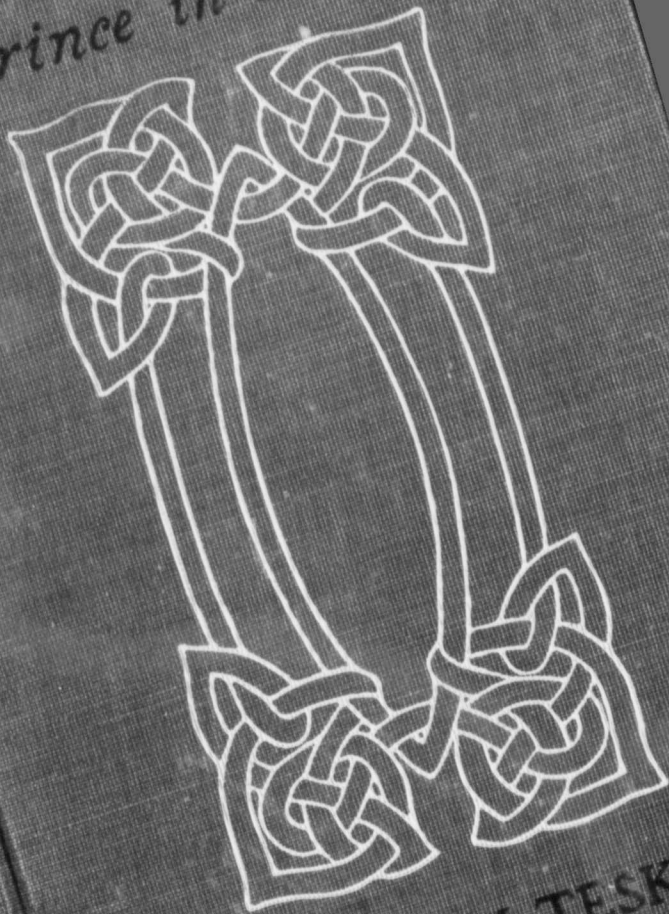
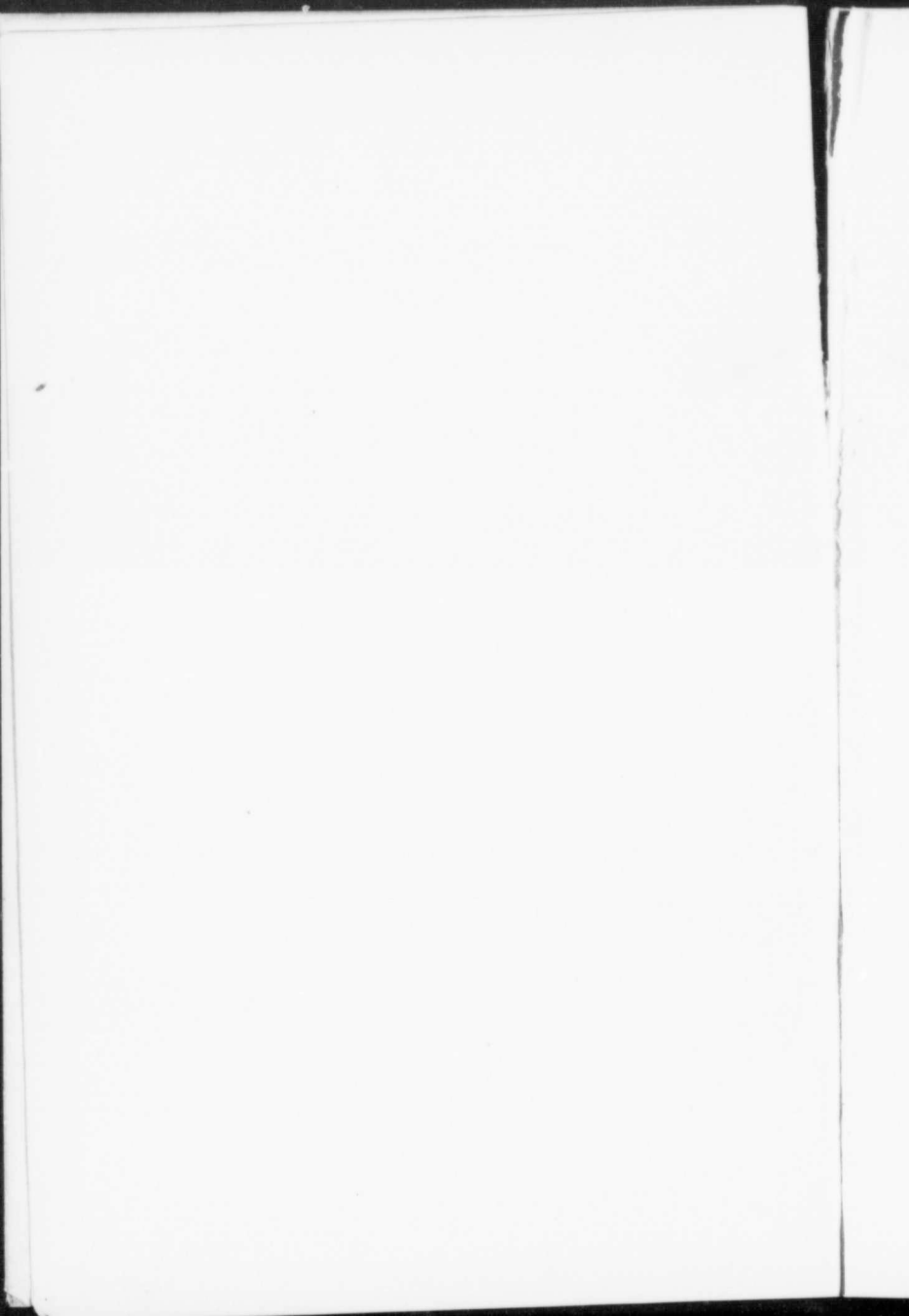


ALEXANDER M'BAIN B.A.
Prince in Penury



ADELINE M. TESKEY



Alexander McBain
B. A.

By ADELINE TESKEY

The Village Artist

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Alexander McBain

B. A.

A PRINCE IN PENURY

BY

ADELINE M. TESKEY

AUTHOR OF "THE VILLAGE ARTIST"



NEW YORK

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. WHAT IS MAN?	9
II. THE WIDOW'S MITE	24
III. "THE WEE CROODLIN' DOO"	33
IV. SANDY	46
V. MAGGIE	53
VI. THE WOMAN AND THE HOE	67
VII. THE RING CROWNED WITH TWO HEARTS	81
VIII. A SUCCESS AT CHECKERS	97
IX. A CRACK IN THE MARBLE	103
X. THE WIDOW'S PRIDE	113
XI. BILL GILOOLY'S INSPIRATION	127
XII. THE WOMEN INTERFERE	134
XIII. BILL TURNS PREACHER	152
XIV. DEVIOUS WAYS	159
XV. THE VILLAGE HELPER UNDERTAKES	168
XVI. WHAT SOME OF THE VILLAGERS THOUGHT	176
XVII. THE HUSH IN THE VILLAGE	185
XVIII. BILL GILOOLY LEAVES HOME	193
XIX. MORE OF ALEXANDER	204
XX. LIFE AT THE WAYSIDE TAVERN	217
XXI. IN THE WILDERNESS	230
XXII. A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS	245
XXIII. BILL GILOOLY GOES WEST	253
XXIV. THE DERELICT	266
XXV. IN THE OLD VILLAGE	276
XXVI. THE BEST ROBE	286



ALEXANDER McBAIN, B.A.

I

WHAT IS MAN?

HE was young and slender, almost gentlemanly-looking, as he reeled through our village streets, bumping against our tall, queenly maples, and occasionally falling prone among the grasses and weeds that skirted the narrow plank sidewalk. He had become a familiar sight to most of us, and we had stopped passing remarks, and simply looked at the swaying young figure with a lowering of the brows, or perhaps a feeling of depression about the heart, but to strangers the painful story of his life had to be told over and over again.

To the question often carelessly asked, "Who is that young fellow making a snake fence across the sidewalk?" we would reply in an abashed voice, although, as any of the villagers would have told you, we were not "temperance," and would have considered anyone who advanced "teetotal" ideas fanatical in the extreme.

"That is our B. A."

"Your B. A.?" with a rising inflection would immediately follow.

Then we would continue in a lower tone to tell that the young fellow was the only son of a widowed mother, who by strenuous effort had kept him in college until he had won the degree of Bachelor of Arts, but by the time he was through he was such a slave to strong drink that his education was practically useless.

The questioner would glance a second time at the reeling figure, more interestedly this time, and look pained, or simply curious, according to his own character and habits.

A few of us who lived in the village did not know the first part of the story, except as it was told us by some of the old residents. Snatches from Mrs. Brady, Mrs. McShane, Mrs. McTavish—and where could one find biographers who could put their hearts more into their story?—and a word or two from the "Village Helper" furnished us with the boy's early history.

"There's been lots o' happenin's in this here place any one of 'em a book could be wrote about," said the Village Helper; "I've been 'round among them for a good spell—the folks, know 'em from fust to last,

ye may say, bein' on hand when they was born, an' layin' 'em out when they died, and there isn't much about them that's worth knowin' that *I* don't know."

Putting the stories together, it was learned that Alexander McBain's father died when his son was but a few days old, from what the newspapers in the present day would call "heart-failure," but in that day they were honest enough, or rude enough, according as you think about it, to call his malady simply "drunkenness."

There was caste among drinking men then, as now; the respectable tippler was well-dressed, preferred to drink his potion from a glass, and generally kept himself in a condition to walk home—if he had to be carried it was always done after nightfall. To this class, it may be said, the father of the boy belonged. Only twice in the memory of the oldest inhabitants of the village did he so far forget himself as to go yelling like a wild Indian down the main street, and that was when his wife was away for a week. "And," said Mrs. McTavish, when telling this incident, "th' Bible never said a truer word than, 'It is na gude for man to be alone,' some o' them not even for a week at a time. It is different wi' woman; she knows how to keep her head, an' get

along very well by hersel' when th' Lord appoints her so to do. But I'm thinkin' a man's bein' alone is never by th' Lord's appointment, or it wouldna work sa ill."

Ours was not a Scotch settlement, nor a Scotch village; perhaps Granny Neilson was the only one among us who could boast of having been born in the land of the heather. There were not more than half a dozen that had the broad rolling accent of the Scot, but such was the character of that half dozen we could not very truly write of the village and leave them out. We had our warm-hearted Irish, our cool-headed English, and also a type of man and woman distinctly our own, which type stood strongly in the foreground of most of the village doings.

The other extreme from the father of Alexander McBain was fairly represented by Paddy Conley, a servant of some Irish lord, who at the death of his master had found his way to our Canadian village. Paddy was without family and friends, and, to speak the cruel truth, he was a whisky-soaked blot on the fair pages of our village history. His clothes were shabby; it made little difference to him how his whisky was served; if he had a preference it was for drinking it out of the bottle; indeed he was seldom seen without the neck of a bottle protruding from

his pocket, and all his shortcomings were witnessed by the white light of day.

We buried Paddy at the county's expense, when Alexander McBain was at college; all the women wishing in the depths of their hearts that there was a chance for a poor soul to try again.

