

Little Homer's Slate.

BY EUGENE FIELD.

AFTER dear old grandma died,  
Hunting through an oaken chest  
In the attic, we espied  
What repaid our childish quest:  
'Twas a homely little slate,  
Seemingly of ancient date.

On its quaint and battered face  
Was the picture of a cart,  
Drawn with all that awkward grace  
Which betokens childish art.  
But what meant this legend, pray,  
"Homer drew this yesterday"?

Mother recollected then  
What the years were fain to hide—  
She was but a baby when  
Little Homer lived and died;  
Forty years, so mother said,  
Little Homer had been dead.

This one secret through these years,  
Grandma kept from all apart,  
Hallowed by her lonely tears  
And the breaking of her heart;  
While each year that sped away,  
Seemed to her but yesterday.

So the homely little slate  
Grandma's baby's fingers pressed,  
To a memory consecrate,  
Lies in an oaken chest,  
Where, unwilling we should know,  
Grandma put it years ago.

HUNTED AND HARRIED.

A Tale of the Scottish Covenanters.

BY R. M. BALLANTYNE.

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

CLOSE beside one of the sodden graves lay the yet warm body of a dead man. The random bullet had found a billet in his heart, and "Nature's sweet restorer" had been merged into the sleep of death. Fortunate man! He had been spared, probably, months of slow-timed misery, with almost certain death at the end in any case.

Three men rose from behind the headstone of that grave, and looked sorrowfully on the drenched figure.

"He has passed the golden gates," said one in a low voice. "A wonderful change."

"Ay, Will," responded another of the trio; "but it's noo or niver wi' us. Set yer heid agin' the wa', Quentin."

The shepherd obeyed, and the three proceeded to carry out a plan which they had previously devised—a plan which only very strong and agile men could have hoped to carry through without noise. Selecting a suitable part of the wall, in deepest shadow, where a headstone slightly aided them, Quentin planted his feet firmly, and, resting his arms on the wall, leaned his forehead against them. Black mounted on his shoulder, and, standing erect, assumed the same position. Then Wallace, grasping the garments of his friends, climbed up the living ladder and stood on Black's shoulders, so that he could just grip the top of the wall and hang on. At this point in the process the conditions were, so to speak, reversed. Black grasped Wallace with both hands by one of his ankles, and held on like a vice. The living ladder was now hanging from the top of the wall instead of standing at the foot of it, and Quentin—the lowest rung, so to speak—became the climber. From Wallace's shoulders, he easily gained the top of the wall, and was able to reach down a helping hand to Black as he made his way slowly up Wallace's back. Then both men hauled Wallace up with some trouble, for the strain had been almost too much for him, and he could hardly help himself.

At this juncture the sentinel chanced to look up, and dark though it was, he saw the three figures on the wall a little blacker than the sky behind. Instantly the bright flash of his musket was seen, and the report, mingled with his cry of alarm, again brought out the guard. A volley revealed the three prisoners for a moment.

"Dinna jump!" cried Black, as the bullets whizzed past their heads. "Ye'll brék yer legs. Tak' it easy. They're slow at loadin'; an' the mair hurry the less speed!"

The caution was only just in time, for the impulsive Wallace had been on the point of leaping from the wall; instead of doing which he assisted in reversing the process which has just been described. It was much easier, however; and the drop which Wallace had to make after his friends were down was broken by their catching him in their arms. Inexperience, however, is always liable to misfortune. The shock of such a heavy man dropping from such a height gave them a surprise, and

sent them all three violently to the ground; but the firing, shouting, and confusion on the other side of the wall caused them to jump up with wonderful alacrity.

"Candlemaker Row!" said Black in a hoarse whisper, as they dashed off in different directions, and were lost in the blackness of night.

With a very sad face, on which, however, there was an air of calm resignation, Mrs. Black sat in her little room with her Bible open before her. She had been reading to Mrs. Wallace and Jean, preparatory to retiring for the night.

"It's awful to think of their lying out yonder ballless, maybe supperless, on a night like this," said Mrs. Wallace.

Jean, with her pretty face in that condition which the Scotch and Norwegian languages expressively call begrutten, could do nothing but sigh.

Just then hurried steps were heard on the stair, and next moment a loud knocking shook the door.

"Wha's that?" exclaimed Mrs. Black, rising.

"It's me, mither. Open; quick!"

Next moment Andrew sprang in and looked hastily around.

"Am I the first, mither?"

Before the poor woman could recover from her joy and amazement sufficiently to reply, another step was heard on the stair.

"That's an' o' them," said Black, turning and holding the door, so as to be ready for friend or foe. He was right. Mrs. Wallace uttered a little scream of joy as her son leaped into the room.

"Whaur's the Quentin?" asked Black.

The question was scarcely put when the shepherd himself bounded up the stair.

"They've gotten sight o' me, I fear," he said. "Have ye a garret, wummin—onywhere to hide?"

"No' a place in the hooso big enough for a moose to hide in," said Mrs. Black with a look of dismay.

