

* * The Story Page. * *

A Great Faith.

BY DAVID LYALL.

I woke with a start to find someone standing by my bed, and the Doctor's voice called together my wandering wits. "You'll need to get up, David, and drive me to the other side of the glen. See what you get by invading a solitary man's abode."

"Oa, that's all right," I answered, as I jumped out of bed. "What time is it?"

"Ten minutes past four, and a glorious morning. When you've got your eyes fairly opened, you'll enjoy the drive; I'll have the tea ready in ten minutes."

"Who came for you?"

"The man Brodie on a farm-horse. He's a fine poor chap, and he'll have an ache in his bones all day, he's ridden for all he is worth on the great lumbering brute."

He did not explain this dark saying, but left me to my dressing, which was quickly accomplished, and I ran lightly downstairs, to find a little tray set, and a simple breakfast ready.

I laughed as I essayed a mouthful of bread and butter, which, however, did not go down very easily. I was not used to sudden calls and hasty meals at an hour when other folks slept, and though I admired the leisurely way in which the Doctor made his substantial breakfast I could not imitate him. He looked at me with good-natured scorn. "Eat away or you'll need to take a piece in your pocket, lad. Well, I'd get the beast in."

"Let me do it," I said, jumping up, and off I went to the stable. I had been five days in Amphray, and we had become intimate in the true sense of the word. I had never enjoyed myself in any house so well, nor felt more thoroughly at home. And each day increased my admiration and pride in the Doctor, and my gratitude for the happy inspiration which had bidden me to him. In another ten minutes the wheels of the gig awoke the echoes in the sleeping street, but never a head popped over a blind to watch. I dare say more than one drowsy head turned on its pillow, dimly conscious that the healer was abroad, and, perhaps, glad that he was not needed at his bedside.

The still beauty of the new day sank into my soul as we left the house behind, and essayed the long, hilly road to the head of the glen. Even the garrulous have their moments of reserve, and I defy any man to mouth vain words in the hush of the summer morning when the earth, fresh from the hand of God greets him holly. Then, if ever, he must feel what a beautiful and wondrous and holy thing is the earth the Lord has made; it is then he will feel sharpness of regret if he has done anything in his own life unworthy of his heritage in it. The level lines of the risen sun lay athwart the purpling hills, making sharp and dark their shadows. It shone clear and glorious on the running waters of the burn, whose parting music filled all the air.

It was almost five o'clock when we arrived at the farm-place, at the door of which stood a man with a look of tense anxiety on his face. He was elderly, and his face bore traces of a long struggle with poverty; there was something pathetic, I thought, in his straggling grey hairs and stern, unrelaxed mouth.

He gave the Doctor "Good-morning," and took the horse by the head.

"We'd better yoke."

"Just wait a bit, Mr. Brodie; perhaps I needn't stav now," said the Doctor, as he leaped from his seat and strode into the house.

"I'll just go in too," said the farmer, and I nodded assent. I was beautifully situated in a cleft of the hills commanding a glorious sweep of the country, and the air had an intoxicating freshness in it finer than anything I had ever experienced. I knew by the slowness of our ascent that we must be at least six hundred feet higher than The Byres. Except its situation, there was nothing specially distinguishing about the place, the usual cluster of farm buildings, rather untidily huddled together, and a plain, bare two-story house with a breadth of green grass before the door that was all. It had a poor look; the man who is successful, if he is a normal being, makes haste to beautify and adorn even the outside of his abode; but there was no attempt. Its bareness indeed had something pathetic in it.

I sat there a good fifteen minutes, until the farmer came out from the house again.

"I'm to take out the beast," he said laconically. "Will you come inside and get some breakfast?"

"We've had it," I answered, as I jumped down.