It was at a sewing-bee, assembled for the purpose of making some clothes for a family of poor children suddenly left motherless, that the women, the day of the funeral, discussed the subject of Paddy Conley's future state. When he was sober he would have gone out of his way to accommodate any one of them, and they seemed unable to drop him from their solicitous care.

It was Mrs. McTavish who was talking, first in a low tone and to a few directly around her; then, as she grew more earnest, she raised her voice so we all could hear her—Mrs. McTavish was a woman who would have shone intellectually in a larger sphere.

"Why, the man took too much, I'm no denying," she was saying, apparently in answer to the remark of another, "but his life was shaped by heredity; he told me himsel' that his faither, an' his grand-faither"—it was remarked in the village that Mrs. McTavish talked more "Scotch" when she was

very much in earnest—"before him, both rolled intil drunkards' graves, an' moulded by environment"—she had found this new word in her recent reading, and felt a certain pride in airing it—"hasn't the very breath o' th' daisies o' th' field been smothered out for the poor fellow, by th' smell o' whisky that's always been about him frae th' cradle till th' grave; where waur his chance? . . . I'm no sayin' there ain't good in whisky," she murmured in a lower tone, as if afraid she might be considered to have fanatical ideas, "but one kin hae too much o' a gude thing. . . . I mind," she continued, after a second short pause, "o' seein' that man when he was sober—which I own was seldom—wi' as good an' sedate a look on his face as ye'd want to see on an ordinary mortal. . . . He *would* hae been better; he never rolled sin as a sweet morsel under his tongue, an' that' th' state o' th' wicked—'cordin' to Job."

"Many a quid of tobacco he rolled as a sweet morsel under his tongue," said Mrs. Brady, as she drew her needle through a stiff piece of buckram. Mrs. Brady was of Irish extraction, and had a blunt, honest way of expressing herself that sometimes hurt the sensibilities of the other women.

"I wouldn't call that exactly a *sin*," said Mrs.

Brown, a thin-lipped, careful, precise person—so careful and precise that the women, with common consent, gave her the work of cutting out the garments they were about to sew. “The Bible speaks of *sins* and *infirmities*; I think chewing tobacco comes under the head of *infirmities*.”

“I ken fine,” said Mrs. McTavish, as if her mind had never wandered from her original thought, “that th’ on’y hope for sinners consists in their bein’ saved frae sinnin’; but what th’ Faither may do to save them, I’m no sa sure, no sa sure as when I waur younger an’ tho’t I knew more. . . . The God who is dealin’ wi’ th’ human race is th’ God an’ Faither o’ our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Th’ same yesterday, to-day, an’ forever,” whispered Granny Neilson’s thin, tremulous, old lips to her own heart, quite unconscious that it was audible to the other women.

“I’m remembering,” continued Mrs. McTavish, “when I was a bit girly, our minister had three children. One o’ th’ wee things was no all there—water on th’ brain, or somethin’—an’ one day when th’ faither was comin’ home frae his parish duties, th’ two hearty bairns pick-ed each a rose out o’ th’ manse garden, an’ went out to meet him, an’ gie him th’ bonnie flowers, th’ wee daft thing following

off th' road, stumblin' among th' stones an' roots, wi' a stalk o' cottonweed an' a dandelion she had plucked by th' roadside. I mind th' poor faither took th' roses frae th' two strong children, an' thank-ed them; but wi' a great pity in his face he reached afar past them, an' stoopin' down he took th' poor foolish thing, that never e'en tho't to offer him what she had gathered, up in his arms, an' carried her home. So I'm thinkin' p'raps th' Heavenly Faither will take His poor foolish things, that were born wrong, started off on th' wrong road an' plucked weeds on th' highway o' life in place o' roses, up in His arms, an' carry them to some more sheltered place where they may hae a chance to grow intil men after His own heart. No one will make me believe, if I am a Presbyterian, that th' A'mighty hae made a human heart better than His own, an' who by searchin' can find out God?"

"But," said Granny Neilson, passing her needle over to another woman to be threaded—her eyes were not so strong as they used to be, but she did all the basting—"if it were our poor daft lad here in the village, Crazy Tim, wi' on'y half his faculties, it would be different; shall not the judge of all the earth do right? But when one has been given the light to ken right from wrong, an' chooses th'

wrong? . . . Th' A'mighty hae His condections for everything," she added, "an a road to every place; an' if we wish th' thing we must fill th' condections, an' if we want to reach th' place we maun walk th' road. Would I even reach Toronto if I started off toward Buffalo?—without turnin' square 'round, an' walkin' th' other way?"

None of the women seemed inclined to dispute this; there was a short, impressive silence, then the conversation drifted into the merits of straight and bias frills.

"My gracious goodness!" said Mrs. Brady to another woman, as they were walking home after dark from the sewing-bee, "that was queer talk Mrs. McTavish was givin' us this afternoon, queer talk, sure enough."

It was a night in autumn; the gentle flutter of falling leaves stirred the air like angels' wings, and the million stars throbbed in the heavens, as if keeping time to some unheard music. Something in the beauty or mystery of the latter stirred even the materialistic soul of Mrs. Brady, and she said, raising her eyes to the blue-black canopy overhead, "When we look at them stars, an' think how little we know about them, what's keepin' 'em goin', an' what's keepin' 'em from jumpin' their tracks, like the railcars

does sometimes; or runnin' into one another; an' what's goin' to be did with them in the end—why—why—why—what's the use in talkin'? What's the use in us tryin' to say what's goin' to be did with a soul? What's the use?"

Mrs. Murray, the Squire's wife, walking home in another direction was also attracted by the peculiar glory of the starry heavens. Pausing on a dark corner of the village street, she whispered, as her eyes swept the immensity above her, "When we consider the heavens the work of Thy fingers, the moon and stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man that Thou art mindful of him?—more, infinitely more than the stars," she added, after a moment's pause. "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, a little lower, only a *little* lower."

Walking a few rods she found herself in front of a small house from the uncurtained window of which shone out the light of a lamp. It was a plain shoemaker's shop; the walls were hung with the appliances of the owner's trade, strings of lasts, sides of leather, balls of hemp; cobwebs festooned the corners.

It would have been a dingy-looking place but for the fact that the central figure, the man seated on his cobbler's bench, was a beatific vision. The ob-

server forgot the man's canvas smock and soiled hands, gazing spell-bound at the white glow of his large-featured face.

"The Village Saint," mentally soliloquised Mrs. Murray; "it is like gazing at some great, white mountain peak to look into his face. What is he thinking about at this moment? His face has the glow of a St. Francis of Assisi. Wonderful to what a height a man can rise! And yet, should we wonder at it? Should not that be the normal condition of man? Is it anything more than the expression of the divine which is in every man. 'Thou madest him a little lower than the angels, only a *little* lower.' What great beings we are!"

A few minutes after Mrs. Murray had passed his shop the old shoemaker laid down the "upper" of a shoe on which he had been stitching, took off his apron and canvas smock and hung them on a wooden peg over his bench, turned out his lamp, and retired to a room in the rear of his shop.

This room seemed to serve both as a sitting-room and a kitchen; here the old man had lived by himself since the death of his wife and only child. The room was uncarpeted except that braided mats were spread in front of his door and at his chair; but it was scrupulously clean, kept so by the Village Helper,

it being the one joy of her life to lend a helping hand to this aged Saint.

The owner of the room drew on a soft woollen coat, which he kept for the house, placed a teakettle on the stove, and began to prepare his evening meal. This consisted of a cup of tea, a boiled egg, and two slices of toast.

"Yes, I'll have to make three slices," he said to some inner self that had evidently made the suggestion. "Pussy, an' Dicky, an' Watch will want some."

Having spread a white cloth over half the table—it had never been spread over the whole of the table since the departure of his wife and child—he placed the toast and boiled egg upon it, with the old-fashioned pewter teapot that held three cups; then seating himself, he bowed his glory-crowned head and "said grace."

He spoke the words aloud, as he used to do when his wife and child were still with him, and the very canary in the cage, which had belonged to his daughter, the cat on the floor, and the coarse-haired yellow dog seemed to grow silently reverent while he was saying it.

As soon as the grace was finished, however, the bird in the cage began to flutter his wings and emit sharp little pleading calls.

"Yes, Dicky, you'll get your piece of toast," said the master; and breaking off a portion he rose from the table and placed it between the wires of the hanging cage.

"Now, Pussy, an' Watch, it's your turn," and he gave a piece to each animal, that sat one on the right and the other on the left of his chair.

"There now, take it nicely," he admonished the dog, which was last served. "Ah, ye rascal," when the said dog sniffed at the piece and hesitated, "ye want it buttered; *I* know you." Then spreading a thin coat of butter over the dog's piece, he added in an admonitory tone, "Don't ye know butter's gettin' dear; fall comin' on an' milk growin' scarce?"

Having satisfied his humble subjects—the old man felt himself to be a king or a god in his small domain—he patted the top of his boiled egg with the back of his pewter teaspoon, and picking the small pieces of broken shell off with his fingers, he began to eat his supper.

The meal progressed happily, the dog and the cat and himself getting about equal attention. When it was finished the old man cleared away the dishes, and spreading a red cloth over his table, he brought out his large-printed Bible; while the bird and the dog

and the cat rolled themselves into comfortable balls of silence.

Opening the Bible at the Psalms, the old man read, sometimes inaudibly, sometimes audibly. The latter proceeding aroused the quick hearing of the dog, and he glanced up at his master with a look of cheerful intelligence in his deep yellow-brown eyes, as if he would say, "Yes, I know that it is so interesting that you cannot keep it to yourself."

Before closing the book the old man turned to his favourite passage in the New Testament, and read aloud: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "Shall never thirst, shall *never* thirst," he whispered. He closed the book and fell on his knees in a rapture of thanksgiving.

Across the street, down a few doors from the shoemaker's house, at the same hour that he was engaged with his Bible and on his knees, a company of men were drinking in the "Mapleton House." It was Pete Gilooly, the blacksmith, who was "standing the treats," and a wager had been laid as to which man could drink the most whisky. Already they had become hilarious, regardless of the decencies of life, and remembering that it had been Paddy Conley's funeral

day, with much boisterous glee they were drinking to his enjoyment in the realm to which he had so recently gone.

Late that night the wife of the proprietor of the Mapleton House, looking through a small opening into the barroom, shuddered, and whispered, "I never knew before that men could make such beasts of themselves. Man can sink lower than any other animal."

II

THE WIDOW'S MITE

ALEXANDER McBAIN'S father died, leaving nothing to his young wife but the child. He had always scouted the mention of life insurance. "Can I not just as well put odd bits o' money in th' bank, an' let it be gatherin' interest *there?*" he had said crabbedly two or three times when the subject was urged upon him. Money comin' in when a man's dead is o'er late to do him much good." "An' wi' Scotch stubbornness he persevered in his own line o' thinkin,' an' drank up all th' odd bits o' money," said Mrs. McTavish. So the mother soon found it necessary to stop crying over the long white-robed speck of humanity in her arms, and turn her attention to some way of earning his living and her own. Indeed, when she awoke the first morning after her husband's death, and felt the little presence in the bed near her arm, she knew that she still had something to live for—something to make life *worth* living. Drawing the warm little head into the hollow

of her shoulder, and the yielding, confiding little form that she felt was dependent upon her—upon *her*, oh, the glory of it—for everything, nearer to her; a fierce joy leaped up in her heart, and she cried, “God, God, I’ll take good care of him! I’ll take good care of him! *I will, I will.*”

The entire village seemed to take a sympathetic interest in the baby so young left fatherless. The neighbours brought to the young mother lying in her white bed, with the wee babe beside her, presents of caps, flannel petticoats, pinning-blankets, and other indispensable dainties for a baby, and each woman made her wise speech regarding the child.