As she spoke a confused noise of voices and hurrying steps was heard in the street. Another moment and they were at the foot of the stair. The three men seized the poker, tongs, and shovel. Mrs. Black opened her back window and pointed to the churchyard.

"Ye'er only chance!" she said.

Andrew Black leaped out at once. Wallace followed like a harlequin. Quentin Dick felt that there was no time for him to follow without being seen. Dropping his poker he sprang through the doorway, and, closing the door on himself, began to thunder against it, just as an officer leading some of the town-guard reached the landing.

"Open, I say!" cried Quentin furiously, "I'm sure the rebels cam in here. Dinna be keepin' the gentlemen o' the guard waitin' here. Open, I say, or I'll drive the door in!"

Bursting the door open, as though in fulfilment of his threat, Quentin sprang in, and looking hastily round, cried, as if in towering wrath, "Whaur are they? Whaur are thae pestiferous rebels?"

"There's nae rebels here, gentlemen," said Mrs. Black. "Ye'er welcome to seek."

"They maun hae gaen up the next stair," said Quentin, turning to the officer.

"And pray, who are you, that ye seem so anxious to catch the rebels?"

"Wha am I?" repeated Quentin with glaring eyes, and a sort of grasping of his strong fingers that suggested the idea of tearing someone to pieces. "Div'ee no see that I'm a shepherd? The sufferin's that I hae gaen through an' endured on account o' thae rebels is past—But c'way, sirs, they'll escape us if we stand haverin' here."

So saying the bold man dashed down the stair and into the next house, followed by the town-guard, who did not know him. The prisoners' guards were fortunately searching in another direction. A strict search was made in the next house, at which Quentin assisted. When they were yet in the thick of it he went quietly down-stairs and walked away from the scene, as he expressed it, "hotchin"—by which he meant chuckling.

But poor Andrew Black and Will Wallace were not so fortunate. A search which was made in the outer churchyard resulted in their being discovered among the tombs, and they were forthwith conducted to the Tolbooth prison.

When Ramblin' Peter, after many narrow escapes, reached the farm in Dumfries in a half-famished state, he sat down among the desolate ruins and howled with grief. Having thus relieved his feelings, he dried his eyes and proceeded in his usual sedate manner to examine things in detail. He soon found that his master had been wrong in supposing that the hide-hole had been discovered or destroyed. As he approached the outer end of the tunnel a head suddenly appeared above ground, and as suddenly vanished.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Peter in surprise.

"Hallo!" echoed the head, and reappeared blazing with astonishment. "Is that you, Peter?"

"Ay, M'Cube, that's ma. I thought ye

was a' deid. Has ye ony parritch i' the hole? I'm awfu' hungry."

"C'way in, lad; we've plenty to eat here, an' a guid company as weel—the Lord be thankit."

The man led the way—familiar enough to Peter; and in the hide-hole he found several persons, some of whom, from their costume, were evidently ministers. They paid little attention to the boy at first, being engaged in earnest conversation.

That same night, when darkness rendered it safe, Cargill, Cameron, Welsh, and Douglas, with some of their followers, left Black's place of concealment, and went off in different directions to risk, for a brief space, the shelter of a friendly cottage, where the neighbours would assemble to hear the outlawed ministers, while one of them kept watch, or to fulfil their several engagements for the holding of conventicles among the secret places of the hills.

CHAPTER X.—FIERCE AND FIERCER.

AFTER his escape, Quentin Dick, hearing of the recapture of his comrades, and knowing that he could not in any way help them, resolved to go back to Dumfries to make inquiries about the servant lassies Marion and Isabel, being ignorant of the fact that Ramblin' Peter had been sent on the same errand before him.

Now, although the one was travelling to, and the other from Edinburgh, they might easily have missed each other, as they travelled chiefly at night in order to escape observation. But, hearing on the way that the much-loved minister, Mr. Welsh, was to preach in a certain locality, they both turned aside to hear him, and thus came together.

A price of £500 sterling had been set on the head of Mr. Welsh, and for twenty years he had been pursued by his foes, yet for that long period he succeeded in eluding his pursuers—even though the resolute and vindictive Claverhouse was among them,—and in continuing his work of preaching to the people. Though a meek and humble man, Welsh was cool, courageous, and self-possessed, with, apparently a dash of humour in him—as was evidenced by his preaching on one occasion in the middle of the frozen Tweed, so that other he "might shun giving offence to both nations, or that two kingdoms might dispute his crime!"

The evening before the meeting at which Quentin and Peter unwittingly approached each other, Mr. Welsh found himself at a loss where to spend the night, for the bloodhounds were already on his track. He boldly called at the house of a gentleman who was personally unknown to him, but who was known to be hostile to field-preachers in general, and to himself in particular. As a stranger Mr. Welsh was kindly received. Probably in such dangerous times it was considered impolite to make inquiry as to names. At all events the record says that he remained unknown. In course of conversation his host referred to Welsh and the difficulty of getting hold of him.

"I am sent," said Welsh, "to apprehend rebels. I know where Mr. Welsh is to preach to-morrow, and will give you the rebel by the hand."