"But you've had a long drive, and will be ready for a second," he said laconically. I was standing close by him as he took the horse by the head again, and I saw his rough, brown, hardened hand tremble like any woman's. Then I saw that the most cruel of all anxieties, concerning the welfare of one he loved, had him in thrall. I did not trouble him with speech, and when we had put the beast in its strange stall, where he betrayed no uneasiness, being accustomed to all kinds of housing,

I said I would take a walk around, and come back in half an hour or so.

He seemed relieved, and I turned to the hill behind the house, where there was a burn running down, and a few stunted birch and rowan trees fringing it. There I found a comfortable seat, and lit my morning pipe, at the same time keeping an eye on the front door of the house. The stir of life at the farm town was beginning; a man crossed the stable-yard and took two horses out to water; a woman in a short wisney petticoat entered the byre with a milking-pail. And so I sat, in no way bored or weary, for a good hour. Then I saw one of the upper windows suddenly thrown open, and I recognized the Doctor in the room. After another half-hour's wait, I saw him at the front door.

I rose and ran down the slope to the house. His face wore an anxious look, and he saw me, he beckoned me to come quickly.

"I want you to yoke again and go over to Caltha for Doctor Mercer. You can go and come in an hour if you put him on. You won't lose any time."

"Have I to say anything particular to him?"

"No; tell him where he is wanted, and he'll understand."

So I set off again, and, being fortunate in finding the man I sought at breakfast, brought him back in an hour. While they were up stairs, I accepted the farmer's offer of something to eat, and enjoyed it. He pressed the food on me; but all the time I could see the heavy strain under which he was laboring. In the middle of speech sometimes he would break off and listen for some sound from the upper air.

Presently the room door was abruptly opened, and the Doctor looked in.

"You'll better come up, Mr. Brodie; your wife is asking for you."

"Hoo is she?" he asked, and the sweat drops stood on his brow.

"Far through, friend. We have done our best, but only the Lord can preserve her life."

I heard the sob strangled in the strong man's throat, and a blight seemed to have fallen on the fairness of the summer morning. It was the first time I had been so near the verities of life; its tragedy sank into my soul. I was glad to get out into the open again; the strained stillness of the house was too oppressive to be borne.

After what seemed an interminable quarter of an hour, the Doctor appeared, and beckoned me from the bottom of the garden to the door.

"We'd better go, David; we must sit three abreast and drop Doctor Mercer at the Caltha road-end."

"How's the woman?" I asked bluntly.

"She'll die," said he abruptly. "Nothing but a miracle could save her. The bairn's all right."

I got the gig, and in a few more minutes we were bowling down the smooth road, a very silent trio. Occasionally a remark of a technical nature would pass between the two regarding the patient they had left, and when we came to the Caltha road, Doctor Mercer slid silently down, nodded, and went his way. Silent men at all times, they seemed specially so then. They had done their best, working to each other's hands, as they had done all their life through, and their disappointment was written on their faces.

"It's this that makes me wish I had chosen any other calling, David," he said, when we had settled ourselves comfortably for the remainder of the journey. "To look in a man's eyes and tell him you can do no more, that you are helpless to save what he most prizes on earth, it takes the starch out of one, lad, I can tell you that."

"She's a young woman, I suppose?"

"Yes, a mere bairn. It's a pathetic story. You wouldn't think Thomas Brodie had been going about all his days with a romance hidden under his homespun jacket, would you?"

"Indeed no; he looks stolid enough."

"To the outward eye. Five and twenty years ago he cared for a woman who wouldn't look at him. She married another man for his looks and his wheeling ways, and she paid for it through ten years of misery; then she died, and left her only child—to whom do you think? Her old lover. Her father deserted her, and went off to the end of the earth, and Brodie took the bairn home to Torphinn, where she grew up as winsome as her mother had been in her youth. Then Brodie found that their life couldn't go on except under new conditions. He loved her, you see, to make a long story short, for the man went through many torments before he asked her, they were married at twelvemonth past at Martinmas, and this is the end. The Almighty has queer ways of testing men, Brodie's deeply religious in his way, he's a kind of preacher up there in the lonely hills, and God might have spared her, that's what I think."