“Ye’ll want to discipline yer baby; be very firm an’ pertickler right from th’ start,” advised Mrs. Brown, shutting firmly her thin lips, “to teach him rules. Ye have to begin the trainin’ as soon as they’re born, an’ keep at it; have a time for him to sleep, an’ a time for him to wake up, an’ a time for him to eat, and a time for him to be washed, and a time for him to be dressed. That’s the on’y way—break him at the beginnin’.”

“Goodness gracious!” said Mrs. Brady, who was present and somehow felt troubled at the thought of all those burdens being put upon a little baby, “give the child enough to eat. *He’ll* let you know when he

is hungry; let him alone for that. He'll be growed up before you know where you are, an' be supportin' you. He'll throw aside dresses for trousers in no time. Just you take care av him, an' give him plenty to eat, an' yer troubles 'll soon all be over."

"Dearie me, dearie me, a baby!" cried Granny Neilson—people were just beginning to call her Granny at that time—caressing the cheek of the new-born with her fingers; "a wee new soul just fresh down frae heaven. Our Saviour himsel' was once a babe; as I have just been readin', 'He set his foot on th' lowliest o' our paths that we might hae footprints all th' way ta his home.'"

She looked reflectively out through the window as she was speaking, toward the pink sunset in the east; then her mind came back to the mother and the baby, and she continued:

"Aye, aye, it's a great work that's come ta you, Jessie, th' work o' guidin' a new soul through th' shoals o' life. Ye never can do it by yer lone, *never*. Gie th' boy ta God, Jessie; he's yer Widow's Mite, an' that's th' on'y thing ta do wi' Mites. Gie yer Widow's Mite ta God."

It was not customary for the men to show much interest in new-born babies, but Peter McKim, being a sort of village wiseacre, felt it incumbent upon him,

as the child's own father was dead, to call on the widow and advise her in reference to the training of her son.

"Break his will," was his injunction. "His will must be broke the first thing, if ye've got to spank him into it; then, as soon as he is able to read, learn him the catechism off by heart; then when he is a little older—be keerful an' don't wait too long—put him to cuttin' wood an' keep him at it stiddy. Work, work, that's my receipt for bringin' up a boy. 'Satan finds some mischief still fur idle han's to do,' as the poet says."

"There he lies in his unconscious majesty ruling the house. Have you ever thought about how everything in the house has to bend to a baby?" said Mrs. Murray, the Squire's wife, the afternoon she came over to make her first visit to the new baby, bringing little bunches of her choice lavender to lay in the bureau among his tiny garments. "Look at that wee, pure face; everybody is subdued by it.

"There is a Jewish legend," she continued, "that when Adam was driven from the garden, he asked in an agony of sorrow, 'What shall I bring back to God if I ever return?' And the angel answered, 'Bring back the face He gave you in the garden, and He will once more let you in.' Ah, this is our great prob-

lem, the battle of life, to keep the face He gave us in the cradle—the kingdom of heaven face.

“He is a very precious gift to you, Mrs. McBain,” she added, “and, like all precious things, he must be handled with fear and trembling. There are two ways a baby can be hurt—by starving him for want of love, and by making him selfish by overmuch care. I never look at a baby boy,” she added, “without thinking of Victor Hugo’s lines:

“‘Opening wide his young soul to life
And his mouth to kisses.’

“We all here in the village,” she said lightly, gathering up her daintily frilled gown, the folds of which always emitted an odour of lavender, preparatory to taking leave, “must in spite of ourselves have a share in filling his young soul with life—he is going to judge what manner of thing life is by what he sees around him as he is growing day by day, but his mother will have to fill his mouth with kisses—for a few years at least.

“We all here in the village must have a part in filling his young soul with life——” Part of Mrs. Murray’s parting sentence seemed to repeat itself as she walked home in the gloaming. She was just at that moment passing the open door of the Mapleton

House; a strain of music floated out, and a voice within her said, "The barroom presents the only open door in the village which invites growing boys and young men to light, cheer, music, companionship—and whisky." She shuddered, and said in an audible tone, "I'm glad my children are not boys."

Another woman called to see the new young mother and baby, one who was not long a resident of the village. She belonged to some sect which the village had never before known. She was not a Methodist, nor Presbyterian, nor Baptist, nor Episcopalian, and we had meeting houses, and, in fact, very little toleration for any others. When she looked on the little baby, she exclaimed with uplifted hands:

"Ah, Mrs. McBain, yer baby boy may be a Christ, just as much as any that's yet been born into the world."

Politeness kept the women quiet until she left the house—she was a stranger—but as soon as she was gone, Mrs. McTavish, who had installed herself as nurse of the mother and child, said:

"Jessie, there's no mistakin' yours is a fine boy; it would be hard to find a finer among ordinary babies; but no cohort of angels came to herald his birth; no shepherds keepin' watch over their flock by night

rejoiced over it; no wise men came frae th' East to worship th' baby, an' they never *did*, an' never *shall* 'cept at th' birth o' one Baby."

After the callers had gone, and even Mrs. McCavish had stepped over to her own home for a few moments, the mother lay quietly thinking over what each one had said. *Train* a little bit of a baby! She'd do nothing of the kind; she'd give a wee thing like that all he wanted, in spite of Mrs. Brown's advice.

She smiled indulgently when she thought of Mrs. Brady's speech about the trousers, and measured with her hand the length of the little form in the bed beside her.

Then she agreed fully with Mrs. Murray about feeding his mouth with kisses; yes, she would take good care of that part of his nurture.

She smiled again when she thought about the unconscious majesty, and this little mite by her side ruling the house.

She scorned Peter McKim's interference; break his will indeed! the baby had just as good a right to his little will as anybody.

But among all the many bits of advice which came from the village women, Granny Neilson's seemed to stand out prominently. "Gie yer Widow's Mite ta

God," "Gie yer Widow's Mite ta God," kept repeating itself over and over again in her mind like some refrain.

"No, no," she said aloud, after a while, drawing closer to her heart the soft, warm bundle in the bed beside her. "No, no, no, I can't do *that*; God gave him to *me*; I'll train him, *I*, his mother. I'm the proper person; my precious little Widow's Mite."

The widow did not dare to voice her next thoughts, but mentally soliloquised, "Give him to God and He would go to disciplinin' him likely; he would be sickly an' delicate, an' like enough he would die before he reached his majority. No, no," again she said to herself, "he's *my* baby, *I'll* bring him up. When he's a man of course I want him to join the church."

Over in the shanty built on the government land, and occupied by the Gilooly family, another baby made his advent to the world on the same day that Mrs. McBain's son was born. Very little attention, however, was given to this second baby.

"I've been over to see th' puir wee thing," said Mrs. McTavish, "an' th' Squire's wife has sent over a wee dress; th' mother hadn't a dud scarcely for th' little creature; an' th' Village Helper goes in spells

to wash an' dress him. The stirrin' wee thing, it seems hard not ta welcome him, but one canna hope for much frae yon shanty. The boys hae started off on th' track o' life th' same day, but it'll be an uneven race—th' young Gilooly is handicapped wi' a bad inheritance."

III

"THE WEE CROODLIN' DOO"

AS soon as the mother was strong enough she opened a shop and took in sewing, every effort prompted by the desire to make a bright future for her boy. Away into the small hours her light was often seen shining; and the neighbours wondered how her frail life endured the burdens she imposed upon it.

Frequently as she sat in the twilight, with her foot on the rocker of the wooden cradle, made specially for the baby by the village carpenter, the wee one, pink and warm, tucked in his soft blankets lying within, there would arise before her mental vision a most fascinating picture. A dreamy look would creep into her still youthful brown eyes, while she gazed as if charmed into the dim recesses of the room, and saw her baby, a grown man, holding some great office, and performing some large work in the world. Sometimes he was a minister standing in the sacred desk, high above the heads of the common people, with gown and bands, in all solemnity dispensing the

Word. Sometimes he was a gesticulating politician, pacing a wide rostrum, his burning eloquence winning the applause of hundreds. Sometimes he was a lawyer in court, clearing the falsely accused; and sometimes he was a judge on the bench. She even sighed once because the form of government in the British dominions would not permit of her lad occupying the highest position in the kingdom.

She had been disappointed in the manhood embodied in her husband; she never acknowledged this disappointment in so many words, but at times, in the press of a heavy day, she would suddenly drop her work, snatch her baby from the cradle, and strain him to her bosom, whispering:

“I’ll have pride in my son!—bone o’ my bone, flesh o’ my flesh—he’ll grow up to be a man after my own heart! I have him in my arms to make of him what I choose!”

She gave him his daily bath, handling his small body as if it had been a piece of frail and precious china; she dressed and undressed him with her own hands, jealously guarding him from strangers sharing in this labour of love. The little naked body of her child was a thing of tender beauty in the eyes of the mother, and the very sight of the tiny dresses filled her with emotions unspeakable. Before many

weeks his baby lips, beginning to purse themselves into intelligent little "coos," and his tender clinging fingers twining around her own, made even stronger appeals to the mother's heart for more strenuous effort toward providing a competency for the boy's future.

One day her minister, the Rev. Nathaniel Vickers, dropped into the little home when she was just completing the interesting work of dressing her baby. Seating himself beside the cooing boy, just fresh from his bath, the minister took one of the little pink fingers in his hand and said to the mother, "Would you take a thousand dollars for this?" The mother paused a moment as if she could scarcely grasp the awful meaning of what he said, then she answered, "No." Touching the two fingers, the minister said, "Would you take two thousand dollars for these?" Almost indignantly the mother answered again, "No." Then clasping in his the chubby, tender little hand, he said, "Would you take ten thousand dollars for this?" Unhesitatingly the answer again was, "No." "Your baby, then," said the minister, "is worth ten thousand dollars to you; you're quite a rich woman."

After the minister had gone the young mother gathered her child to her bosom and cried in an

ecstasy of joy, while the tears brimmed her eyes, "Ah, he might have said ten million dollars and not have exaggerated! Not a mite!"

She fashioned his small garments, her needle keeping time to a music in her heart; she embroidered dainty scallops for soft round throat and wrists; she knitted stockings for rose-leaf feet, and while she wrought she thought of the gentle Judean woman, the mother of a Saviour, and she whispered in her heart, "She, too, was the mother of a baby boy."

As soon as the length of the boy's hair would permit, one of her pastimes was to brush it into a curl on the top of his small head; then holding him at arms' length, she would exclaim with her heart in her voice:

"Mother's wee man! Mother's wee man!"

Then she would usually repeat some foolish little lines that ended in this couplet:

"Look in his face, and guess if you can,
Why mother is proud of her little man."

After this she would hurriedly kiss his soft cheek, place him on a mat on the floor, with a teaspoon or a rattlebox, or something with which he could not hurt himself, and snatch up her sewing, which she felt had been neglected too long.