Overjoyed at this news the gentleman agreed to accompany him to the meeting on the morrow. Arriving next day at the rendezvous, the congregation made way for the minister and his host. The latter was then invited to take a seat, and, to his great amazement, his guest of the previous night stood up and preached. At the close of the sermon Mr. Welsh held out his hand to his host.

"I promised," he said, "to give you Mr. Welsh by the hand."

"Yes," returned the gentleman, who was much affected, as he grasped the hand, "and you said that you were sent to apprehend rebels. Let me assure you that I, a rebellious sinner, have been apprehended this day."

It was at this interesting moment that Quentin and Peter recognized each other, and, forgetting all other points of interest, turned aside to discuss their own affairs.

"Then there's nae use o' my gaun ony farther," said the shepherd thoughtfully.

"Nae whatever," said Peter; "ye'd best c'way back t' toon wi' me. Ye'll be safer there nor here, an' may chance to be o' service to the lassies."

Alas for the poor lassies! They were in the fangs of the wolves at that very time. In that council-room where, for years, the farce of "trial" and the tragedy of cruel injustice had been carried on, Marion Clark and Isabel Scott were standing before their civil and clerical inquisitors. The trial was nearly over. Proceeding upon their mean principle of extracting confession by the method of entrapping questions, and thus obtaining from their unsuspecting victims sufficient evidence—as they said—to warrant condemnation, they had got the poor serving-maids to admit that they had attended field preachings, had conversed with some of the Government denounced as rebels; and other matters which sufficed

to enable them to draw up a libel. These two innocent girls were then handed over to the Justiciary Court, before which they were charged with the crime of receiving and corresponding with Mr. Donald Cargill, Mr. Thomas Douglas, Mr. John Welsh, and Mr. Richard Cameron; with the murderers of Archbishop Sharp; and with having heard the said ministers preach up treason and rebellion!

When the indictment was read to them the poor things meekly admitted that it was correct, except in so far as it called the ministers rebels and asserted that they preached up treason. The jury were exceedingly unwilling to serve on the trial, but were compelled to do so under threat of fine. After deliberating on the evidence they found the girls both guilty, by their own confession, of holding the opinions charged against them, but that as actors, or receivers of rebels, the charge was not proven.

Upon this they were condemned to die, but before leaving the court Isabel Scott said impressively: "I take you all to witness against another at your appearance before God, that your proceeding against us this day is only for owning Christ, his Gospel, and his members." They were then led back to prison.

When Quentin and Peter arrived in Edinburgh, two days later, they passed under the West Port, which was decorated with the shrivelled heads and hands of several martyrs, and made their way to the Grassmarket, which they had to traverse in going towards Candlemaker Row. Here they found a large crowd surrounding the gallows-tree which did such frequent service there. Two female figures were swinging from the beam.

"The auld story," said the shepherd in a low, sad voice. "What was their crime?" he inquired of a bystander.

"They tried to serve the Lord, that was a'," replied the man bitterly. "But they ended their course bravely. An' sang the 81th Psalm and the 118th psalm o' God's great love an' free grace to her and to sinfu' man."

"Puir things!" exclaimed Quentin with tremulous voice. "It's ower noo. They're fairly inside o' the celestial gates."

The sight was all too common in those dark days to induce delay, but the two friends had to pass near the gallows, and naturally looked up in passing.

"Quentin!" gasped Peter, stretching out both hands towards the martyrs, whose now soulless frames were hanging there, "it's—it's Marion an'—"

A low wail followed, as the poor boy fell over in a swoon.

The shepherd's heart almost stood still, and his great chest quivered for a moment as he gazed, but he was a man of strong will and iron mould. Stooping, he picked up his little friend and carried him silently away.

Their grief was, however, diverted to other channels on reaching the abode of Mrs. Black, for there they found her and Mrs. Wallace and Jean in deepest sorrow over the terrible news just brought to them by Jock Bruce.

Andrew Black, he told them, had been sent a prisoner to the Bass Rock, and Will Wallace, with two hundred others, had been banished to the plantations in Barbadoes, where they were to be sold as slaves.

Quentin sat down, covered his face with both hands, and groaned aloud on hearing this. Peter, who had recovered by that time, looked about him with the expressionless face of one whose reason has been unseated. Observing that Jean was sitting apart, sobbing as if her heart would break, he went quietly to her, and, taking one of her hands, began to stroke it gently. "Dinna greet, Jean," he said; "the Lord will deliver them. Marion aye tell me that, an' I believe she was richt."

Truly these unfortunate people needed all the consolation that the Word could give them, for banishment to the plantations usually meant banishment for life, and as to the hundreds who found a prison on the bleak and rugged Bass Rock at the mouth of the Forth, many of these also found a grave.

(To be continued.)

THE sweetest lives are those to duty wed,  
Whose deeds, both great and small,  
Are close knit strands of an unbroken thread

Where loves on nobles all,  
The world may sound no trumpets, ring no bells,  
The Book of Life the shining record tells

—Mrs. Brewster

Good thoughts are the sweetest guests, and should be heartily welcomed well fed and thick with life. If the roses they give out sweet smell if laid up in the jar of memory.