search for possibly hidden gold. Into this box Gibbs put first his prizes, and then the most respectable part of his library. But the Annual Registers and the Miscellanies and the green-backed works by Mrs. Sherwood he strewed recklessly about the room, and astonished the people who from time to time cautiously came to have a look at him, by telling them they could take what they liked away. With a wary eye on the donor the books were removed, and many a happy home in that remote district is even now indebted to his generosity for the solid collection of works which adorn its humble shelves. If the constant perusal of "L'Industrie Françoise," the "Géographie Ancienne Abrégée," the "Grammaire Espagnole Raisonnée," or "Histoire de Henri le Grand," have in any way soothed the sorrows, lightened the labours, and improved the morals of the crofters in this part of the north of Scotland the praise and the reward is due to John Gibbs the fisherman, and to no one else. If, as the old story-books say, the books have never been removed, they are there still.

Then the two men started on their way home. We said just now that Gibbs was perhaps for a short time the happiest man in the world; in making that remark we did not take into consideration Archie's feelings. He had bought a flaming yellow-red mahogany horse-hair sofa, three chairs, a clock-case, and an umbrella-stand, and, above all, a bed,—a real old-fashioned, seven feet by five-and-a-half erection, with a sort of pagoda on the top. That he had only a "but and ben," with stone and mud floors, twelve by fourteen feet each, and a door leading to them little more than two feet wide, had not yet caused him any anxiety. But we believe that before that seven-foot bedstead was got through that two-foot door the good-looking young woman, to whom half of it might be said to belong, expressed her opinion of his judgment in a way which made him shake in his shoes, strong and able man as he was.

When Gibbs reached the inn with his precious cargo he came in for the end of what had evidently been a serious disturbance. The landlord was undergoing with what patience he might the angry reproaches of a little old man, who, with uplifted finger, emphasized every word he uttered. The stranger had his back to the doorway, as had also his companion, a lady in a grey tweed dress.

"It's most provoking and annoying," cried the old man. "I took particular care to write the name of your infernal place plainly!—I believe you got the letter!"

"I got no letter," replied the landlord, "or I should have sent the machine."

"But you should have got it," cried the old man furiously, "and I'll find out who is responsible! It's scandalous!—it's—" he stuttered with rage at a loss for a word.

"You've lost a good day's fishing, Mr. Gibbs, I doubt," said the landlord, looking as if he would rather like to get out of the corner in which the new-comers had caught him; they had cut him off coming down stairs and blocked the lower step.

"And I'll see that whoever is responsible suffers for it," went on the old gentleman in a threatening way; "I'll show you —"

"Oh, man!" said the landlord at last, roused to retaliate, "I got no letter. And I do not care the crack of my thumb for you or your letter, or your threats, or your responsibilities! Here's a gentleman who has just come from the sale, and he'll tell you there was naething in it but a wheen sticks and books and rubbish,—a wheen auld chairs and pots!"

The strangers turned round at once to see who was appealed to. The man had a little, red angry face and a long beard,—you will see fifty like him in any town in a day's walk. His companion would have attracted some attention anywhere; Gibbs got to know her face pretty well in the course of time, but though he felt it was what is called a striking one he never knew exactly why. He would have said that her hair was neither dark nor light, that her eyes were grey, her mouth and nose both perhaps rather large, and that she had full red lips—a commonplace description enough, which would answer perhaps for three or four out of every dozen girls you meet. She was very tall—she stood a head and shoulders over her companion—and her figure, though it would have been large for a smaller woman, was in just proportion to her height. She put her hand on the old man's arm, as if to check his impetuosity, and threw oil on the troubled waters as it is befitting a woman should do.

"It is really of little consequence," she said, "though it was provoking at the time. We only wished to have got some remembrance—of an old friend. I have no doubt that there was some mistake at the post-office. Come!" and with a pretty air of authority she led the old grumbler into the sitting-room.

Gibbs was by no means what is called a classical scholar. He had wasted—so it seemed to him—a good many years of his life turning Shakespeare and Milton into very inferior Greek and Latin verses, and since he left Oxford had never opened a book connected with either of the languages—unless it was to see who the printer was. But he had a misty recollection of some passage which described how a mortal woman walked like a goddess, and he thought that then for the first time he understood what the writer meant,—he knew then for the first time how a goddess moved.

If a traveller had passed by that lonely inn at midnight, he would have seen a bright light burning in one of its windows. And if he had returned two, or three, or even four hours later he would have seen it still burning, shining out like a beacon over the wild moors. The salmon-fisher had forgotten his craft, the politician his newspaper, the admirer of goddesses that such creatures ever existed upon the earth. It was very late, or early, before Gibbs had finished his investigations and retired to his bed, and then his sleep was not a pleasant or a restful one. Unless it is pleasant to have hundreds of other people's poor relations standing in endless ranks, holding out thin and empty hands for help—unless it is restful to have to drive a huge wheelbarrow along in front of them, heavy at the commencement of the journey with first editions, uncut, of the quartos, but gradually growing lighter and lighter as they one by one slipped down the pile, and fell off on to the muddy roadway.

II.

Two parties cannot be long together in a small country inn without getting to some extent to know each other. Gibbs began by the little services which a man can always render to a lady, opening doors, lending newspapers, and so forth. A dog, too, often acts as a sort of introduction to two people who are fond of that animal; and the fisherman was the possessor of a small, short-legged, crust-coloured, hairy creature, answering to the name of Growley, which soon twined itself round the lady's heart, as it did round all with whom it came in contact.

(To be Continued.)