When the sewing, however, was rolled away for the

night, and the lamp was lighted, and the widow had shut all doors against the outside world, her great joy was to seat herself in her rocking-chair, with her little baby clasped in her arms, and sing to him some of the old Scotch songs she had heard her mother sing. She was very proud of her Scotch ancestry, and she was determined that her son should be early imbued with a knowledge and spirit of the same. The first year of his life, if you had been allowed within the sacred precincts of that sitting-room, you would have heard her lilting voice, with the penetrating quality that is peculiar to Scotch voices, singing:

"Will ye no fa' asleep the night,
Ye restless little loon?
The sun has lang been oot o' sicht,
An' gloamin's darkin' doon.
There's claes to mend, the hoose to clean—
The nicht I'll no get through;
For oh, ye winna close your een—
Ye wee croodlin' doo.

"Spurrin' wi' yer restless feet,
My very legs are sair;
Clautin' wi' yer buffie hands,
Towslin' mammy's hair.
I've gi'en ye meat wi' sugar sweet;
Your little crappie's fou;
Cuddle doon, ye stoorie loon—
Ye wee croodlin' doo.

"Twistin' round and round again,
Warsling' aff my lap,
And pussy on the hearthstane,
As sound as ony tap—
Dicky birdin' gaen to rest,
A' asleep but you;
Nestle into mammy's breast,
Ye wee croodlin' doo.

"Guid be praised, the battle's by,
And sleep has won at last!
How still the puddlin' feetie lie,
The buffie hands at rest!
And safely fa's the silken fringe
Aboon thy een o' blue—
Blessin's on my bonnie bairn,
Me wee croodlin' doo."

There was something soothing in both words and music; the baby was always asleep when the song was finished.

Only on one occasion did the widow vary the song; on Christmas night she sang:

"A child was born in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem;
The wise men came to welcome him; a star stood o'er the
gable;
An' there they saw the King o' kings, no longer thronged wi'
angel wings,
But croodlin' like a little babe, and cradled in a stable."

“Ah, yes,” she said, hugging her baby when she had finished the verse, “our Saviour himself was a wee croodlin’ doo, an’ na doot Mary had to sing him to sleep with some bit song—Hebrew in place o’ Scotch; but all the same it would be a song o’ her own people. Yes, yes, in a mother’s arms the wee baby Christ lay, from a mother He learned to lisp His first word. Out on the fields of Nazareth she saw Him play. Ah, ah, she was like other mothers who love.”

Shortly after the boy’s hair was long enough to comb into a curl on the top of his head, arrangements were made for his christening. The village babies were usually christened much younger, but the widow would not have her baby undergo this time-honoured ceremony until she could afford what she considered a suitable frock—she could not exactly call it a christening *robe*, for robes were usually long, and the baby by this time was wearing short skirts some months. In the course of time a new short frock, trimmed, as befitted the momentous occasion for which it was intended, with finer embroidery than had yet adorned his small person, occupied his mother’s spare moments for weeks, not to say months, in the making. A tiny pair of red shoes, intended to peep cunningly from beneath the short frock, were carefully selected from the shoe stock of the village general store.

When everything was in readiness, the widow one afternoon carried the baby over to leave him in care of Mrs. McTavish while she went out to invite the elders of the church and the minister to the christening.

"Oh, Agnes," she said as she kissed the baby and placed him for an hour in her neighbour's keeping, "because of his dear little golden head, if ye'll believe me, I notice all th' wee heads I see on the street, an' everywhere else, an' they all look beautiful to me. If I had *my* way I'd paint a halo 'round *every* baby's head, same as some o' the great artists put 'round the head o' our Saviour. Aren't they all sacred, the darlin's, with their wee white saintly faces? I cannot keep the tears back, Agnes, when I look into babies' eyes, thinkin' o' my own baby's two wide earnest eyes that seem at times to look me through and through."

"I ken fine how ye feel," returned Mrs. McTavish. "Haven't I owned a baby o' ma own in ma time?"

The widow was a little woman, with one of those wiry Scotch figures that never grow stout, and when she was dressed in her black merino Sunday gown, and black bonnet with the white border, and long clinging widow's veil, she presented a sightly picture

to the men whom she was honouring. She went to each with the carefully prepared little speech:

"I would be very pleased to have ye take tea with me the comin' Friday evenin', the occasion o' my boy's christenin'."

Cakes, preserves and pickles of every variety were prepared for the supper which was to grace the occasion. Mrs. McTavish's armchair and silver cake-basket, along with another neighbour's silver spoons, were borrowed. Not but the widow had silver spoons, that had once belonged to her grandmother, of her own, and a cake-basket of her own, but she liked to look affluent on this evening of evenings.

Mrs. McTavish was invited to keep the widow in countenance among the men, and to assist in their entertainment.

When the minister and the elders, each man dressed in his best Sunday suit, were all assembled in the little parlour, Mrs. McTavish carried in the silver bowl, a rare old piece of silverware brought from Scotland,—an heirloom in the family for many generations, and considered invaluable—filled with water, while the mother followed with the babe. The minister rose to his feet, took the white-frocked, red-shoed baby into his capacious arms, dipped his large fingers into the water in the silver bowl, dropped some of it on the

little unconscious head, and calling him his maternal grandfather's name, he said in the slow and solemn tones of a follower of Knox, "Alexander, I baptise thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," while the mother looked on with glistening eyes and heightened colour, forgetting all the trouble of her life in the joy that she was the mother of a man child.

That night after the minister and elders had left the house, the two women who had entertained them sat down to talk over the events of the evening; the baby having been tucked away in his trundle bed an hour before.

"My, Agnes," said the widow, her whole face vivified by the night's excitement, causing her to look fully ten years younger, "did you notice how fine the wee boy acted in the minister's arms?—like a wee angel. His little face was as serious and solemn as if he knew all about what was goin' on—an' what it meant—the darlin'. An' perhaps he did, who knows? Perhaps he did. The wee souls fresh from God may know more than we worldly-wise people ken anything about. And did you see, Agnes, how fine he stuck out his wee feet and showed off the pretty red shoes to perfection; weren't they beauties? And the embroidery on his frock—I could most see the rosebuds

as if they were growin’ on the bush, and the veins in the rose leaves. I felt well repaid by the appearance of that frock for every stitch I took in its makin’.

“Yes, as you say, Agnes, everything went off well; the supper was good, an’ all the men an’ the minister ate hearty; I could not be better pleased. But of course it was just as it ought to be at the christenin’ of my son.”

“Ah,” said Mrs. McTavish boastfully, when talking afterward to the neighbours, “it might ha’ been a young prince that was bein’ christened, th’ way he was covered wi’ embroideries—all his own mother’s needlework. An’ th’ supper that that woman spread for th’ minister an’ th’ elders—th’ pies an’ cakes, th’ fine dishes an’ silver—some of it borrowed, of course—I don’t see how any rich woman could ha’ had more. Dear, dear, it was a releegious exercise, an’ I’m hopin’ it was well pleasin’ in th’ eyes o’ th’ Lord,” she added, as if she felt some compunction for dwelling at such length on the earthly side of it.

At a late hour on the evening of the christening, after the two women had washed the china and polished the silver, the mother placed the silver bowl on a bracket which was fastened in a conspicuous place on the parlour wall between the windows. Beside the bowl she put the little red shoes.

"They're for the laddie when he's a man," she said to Mrs. McTavish, "to keep his heart tender, and remind him of this occasion in his life. He'll be awful proud of them then."

Mrs. McTavish frequently told that in after years when the boy was old enough to understand; the proud mother often related the whole story of that christening, enlarging on the priceless value of the silver bowl, which belonged to her grandmother's grandmother; and she would always conclude by saying:

"Many generations have been christened out of that bowl, and it shall go down to you, Alexander, and to your children's children after you."

"I was terrible well pleased ta hear that ye had publicly gi'en yer baby ta God in baptism, Jessie," said Granny Neilson the first time she met the widow after Sandy's christening.

The widow started—she had not thought of the ceremony in that way; she had her baby christened because all the church people christened their babies, and she thought it the proper thing to do.

"I hope," she mused as Granny Neilson walked away, "that he won't grow delicate an' sickly now." Indeed, with that fear in her heart, she watched him closely for several months afterward.

The little baby over in the shanty on the government land was never christened. His grandfather, old Bill Gilooly, had died when the child was but a few weeks old, and as a mark of ancestral respect the baby's mother had given him the name "Bill." William Henry Gilooly was the whole of the name, but nobody ever had time to say it all.

IV

SANDY

THE next event in the boy's life, and therefore in his mother's, was the taking of his first step alone. Of all these recurring events she kept a record on the flyleaf at the back of the "family Bible," the same in which the boy's birth was registered. The following were some of the entries:

"Feb. 6—The dear can reach out for things, and touch his own wee toes."

"March 3—The laddie cut his first wee tooth."

"June 5—My boy's christening day—I've called him Alexander, after his grandfather."

"Aug. 10—He can play peek-a-boo round the back of a chair."

"Aug. 15—Alexander took his first steps alone."

"Aug. 18—He keeked at me to-day from behind his pinny."

"Sept. 1—The pet spoke his first word."

Only on one occasion, after the event of his christening, did he wear the elaborate white frock and the red shoes; that was when a "photograph car" passed

through that vicinity, and stopped for a week in the village. Then the baby was arrayed again, just as when the minister had taken him in his arms to sprinkle him with the baptismal water, and carried down street to the "photograph car" to have his "likeness" taken.

A new entry was made on the flyleaf of the family Bible.

"Aug. 30—The pretty boy had his likeness taken to-day. He wore his christening frock and shoes."

Very soon after he began to toddle around the village seemed to naturally fall into the habit of calling him "Sandy"; because he was Scotch, and because his father, and his grandfather, and his great grandfather had been called "Sandy." He was a "promisin' little chap," they all said who remembered his childhood; an interesting child with timid blue eyes, and light hair like silken floss.

There were those who said afterward that the hair was too soft and silken to be on a male head; but Mrs. Brady said that was "puttin' blame on Providence," and she never did believe in that. At the time no one thought of anything but the child's beauty.

It was some months after this that Mrs. McTavish called one evening on the widow just at the hour she was putting Sandy to bed. He could talk now in a

manner quite intelligible—to his mother at least, and she was teaching him his first prayer. He was kneeling at her knee clad in his little white nightgown, with his small pink hands clasped in the form of supplication, when the neighbour, after a light knock, opened the door and entered.

When she saw what was going on, she placed her finger to her lips and dropped into the nearest chair. The mother, nodding silently to her visitor, continued:

“Now, dearie, try again. Now I lay me——”

“Now I lay me,” said the sweet baby voice.

“Down to sleep——” went on the mother.

“Down to sleep,” lisped Sandy. “The chickens are asleep now, too,” he cried with interest.

“Yes, dearie, but go on with yer prayer now. I pray the Lord——”

“I p’ay the Lo’d——”

“My soul to keep——”

“My soul to keep——”

“If I should die——”

“Sandy won’t die,” whimpered the baby.

“No, darlin’,” said the mother, clasping his hands in a spasm almost of fear, “Sandy won’t die; his mother could not live without him. Now, pet, finish it. If I should die——”

“Sandy’s sleepy,” cried the little suppliant.

"Well, well, that's very good for the first," said the mother, picking him up and tucking him with a kiss into his trundle bed, which stayed in the sitting-room until such time as the widow was ready to retire to her own room; then she rolled it in.