"Perhaps he may," I hazarded, but the Doctor shook his head.

"Unless I've made the biggest mistake of my life, she'll be a dead woman before the setting of the sun," he said,

and we talked of the subject no more. Late in the evening an old-fashioned lumbering farm gig, drawn by a thick-legged horse, drove up to the Doctor's door. We were finishing our dinner and enjoying our talk, as usual; the Doctor seemed to know who it was before the bell rang. "That'll be Brodie to tell me the poor soul's gotten by with it," he said, lapsing, as he sometimes did, into the idiom of the Dale, and he strode out of the room. When he came back there was a puzzled look on his face. "He says she's better, David, and that she'll live. He speaks with the confidence of a man who knows."

"Are you going up?"

He nodded. "I'll just go back with him. In an hour's time you can yoke the black mare in the little gig, and come as far as Caltha road-end to meet me. I'll get to the cross-roads about nine o'clock."

I stood by the window and watched them drive away again, and I saw that a change since the morning had come on Brodie's face. The strained look had left it; his expression was one of peace.

Punctually at nine I was at the cross-roads, but the Doctor was there before me. "He's right, she'll live. It's beyond me; you should have heard him speak about it as we drove up, David; it would have been good enough for any book."

"What did he say?" I asked with deep interest.

"He said that after I left he was no more able to bear the four walls of the house, and calling the dog, he went away to the hills after the sheep, tramping the bluest of them until he reached the remotest corner of the place. And there he knelt down, he said, and wrestled with the Lord for his wife's life. 'I told him,' he said, 'that I had served him day in and day out for thirty years, and that I had asked naething frae his hand; thatither men had the things that make life worth living, I had only her. I cried to him mightily, and when I got up frae my knees and went back to the house, I kent he had heard me, and that Jeanie woud live.'"

"It's no canny," said I.

"That kind of a man, living solitary all his days with dumb beasts and growing things that come from the hand of God, is nearer the eternal than such as we. His faith is great, and his expectation without a flaw. He has proven to the uttermost the words, 'Ask, and it shall be given you.'"

"Other men have asked and been denied."

"Not as Brodie asked. I read my lesson with him this day. David, you's a faith that a king on the throne might envy, a faith to move mountains."

So Thomas Brodie of Torphinn, having wrestled with God and prevailed, saw his wife restored to ultimate health, and her bonnie bairn toddling by her side. And always from that day my thought of him was associated with near and intimate communion with the unseen, possible in this world only to very few.—The British Weekly.

How the Gospel Works.

A GOOD STORY.

REV. G. CAMPBELL MORGAN.

I remember some years ago conducting a mission, and one of the office-bearers of the church where I was, said to me:

"Mr. Morgan, I want you to come and see some people. A girl was married out of our Sunday School three years ago, to a man who is a slave to drink and impurity and gambling. I would like you to come along and see her."

I went—it was in '85—on a cold February day, to see that girl. Oh, I cannot picture the home to you! It was one of those awful houses in the midlands of England, reached by passing through an entry between other houses, into a back court. When I got to the entry with my friend, some children who were hovering and shivering there, hearing our steps approaching, rushed away. We followed them and went into the house. I see that room now. There was a broken table standing there, a chair with the back broken off standing by it, no fire in the grate; upon the mantel-shelf a cup and saucer, broken; and not another article of furniture that my eye rested on in that room. And there stood a woman in unbecomingly rags with the mark of a brutal fist upon her face, and three ill-clad bairns clinging to her gown. She said:

"Excuse the children running from you, but they thought it was father."

Oh, the tragedy of it!

When I got on to the rostrum that night to preach, my friend came to me and said:

"He is here."

I said: "Who is here?"

"That woman's husband; he is sitting right down in front of you."

Now, I don't often preach at one man, but I did that night. I put aside what I was going to talk about, and