"What pure wee things they are when they are babies," said Mrs. McTavish, touched by what she had seen and heard; "ef boys could on'y be kept so, Jessie."

"Oh, I'll keep *my* boy so," returned the widow.

"There's such terrible temptations in th' world to draw th' lads astray," said the neighbour sadly.

"Not *my* lad," returned the widow confidently. "I have him in my arms—to myself to train as I will. I have no fears for *my* boy, Agnes; what can draw him out of his mother's arms?"

The baby boy over in the shanty on the government land never learned a prayer; his mother never said any, and it never occurred to her to teach little Bill to pray.

In the years that followed Alexander's mother tended him through whooping-cough, measles, mumps, and all the general ills youthful flesh is heir to, with a solicitude which only a mother with one child can understand.

Little Bill Gilooly, as soon as he had learned to

walk, did not choose to be confined to the house, not even to the government land on which his cabin home was built. He soon discovered, as his small bare brown feet went wandering through the byways and highways of the village, that Sandy McBain was about his own age, loved the same things that he loved: strings, and kites, and nails, and dead rats; and hated the things that he hated: to have his face washed, his boots put on, or to be taken for a girl; and he and Sandy struck up a friendship. Bill was collarless, almost shirtless, and his short red hair stood up straight around his head in a manner that showed slight acquaintance with a comb, while his playmate was dressed with the most scrupulous care. But at three years of age things of the outward man are of small consequence to the deeper question of affinity of soul; and despite the widow's disapproval her son and the blacksmith's child could not be kept apart.

Sandy grew fast, as all healthy young things do, and was scarcely out of short skirts when he was sent to school. His mother early determined that her son should receive an education; she had an unexpressed idea that her husband would never have gone to the excesses he did if he had been educated. Then the widow had some college men in a branch of her family,

and she was determined that her son would equal any of his predecessors.

The day he started was an eventful one in the mother's calendar. With her own hands she brushed the flossy hair into many little curls, buttoned his collar, and tied his necktie, crowning all by placing jauntily on his small head his "wee Scotch bonnet." She had ready in a little cotton bag with a running-string a "piece" for him to eat at recess—a slice off a fresh loaf, made by her own hands from "spring-wheat flour"—considered in the village to be a delicacy—carefully buttered and spread over with some of her choice huckleberry jam.

"An' many's th' day," said Mrs. McTavish, "wi th' hot sun beatin' down from above, an' th' briars an' brambles scratchin' her han's an' tearin' her skirts from below, did th' mother, wi' her two-quart tin pail hingin' on her arm, clamber over th' brush an' fallen trees, an' wade thro' marsh, stoopin' an' bendin' after thae same bit blue berries. She always got a great ready for th' berryin'—'twas 'bout all th' luxuries any o' us could hae throu' th' winter—th' jam we made frae th' berries we picked th' precedin' summer. 'Twas said by some that there were rattlesnakes in th' huckleberry marsh, an' th' widow was terrible 'fraid o' snakes, an' always carried a wee brown paper bag

o' bakin' soda in case she got bit. I can see her now, steppin' gingerly 'long, startin' at this, an' jumpin' at that, studyin' every spot o' ground afore she set her foot until 't. It waur a sore trial to her that berry-pickin'. 'An' goodness me! she'd no more let Sandy come intil that huckleberry marsh than she'd let him go intil a wild beasts' den. I mind once," she continued reminiscently, "we were out together, an' somethin' tweaked her on th' ankle joint. I think it waur more than likely a bramble-bush, or a bit sharp root, but she'd hae it that a rattlesnake bit her. She droppit on th' nearest log, an' whippit off her shoe an' stockin' (she was a slim bit body, an' could act quick)' an' clappit th' soda til th' scratch, which 'twould take a miscroscope to see. She declared some green matter, th' snake's p'ison, came out o' th' injured part after th' soda was pit on. I wouldna want to swear til it mysel', but onyway, she waur sateesfied, an' we went on wi' our berry-pickin'—I mind we got eight quarts that day."

With her hand over her eyes, the mother stood in the door and watched the little Sandy that first day until he passed out of sight around a corner, whispering in her heart: "I've sent my one treasure out into the world, the great big world. Ah, I know he'll do great things for it yet, my clever little man."

V

MAGGIE

AT the corner Sandy was joined by Maggie Thompson. Maggie lived around on another quiet street of the village, was the same age as Sandy, but, being a braver, stronger nature, had started to school six months earlier. His helpless, timid air appealed to her, and going up to him she took his soft little yielding fingers into her own firm little brown hand, and thus led him into the crowd of children surrounding the schoolhouse.

When little Bill Gilooly, whom his mother, to get him out of her way, had started to school some months earlier, saw Maggie coming into the schoolyard leading Sandy McBain by the hand, he stared at them with his two round Irish blue eyes, something closely resembling a frown gathering down between them; and in a few seconds he stole around behind Sandy and gave him a sharp pinch. He had not seen as much of Sandy since he had begun to go to school, and his friendship for him at that moment received a severe wrench. Sandy, looking very much grieved,

stuck his thumb in his mouth and began to cry; and when Maggie learned the reason of his tears she flew at little Bill and gave him three hard slaps, emphasising each one with a vindictive:

“There! there! there!”

But what were girls’ slaps! Pooh! little Bill smiled in a superior way, and looked as if he would have enjoyed a dozen more—if Maggie gave them.

That night when Maggie was kneeling by her bedside saying her prayers, and had gotten through “Our Father,” and “God bless father and mother,” she added, “and wee Sandy McBain, too; he’s on’y a little fellow, God, an’ won’t need much—but don’t bless little Bill Gilooly; he pinched Sandy to-day. Amen!”

At the same moment little Bill was tumbling into his small bunk in his mother’s kitchen, smiling complacently and saying within himself, “I gev him one good pinch, annyway—he had no business holdin’ Maggie’s hand.”

Precocious Maggie, just learning to read and write, was keeping a diary; her mother had read her a story about another little girl doing so, and Maggie would not be satisfied until she had a blank book, in which, with pen and ink, she recorded the events which occurred in her small world. This day when she came

home from school she wrote in large scrawling characters:

"TooK wEE SaNdy McBain tO sChool Ti-Day.
i MinDeD hiM All Day. i Like HiM rEal WeLL.
He hAs YeLLow CurLs. i Slapped BiLL GiLLooLy
For PinChin Him."

A week later, each day of which she had spent attending to Sandy's wants, she wrote again:

"SanDy goeS to SchooL wiTh Me everY Day
Now. i like HiM Terrible WeLL. WhEn We aRe
Big i Guess We WiLL Get mArriEd, We LiKe Each
OthEr So wEll."

Somehow she felt it to be her work to stand by him all through the earlier school years; his weakness seemed to make demands on her strength, and many a time when some larger boy was taking advantage of him at marbles or a game of ball, Maggie would step in, snatch the marbles or ball, as the case might be, and refuse to return them until fair-play was established. This was generally speedily accomplished, for even the "big boys" were intimidated by the little fury, and quickly yielded to her demands, which they knew in their hearts were right.

"The wee girl protector saw that he always got his rights," said Mrs. McTavish. "I can see her now wi' her bright red cheeks, sort o' deep rich red, some-

thing like the heart o' a piney rose, none o' yer fady pinks, small brown curly head, an' flashin' brown eyes. Nothin' seemed to frighten Maggie out o' doin' what she thought she ought to do,—even when it meant givin' a beatin' to a boy. She parted more fightin' lads, pullin' 'em apart by main force, than all the rest o' th' school pit together. Mony a time she saved Sandy frae a thrashin'."

Maggie's mother was an artist in her way; she had always wanted to paint; had looked wistfully at crimsoning clouds and golden sunsets, but the only means which had come within her reach of expressing her love for colour was in dressing her only child, her wee dark-eyed lassie, in bright frocks. So Maggie grew up a sort of bird of paradise in the village, the wonder and admiration of all the boys and girls.

"Then," said Mrs. McTavish, "she was a kin' o' tom-boy; played ball an' jumped on passin' waggons, climbed shed-roofs an' fences; an' th' boys all like-ed her. One o' th' worst thrashin's Sandy ever got was frae Bill Gilooly, because Bill had seen Maggie one day at th' school give him a bite out o' her apple. This was when they were all bits o' things. Maggie had gone home from school that day early, an' Bill took his chance at Sandy."

The entry in Maggie's diary on this occasion was:

"i Hate tHat Bill GilooLy, He HurT Poor SandY. Let Me CatCh Him Once. i Won't speAk to Him For A whoLe Day."

Sunday school followed close upon day school, and each recurring day of rest Maggie and Sandy trudged to the infant class, hand in hand. Sandy had a good memory and always repeated his text without a flaw. Maggie was more careless; she stumbled and faltered, forgot and repeated. Sunday school was the only place where Sandy could feel himself Maggie's superior, and he enjoyed going very much. He could never forget the day when he said through, without even pausing to take breath, the text, "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks so panteth my soul after thee, O God." When it came Maggie's turn, she said "painteth" instead of "panteth," and she did not know that a hart was only a deer; she thought it was that thing that thumped up and down in people's breasts. Sandy reminded her of her mistakes two or three times on the road home. "You didn't know that a hart was on'y a deer. I knew that," said Sandy, "long ago. An' I knew that big word panteth—oh, *l-o-n-g* ago." Maggie tossed her brown curls and said nothing.

Another day the lesson was about the Prodigal Son, and Sandy, as usual, said his verse perfectly: "When

he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." When it came Maggie's turn, she blurted out excitedly, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and broke it." Poor Maggie, that day she had been running with her best china doll in her hands, stubbed her toe and fell, with the result that her precious doll's neck was broken. She had suffered keenly the loss, and naturally she thought that falling on a neck meant breaking it. She was quite unprepared for the laugh from the entire class which greeted her effort.

That evening this entry was put in the diary:

"SaNdY Thinks He's sMarteR ThaN Me BecaUse He kNew His vErsE BetteR in SuNdaY SchooL, BuT i Know i'm smArter Than hiM in EverYthing But Verses. i Don't care. I Would Rather HaVe Sandy BeAt Me Than Any othEr Boy."

Even after he had grown to be a man, that triumph over Maggie stood out prominently among Alexander's memory pictures.

As soon as he was able to walk, the widow had taken her son to church.

"It was a sightly thing to see his fair wee head in the pew," said Mrs. McTavish. "Whiles he would

take quiet naps wi' his yellow head on his mother's lap, or nestlin' against her arm; an' whiles he would amuse himself turnin' th' leaves o' her hymn-buik."

The library in Maggie's home offered scant attractions to a hungry young searcher after novelty. In the small bookcase in the sitting-room there were a few heavy biographies of church dignitaries, a concordance and a dictionary of the Bible, a "History of the World," and a copy of "Pilgrim's Progress." The latter was illustrated, and for this reason was the only book which claimed the attention of the one child in the home. There was a picture of Giant Despair seated in a dim and gruesome corner, surrounded by skulls; this picture Maggie studied often with fascinated horror. She would like to have had Sandy gaze at it along with her, but he always cried at sight of it, and wanted to go home. So Maggie dreamed and dreamed, all by herself, about that awful giant that could turn living men into skeletons and skulls. When she had not been good during the day, she always imagined that, in some mysterious way, Giant Despair came out of the book, stepped down from the bookcase, and was standing in the dark by her bedside. Indeed, the grim visage of the great giant, as he was portrayed in the book, presented

himself to Maggie at times all through her grown-up years.

When she had any trouble with the little Sandy, when she could not get him to immediately obey her wishes, all she had to say was, "Giant Despair will get you," and Sandy would at once shove his little hand into her firmer one, and refrain from further opposition.

Sandy had also his little threat which he wielded with great success over Maggie; when he was *determined* to have his way, and could not get her to yield, he would cry:

"I'll eat caterpillars an' worms, I will; smooth ones an' woolly ones!"

At this threat Maggie's sensitive soul would at once shrink into submission.

Sandy was not without brains, and did fairly well at the public school, which fact caused his mother to conclude that he was a prodigy.

"The fact was," said Mrs. McTavish, "she tho't there was not such another bairn in under th' sun. There she would sit in church gazin' at that boy who sat by her side, more than at the minister, straightenin' his necktie if it got a bit awry, slippin' him a peppermint if he grew sleepy or restless, lickin' her finger an' smoothin' back a front lock o' his hair

that was a kin o' cow-lick an' inclined to be stubborn. My, I fear she made a god o' th' child! It was enough to make the A'mighty jealous. Then when th' sermon was over, she would open up the psalter and give him one side o' th' buik to hold, so important-like; an' we all around could hear her whisperin' till him, 'Sing, son, like a wee man.' Th' boy was no a bad singer in thae days; he had what I call a good Scotch voice; you can detect that voice even in a bairn's singin'—a bit hard. But, like everything else he did, his mother tho't he could do it better than anybody else, an' she was terrible proud o' his gift. I mind her makin' him sing to show off when company came till th' house. He knew th' words o' th' one hundred an' twenty-first psalm better than th' others, an' he would stand in th' middle o' th' sittin'-room floor an' pipe up in his shrill little child's voice:

“‘I to th' hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come mine aid.
My safety cometh from the Lord,
Who heaven an' earth hath made.
Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will
He slumber that thee keeps,
Behold he that keeps Israel,
He slumbers not, nor sleeps.’

“Dear, dear, it's awesome to think on—his foot

did slide, after all. Th' Lord never keeps a' body from slidin', I'm thinkin', unless th' body is willin' himsel' to be kept."

As soon as Sandy started to school the mother began to practise many bitter economies to save money for his further education. The neighbours who chanced into the house about meal time noticed that she ate her bread without any butter, put no sugar in her tea, or on her green-apple sauce, and, as Mrs. McTavish said, "Fair starved herself for that bairn."

When very young, Sandy was not conscious of these economies; all he knew was that the fresh pat of butter was always by his plate, and the spoonful of sugar in his apple sauce; was he not "Mother's only man"? and if he grew conscious with advancing years, by that time he had begun to look upon the indulgence as a right—perhaps by reason of his approaching manhood and supposed greater work in the world.

He was still a very small lad when in his secret heart he was congratulating himself on the superiority of his sex. How could he think otherwise when he heard the neighbours say many a time:

"How fortunate, Mrs. McBain, that yer bairn is a boy."

To this he noticed his mother always gave glad assent.

Indeed, one day he heard one of the women say, in an undertone which he was supposed not to hear:

"Ye ought to be proud o' yer boy, such a *fine* boy, Mrs. McBain; he's worth a *dozen* o' girls."

How could he doubt it?—and he didn't.

More than once when he was playing with Maggie, and they differed about something, he said to her with a superior air, "*You're* only a girl."

It was a day to be remembered in his experience when he was thought old enough to bring home his mother's cow. He felt a little timid about going alone the first time; there was a wide green pasture field to be crossed before the cow could be reached, as she always insisted on standing at the back of the field, so it was decided to ask Maggie to go with him. After that it became her daily joy to accompany him, and his daily joy to have her do so. They had a green-banked pond to pass, on which were always to be found some ducks; and these they had to stop and look at every time. It was years after, when Maggie was a woman grown, and far from the scenes of her childhood, that she sometimes used to repeat silently to herself the foolish little lines:

“ Four ducks on a pond,
A grass bank beyond—
A blue sky of spring,
White clouds on the wing.
How little a thing
To remember for years,
To remember with tears!’ ”

After the two children had passed the pond, they wandered hand in hand out over the grass-grown fields in search of the cow; talking over such weighty subjects as where the wind came from—and where the flowers went when they died—and why the clouds were up so high instead of the nice woolly-looking things being low enough down to be jumped into—and who built the fire in the sun—and who made God.

When Maggie thought of these talks in after years there were four other lines that insisted in coming to her memory—and over and over again, perhaps for a whole half day, something within would be repeating:

“ When potatoes were in blossom,
And the new hay filled the mows,
Sweet the paths we trod together,
Bringing home the cows.’ ”

During the cold winter months the dozen hens occupying a small house in the widow's backyard succeeded in producing but one egg per day between

them all; and the healthy young Sandy daily ate the one egg, which his mother had carefully boiled and served in a white china eggcup beside his breakfast plate.

One morning—a bitterly cold morning—the mother came shivering in from the kitchen with the eggcup containing the egg in her hand, and placed it before her son, who had just come downstairs and seated himself at the table. Something seemed to strike him suddenly that morning; he glanced quickly at her as she seated herself in front of her empty plate, and shoving the egg toward her, he said, “Here, mother, keep the egg yourself.”

“Tut, tut, laddie!” she replied almost indignantly, “you need it a heap worse than I do. I’m done my growin’,” and she shoved it back.

The remembrance of these words and this act of his mother’s came up to console him whenever he resisted again the prompting to give the egg to her.

Years and years after he woke from many a troubled dream murmuring to himself, “Here, mother, keep the egg yourself.”

“I’ve no objection to economies for a purpose,” said Mrs. McTavish, who often had occasion to run into the Widow McBain’s house at meal time, to borrow “a pinch o’ tea,” or “a few grains o’ pepper,”

and could not prevent her sharp eyes taking in everything—a phrenologist who had at one time visited the village said that her bump of observation was unusually high—“an’ I’m not denyin’ I’ve practised it mysel’ at times; but I dinna believe in the mother puttin’ sugar in th’ boy’s drink an’ keepin’ it out o’ her own, nor of givin’ him th’ bit butter, an’ her-sel’ eatin’ th’ dry crust. An’ that healthy young lad eatin’ th’ on’y egg every day is fair rediculous! The boy’ll know nothin’ about self-denial.”

But when she ventured to hint this to the boy’s mother, the latter resented it.

VI

THE WOMAN AND THE HOE

WHERE there is a will a way always seems to open up, though often rough and thorny, and by the time the school at home had Sandy ready for more advanced studies his mother had saved the money to send him where he could prosecute them.

“For I’m never goin’ to be satisfied with seein’ Sandy short o’ a university man,” she had said confidentially to Mrs. McTavish; “I can endure anything, Agnes, if I can live to see the inscription B. A. on a bit sheepskin, an’ know all the while that it’s *my* boy, my own son Sandy.”

“She’s terrible set up on that boy o’ hers,” said Mrs. McTavish afterward to some of the neighbours, “an’ it’s not to be wondered at—he’s a likely lookin’ lad, with the pure pale face of youth—good an’ simple.”

Only the women in the village knew of the old gowns and patched shoes, the dyed shawls and made-

over bonnets, that went to make up the history of that saved money. Only Mrs. McTavish knew how often the front room carpet had been darned and turned, and the places for the furniture changed to cover the threadbare spots. Only the mother herself knew of the long rows of vegetables in the garden behind the house, shut in from the gaze of the neighbours by a high board fence, where she hoed and weeded every summer morning, long before Sandy was up. Somehow she loved to hug the secret to her heart and not tell even Mrs. McTavish what pretty air castles she was building while out there among the growing things. With what a calculating eye she studied the commercial value of each variety of vegetable; with what thrills of delight she noticed their increase in size.

One June morning at the first hint of dawn she emerged from the back kitchen door, hoe in hand, and walked down among the rows of vegetables. A soft haze was shrouding the landscape, like a veil of tender violet, and out of the mystery there floated occasionally the note of "a bird that early rose to feed her little ones." The apple trees crowned with blossoms looked in the dim light like white-vestured angels hovering over the earth, pouring out a benediction of fragrance on every sentient thing. She

stood a while straight and slim, her dark calico wrapper draping her figure in long unbroken lines, and one of Sandy's old straw hats protecting her head. The dawn crept nearer, but she never even lifted her eyes to the glory in the eastern heavens, so intent was she on the small vegetable world at her feet. She could see each variety now quite distinctly, and a flush had crept up under the high cheek bones of her Scotch face.

"Those parsnips," she soliloquised, "will get the laddie a pair o' boots, maybe enough for a pair o' carpet slippers—with heels on them." She stooped down and touched lovingly the feathery leaves of the young carrots, and said, "These'll get the socks, an' cotton, an' thread for shirts which I'll make myself. The tomatoes," she added, rising from her stooping position and looking with a satisfied air at the glossy "love-apples," an early variety just beginning to blush with a consciousness of maturity, "will buy the lad a new felt dicky for the fall, with a pair o' warm gloves, suspenders, neckties, an' col-lars, an' things a *gentleman* can't do without, an' my Sandy must be a gentleman. The beets an' onions an' celery, that nice white celery, will go a way toward a suit o' clothes. Then I'll have the thimble-berries to sell, an' I can spare a few baskets off that

peach tree. Sandy won't be home this winter, an' I won't want dainties to eat."

A song sparrow, perched on a gnarled limb of a plum tree right over her head, at that moment warbled his morning song of praise, and the Widow, who in her exultation felt that the very birds were rejoicing with her, looked up and said:

"Ay, birdie, it's grand work, isn't it, makin' money to give our Sandy schoolin'?"

Then, as if to show her sympathy with the bird interests, she sang blithely from the metrical version of the eighty-fourth psalm:

"Behold the sparrow findeth
A house in which to rest,
The swallow hath discovered
Where she may build her nest;
And where securely sheltered,
Her young she forth may bring
So, Lord of Hosts, thy altars
I seek, my God, my King."

The human song seemed to arouse a spirit of emulation among the feathered songsters in the surrounding trees, for they immediately burst into a perfect concert of bird music. In the medley the trained ear of the country woman distinguished the cat-

bird's message, the robin's earnest note, and the flute of the oriole.

"Dear, dear!" she exclaimed, looking around her apprehensively, "such a clatter! we'll rouse all the village with our joyful noise, an' they'll be peeping out o' their bedroom windows with their nightcaps on their heads to see what's the matter; we don't want the secret of our garden in everybody's mouth."

Her heart felt very tender that morning; she hoed carefully for fear she might cut some of the earth worms that were wriggling their way through the soft clay. She stopped working once to extricate a great bumblebee, that in his clumsy flight had entangled himself in a spider's web. A small, green garter snake, with glittering, frightened eyes, glided silently past her; the Widow had always taken a sort of savage pleasure in killing a snake, but this morning she looked at it and murmured softly, "Poor thing, nothing loves it; I'll let it pass."

The joyous spirit of the bird-songs seemed to have taken possession of even her physical powers; she hoed without weariness until a neighbour's clock sent six hard, fast strokes reverberating on the still morning air. A rooster in a neighbouring yard crowed lustily, and was answered by five or six other roosters, Mrs. McShane's pig began squealing for his morn-

ing pail of swill, the shoemaker, who lived a few doors away, called loudly for his apprentice to "get up," and the Widow thought it time for her to go in and get breakfast.

Alexander's class at school was at this time studying as literature portions of Shakespeare; the quaint sayings of the seer had somehow caught his fancy, and, having a good memory, he was practising applying the quotations on appropriate occasions. He, too, had heard the roosters crow, and, stirring uneasily on his pillow, murmured:

"The early village cock
Has twice done salutation to the morn."

"But I'm not turning out yet," he added, doubling up his pillow to make his head lie more easy. "Mother won't have the breakfast for half an hour, anyway."

About the same time that the Widow, hoe in hand, had gone out to her garden, the Village Saint, carrying his heavy walking-stick, stepped out through his front door. It was his practice to take an early morning walk, partly for his health's sake, and partly to enjoy the beauties of nature, which he affirmed never looked so well at any other time as in the early morning. He was followed by his dog, the poor,

lost, yellow-haired mongrel which pity had induced him to take in and feed. Kindness and good-feeding for some years had changed the very character of the animal; the hunted, cringing, thieving look had left his amber eyes, and peace, confidence, and trustworthiness looked unflinchingly from them.

The old man walked on, sometimes talking to himself, sometimes talking to the dog. The beauties of nature never seemed to pall on him.

"Thy mercies are renewed every morning," he mused, as he smelled the sweet scents of the trees, or looked out over the flower-carpeted earth. The hilarity of the birds at this early morning hour seemed to enter his spirit, and he walked faster. The snickering of the squirrels, the drone of the bees, the pæan of the whole insect chorus seemed to harmonise with a music in his own soul. He walked on and on, until he had reached the place where no buildings obstructed his vision; the tops of the low hills were visible through the soft, purple mist of morning, which still fringed the horizon. Strange, sweet calls came from birds unknown to him, birds which had apparently spent the night in an adjacent tree-filled ravine. It seemed to his pure old heart that they were calls to something higher and better than he had yet experienced. He raised his hat to

the majesty of a great oak tree that stood in his pathway. Some farmer's sheep which were quietly grazing near the fence in an adjoining field stopped nibbling their grass and raised their innocent faces to look at him. Walking past the sheep pasture the old man reached a field where the bearded heads of "fall wheat," swayed by the morning zephyrs, were softly caressing each other. Although a reticent man when in company, he talked a good deal when alone, and, as he threaded his way along the pathway that skirted the highway, carefully avoiding putting his foot on a little flower, even a dandelion, he was saying softly:

"Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice. Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; and Thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys are also clothed with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing."

His dog looked inquiringly up into his face, gave a short, muffled bark of approval, as if he were assenting to what his master had said.

When the old man had retraced his steps and was nearing home again he passed in front of the Widow McBain's cottage. The Widow, before going in to prepare breakfast, had walked around to the front

of the house to secure a hen, which had just broken the tether that had bound her to a stake in the backyard, and was wandering away with her brood of young chickens. The old man exchanged greetings with the Widow, remarked on the beauty of the morning, and passed on, thinking that some of the morning's beauty had somehow crept into his neighbour's face. The Widow, while she placed the tether again around the leg of the wandering hen, and tenderly gathered the downy chicks around her, said to herself:

"That dear old Saint does not carry a care in his countenance."

Having accomplished her task, the Widow came into the house and prepared to start the kitchen fire. Having placed in the pine kindlings she had shaved the night before, she put hardwood on top of it, spilled from a cup over all a little coal oil, and applied a match.

She recollected, as she saw the flames creeping up among the pine shavings, that Mrs. McTavish, coming in one morning early to borrow a "pinch o' soda" to raise her buckwheat cakes, had caught her making the kitchen fire, and had cried indignantly, "'Deed an' it's Sandy ought to be at that work!" And she had replied, just as indignantly, "Sandy!

Why, the poor lad needs his rest morns." She was of the same opinion still, and she wished Agnes McTavish "would not be so ready with her tongue."

"Sandy likes his bit o' bacon morns," she mused, when she saw the blaze catch the wood.

She proceeded to sharpen a knife by whetting it back and forth on an edge of the kitchen stove. That accomplished, she walked to the small smokehouse in the backyard, took down a side of bacon hanging by a twine string, and shaved off some slices. She put the slices on a hot pan and sprinkled a little sugar over them, saying to herself, "Sandy likes his bacon sweet." She stood over the stove turning the meat with a fork until it was frizzled to a crisp. Then she doubled the tablecloth and spread it over half the table; what was the use of setting the whole table for only two? And it was nice for them to sit down so close together, Sandy liked it so.

"Sandy, son, it's time to rise!" she called up the short flight of stairs.

In response to a third call, which the Widow gave at intervals while completing her preparations for breakfast, Sandy, looking as fresh as a new-blown rose, came downstairs. He was a likely looking boy in every respect at this period of his life; his mouth was clean and fresh as if only pure things

came from it; his teeth were white, regular, and glistening, his eyes frank and true. His mother seated herself at the head of the table, while he sat down at the side.

While the boy surveyed the breakfast, wishing that his mother had added eggs to the bacon, the mother placed her hand to her face and said grace into the palm of it.

As soon as that was over Sandy cried, "Mother, have you good, strong tea this morning? I like mine strong, *strong*."

"Yes, son, I've put in an extra spoon just for you."

"He's as fond of his good cup o' tea as any old woman," said his mother with undisguised pride one day to her neighbour, Mrs. McTavish.

"I don't know as I'm likin' that, Jessie," thoughtfully returned the neighbour, "in one sa young—a kind o' cravin' for stimulant. I wouldn't encourage it."

"Agnes is a kind o' croaker," the Widow afterward said to herself; "tea'll never hurt the boy."

After breakfast, while his mother washed the dishes, swept and tidied the kitchen, and scraped and pared vegetables for the dinner, Sandy went out to the

barn to play with his rabbits and his Scotch collie pup—it was Saturday and there was no school.

He stroked the former, let them slide softly through his hands, folded up their pink-lined, satin ears into many grotesque shapes; but the rabbits were too unresponsive to long satisfy the boy and he soon forsook them for the more demonstrative dog.

Trusty was a Scotch shepherd's collie only a few months old, but such was the attention that had been given him he was a very precocious pup. Narrow-faced, long-muzzled, keen-eyed, he sat watching every motion of his young master with an almost human intelligence.

"Now, Trusty, make believe you're dead," shouted the latter. "Dead dog! Dead dog!" Trusty dropped limply to the ground. Then he was made to stand on his hind legs with a cap on his head, and "Speak." "Speak now, Trusty! Speak! Speak, boy!" Trusty followed each command with a short, sharp bark.

When Sandy became tired of the dog, he stood on his head, made cartwheels with his arms and legs, walked the top rail of the fence, climbed a tree and swung from one of the limbs by his arms first, and then by his legs. He bounded a ball, and flipped mar-

bles, and, although he felt a little too old for the sport, he played being a race horse, kicking and rearing in a manner that would do justice to the most fractious brute. He was a train of cars and shunted and switched with much whistle-blowing all over the backyard.

He no longer in his play-hours enjoyed the company of Bill Gilooly, for as soon as the latter was able to do any manual work his father had obliged him to spend every day he was out of school in the blacksmith shop.

"Ye ought to bring up that boy o' yours to help you a bit with your work," said Mrs. McTavish to the Widow; "he could be taught to wash dishes an' pare potatoes as well as yersel'."

"Oh, no," said his mother, "I've other things in my mind for Sandy, other things entirely. Sandy pare potatoes?—he's too proud-spirited for that. . . . I never like to see a man potterin' 'round a kitchen," she added in a lower tone.

"Well, when his women folk hae to potter 'round," returned the officious neighbour stubbornly, "I don't see why he should be too fine to help 'em."

Most of the women in the village did not approve of the Widow's acts of self-denial in behalf of her son, and were not slow to say so—behind her back.

"But," said Mrs. McTavish, who felt in duty bound to defend her friend and neighbour when criticised by other women, "we'll all be proud o' him by an' by; he'll be learnin' Greek an' Latin, an' 'll be a real uplift to th' village when he comes back laden wi' his degrees an' honours. It's no' every village can boast a Bachelor o' Arts. We may be honest here, but we're all kin' o' commonplace; I mean we have no celebrities—nothin' to make us spoken of in th' neighbourin' villages."

"Ye forget One-Armed Joe kin beat 'em all at the checkers; an' I hear tell all the villages 'round are real jealous o' it," cried one of her hearers.

"Ah," returned Mrs. McTavish, "checkers are nowhere beside Latin an' Greek."

VII

THE RING CROWNED WITH TWO HEARTS

IT was a good deal of a wrench for Alexander to tear himself away from the village, the easy homelife, and Maggie—the company of the latter had grown more indispensable to him every day. He seemed inclined to settle down to some occupation in the village, where he should always have Maggie by his side—for in his secret heart he had decided that she must stand by him all through life—some occupation that would not require so much self-denial and exertion as a course of study demanded. Indeed, it is very doubtful that he would ever have had the courage and fortitude to go on only that his mother and Maggie would listen to nothing else.

Before he left home he made Maggie promise, although neither of them fully understood the meaning of it, that she would never walk with any other lad in the village. When they had been children going together to the infant class he gave her a blue bead ring, which she wore until the thread broke and the beads were lost. Before he went away he

put on her finger a ring he had bought at the village general store; its material was doubtful, but it was crowned with two hearts.

The morning that he went away his mother, Maggie, and Mrs. McTavish accompanied him to the railway station, the young people walking briskly in advance, the older couple following at a more leisurely pace.

"I'm that proud o' my boy, that proud, Agnes," said the Widow to her neighbour, allowing her glowing eyes to follow the not ungraceful figure of her son, "that I fancy I must feel something like a goose that has hatched out a swan."

"Aye, aye," returned the neighbour, who could rejoice with those who do rejoice, as well as weep with those who weep.

"My, I feel now that all my trial days are past," she added, "an' th' rest o' th' way will be sunshine."

"That's wi' th' Lord on'y to know," said the neighbour piously, "but ye've every promise o' it, Jessie."

"What a terrible affliction it must be for a mother to have a boy a ne'er-do-well, like Bill Gilooly, for example. Or turn out in the end a good-for-nothing man like One-Armed Joe—good for nothing but playing checkers. I have no fears of anything like *that*, Agnes."

"No fears," returned the neighbour.

Later that same morning Mrs. McTavish ran into the Widow's little summer kitchen and found the tears of the latter dropping into the pan while she was washing the breakfast dishes, which had been shoved aside to allow her to accompany Alexander to the station.

"Why, why!" cried the sympathetic neighbour.

"Oh, Agnes," said the Widow, drying her eyes on the corner of her apron, "my boy has gone out into the great world to-day to make either a good or a bad man."

"Why, why," repeated the neighbour, "I never thought you had any doubts that Sandy would be always among th' gude."

"Ah," sighed the Widow, "I'm just remembering that the Apostle John says that the whole world lies in the arms of the Wicked One; where is there a chance for my lad out in it?"

"But I'm thinking," continued the Widow, after a short silence, "that it cannot be the lads that have a mother that go astray. Ah, surely not. A mother with her arms around a boy can surely keep him from the arms of the Wicked One."

"Aye, aye, surely," returned the neighbour comfortingly. Then, as if her conscience had given her

a twinge, she added hesitatingly, "I'm thinkin', after all, that it's on'y th' Lord A'mighty kin do that, Jessie."

"Oh, no, that's th' work o' a boy's mother," returned the Widow almost impatiently. "I'll have him unite with the church, of course, after he's through his college; he doesn't seem inclined to do so now, but he'll know more after he has got his degree," added the mother.

"Ah, she's set her heart on havin' him a professional man; I know Jessie's pride," said Mrs. McTavish, as she was walking away from the Widow's house. "It would never do for him to be a miller, as his father an' grandfather were before him; he must be a lawyer, or doctor, or some one o' these here white-handed, an' often black-hearted, professions; so she must send him off ta th' university, if it breaks her heart. I'm hopin' th' lad'll have ballast enough in th' hold to stand havin' his sails inflated. Aye, I'm hopin', I'm hopin'. I'm thinkin' Sandy'd 'a' been safer a miller—freer frae temptation. . . . What would become o' all th' world without th' quiet unassumin' bodies that fill th' commonplace positions?" she added after a short reflection on the temptations of the world. "Dear, dear, how far would we go without our bakers, an'

blacksmiths, an' shoemakers, an' tinkers, an' tailors? There's our Village Saint a shoemaker; pit a half-sole on ma shoe that's made it do th' work o' two shoes; an' I had the extra money ta send th' Gospel ta' th' heathen, if I had a mind ta send it. But I'm thinkin' th' Lord must hae meant him for a preacher. So much grace as has been given *him* has been thrown away surely on a shoemaker."

By this time Mrs. McTavish found herself in front of the shoemaker's window, and, glancing in, she caught a glimpse of his white, glowing face bending over his last.

"There he is, just look at him, will ye," she exclaimed softly, "wi' that look intil his face that is a rebuke ta sin, if he never said a word. I'm sure if th' Lord ever intended *any* man ta preach til his fellow-man he intended *that* one, an' I'm goin' in to tell him so."

Suiting the action to the thought, she opened the shoemaker's door and walked in.

The old man on the bench smiled a greeting, and Mrs. McTavish began bluntly, "I jist came in ta tell ye that I b'lieve ye've missed yer callin'; I don't know why some of us have not told ye that long ago; if ever th' Lord intended ony man ta get up in a pulpit an' preach th' Gospel til ither men, he in-

tended *you*. He never wasted a' that grace on a body simply ta sew on shoe-leather. Don't ye agree wi' me?"

For reply the old man laid aside his last, rose from his seat, and, going to a small cupboard in the corner of the shop, he took out of it a volume which looked like a home-made book. Its cover was made of brown paper, and on its back was printed in ink the word "Sermons." It evidently was a book the old man had compiled himself, gathering through the years the sermons that he fondly thought were intended for him, he had preserved them in this fashion. Again seating himself, he opened the book at a place that seemed as if much usage had made it open easily and began to read:

"I believe that God to-day, while He has need of baptised ministers of Jesus Christ, has more need of baptised blacksmiths, and manufacturers, and merchants; and I believe that the blacksmith ought just as truly be baptised with the Holy Ghost for his work as any man who preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Over in Exodus we are told that before a tailor could make a coat for Aaron he had to be filled with the Spirit of God. Before men could do the delicate work on the tabernacle, they needed not to go to some place of fine training in the schools

of men, but they needed to be men that were filled with the Holy Ghost. What a word that is about Bezeall over there in Exodus! God said, 'Now go and search me out a man that is filled with the Spirit of God'; and they found Bezeall and Aholiab, and God filled them up with His Holy Spirit that they might be jewellers—that they might fashion gold and silver and carve the woodwork of the tabernacle. I believe that God wants men to be filled with the Holy Ghost in connection with their daily life just as truly as Peter was filled on the day of Pentecost. God said that before Joshua could be a governor he must be filled with the Spirit of God. He said that because Othmiel was filled with the Spirit of God He would make him a judge. He said unto Gideon it should mean martial valour, and he made him a general. He said that David could not sing until he was filled with the Holy Ghost. Away in the West there was a man who used to make and sell violins and sell them for three or four dollars apiece; but about seventeen years ago there came to him the thought that whatever he did ought to be done for the glory of God, and he would not touch the violin he was making in his workshop except when he knew that he was working by the Spirit of God. The result was that while his other violins

were worth three or four dollars, he sold this violin for between three hundred and four hundred dollars. You might think he would have learned the lesson, but he did not, and he kept on making three-dollar and four-dollar violins for ten years. Then there came to him the impulse to pray and work by the Spirit of God on one instrument, and he made that and sold it for nearly four hundred dollars. You would think he had learned his lesson then, but he had not, and he kept on three or four years more making cheap violins, until the thought at last came to him, 'What I did as a spasmodic thing I ought to do all the time,' and he gave the making of violins over to the Holy Ghost, and now he never sells an instrument for less than three hundred dollars."

"A violin," said Mrs. McTavish reflectively, when the old man had closed his book, "that instrument wi' its contrite pleadin' voice, that will reach yer heart if ye hae a heart; I haven't a doubt that a violin so made would bring somebody intil th' Kingdom."

The old man resumed his work on the leather, and Mrs. McTavish remained silent for some seconds.

"Well, well," she said at last, "it's wonderful to

think on, that a' our wee common doin's are sa important. . . . It's time now for me ta be hastin' home ta get ma man's dinner," she added, rising from the seat she had taken. "We must come down frae our highest mounts of reflection to attend til th' wants of these poor mortal bodies.

"I'm sure," she said to herself, as she was walking home, "if anyone above another needs to feel that th' Lord has called her til th' work, an' is willin' by that reason to fill it wi' a kind o' glory, it's th' wumman who potters over a cookstove, an' washes dishes three hundred and sixty-five days in th' year, hand runnin'!"

It was after Alexander had gone that Maggie wrote in her diary, glancing frequently at the bright new ring while she was doing so—Maggie was fond of pretty things—"Sandy gave me a ring to take the place of the old bead ring he gave me when we were children, he said. How funny that he should remember that old blue bead ring! I had forgotten it. Two hearts," looking at it again; "of course this is because we have always been friends since the first day he came to school. I suppose two hearts stand for two warm friends, and, of course, we shall always remain warm friends until we grow old. Strange to think that everybody has to grow old.

I wonder whether we—Sandy and I—shall grow nicer and stronger as we grow older; I am afraid some people do not. Some seem to grow worse, all their bad habits and cranky ways more fixed. I want to grow old in the right way. Granny Neilson has grown old in the right way; the Village Saint has grown old in the right way.”

Here Maggie began to turn back the leaves of her diary until she reached the first page, where she read, “Sandy goes to school with me every day now. I like him terrible well. When we are big I guess we will get married, we like each other so well.” A faint pink colour dyed her forehead, chin, and all other parts of her face that were white at other times. “How silly children are,” she said, drawing her pen through the written words. “I ought to have learned how to write before I attempted to keep a diary, and I’d have known by that time not to have written anything so foolish.”

She laid her pen down on the table and meditated a few moments, resting her chin in her hands. “I shall probably never be married,” she said at last. “I don’t need any person to take care of me, and I can take care of Sandy without marrying him. I want to do something in the world—something *great*.”

Then she picked up her pen again and wrote: "I wonder why Sandy made me promise not to walk with any other boy in the village while he was away? What has he got against them? Boys are hard to understand. I gave him the promise just to humour him."

Maggie was of Scotch extraction, Highland on her mother's side, and at the time Sandy McBain left the village she carried herself with the air of a queen. Her brown curls were now gathered into a cluster over her shoulders by a scarlet ribbon, and her bright frocks—Maggie inherited her mother's love of bright colours, and when she had reached skirts of ankle length she still continued to wear her gay frocks—were worn with a grace and indifference with which a bird of Paradise might wear its plumage. Her free step (an artist who at one time visited the village said that Maggie stepped like a Diana), the graceful swing of her arm, and a certain depth in her dark eyes would give an observer the impression that she would flinch at nothing she thought she ought to do. Mrs. McTavish said that she never watched Maggie walking down the village street without thinking of the "Scottish Maiden Martyr."

"From some ancestor," said that astute lady, "she has inherited the grit an' fortitude which I verily be-

lieve would carry her til th' stake before she would recant or show th' white feather."

It was on the afternoon of the same day that Alexander had left the village that Maggie's mother sent her on an errand to the general store. She was but a few yards from home when Bill Gilooly came hurrying up behind her.

Bill at this period of his life shod horses, or helped his father to do so, for bread, and performed on the jew's-harp and played checkers for recreation. On rainy days, when there was no business in the blacksmith's shop, if you could not find Bill with his jew's-harp in Joe Pepper's barroom, you were sure to find him in the back of Johnnie Looney's tailor shop playing checkers with One-Armed Joe.

"Hello, Maggie," cried Bill as soon as he was within hailing distance of her, "I saw yer red frock an' came near breakin' me neck tryin' to ketch up wid ye. It's a long time since you an' me has had a bit av a visit. P'raps ye'll look at a feller now onct in awhile when Sandy's gone."

Maggie immediately stopped and said, "I can't walk with you, Bill."

"How's that," said Bill, with a winning cadence in his voice, "have ye sprained yer ankle, Maggie?"

Bill had a red face, and was freckled like a turkey-

egg. To be sure, the phrenologist who had visited the village, and whom Bill, for the edification and amusement of the others, had allowed to "bump" his head free of charge, had said that the red face and freckles indicated "a fine, sanguine temperament, which will moderate as he grows older." The audience were left in some doubt as to which would moderate, the redness and freckles, or the sanguinity. His family had not the social caste in the village enjoyed by Maggie's parents; but association in one small schoolroom, during childhood days, standing side by side in the same classes, whispering answers to questions into each other's ears, has a very leveling tendency. Very often Bill had helped Maggie with her "sums," and many a time Maggie had prompted Bill in the spelling class. Then Bill was "funny"; who can resist fun? and he was seldom repulsed by the girls.

"No," said Maggie in answer to his question, obliged to smile in spite of her determination not to yield to his request; "but I *can't*."

"Don't ye like to walk with me, Maggie?" replied Bill solicitously, looking into her face out of the corner of the eye that was next her.

"I've nothing agen ye, Bill," said Maggie, turning around to face him, and leaning her back against

the board fence, which ran parallel with the sidewalk at that point; "but I *promised*."

Maggie did not always say "ye" for "you," and "agen" for "against," but somehow she felt that it would not be altogether polite not to speak something like Bill.

"Och, ye promised, ye did; promised yer ma that ye'd never be seen walkin' the street with that gosssoon of a Bill Gilooly, eh?" said Bill.

"No," said Maggie, "I didn't promise *her*."

"Oh," returned Bill, a new intelligence flashing into his eyes, "ye promised Sandy McBain. Do you mind, Maggie, when I give him a lickin' 'cause you let him bite out o' your apple—'twas a big red Northern Spy—when we were all youngsters together? Somehow it made me mad to see you in your red frock—that was prettier than other girls' frocks—an' yer brown curls, favourin' him mor'n the rest o' us. Sandy an' me has been good 'nough friends sence, but I'd give him another lickin' now ef I had him here, for that promise."

In reply to this Maggie leaned more solidly back against the board fence.

She was thoroughly unconscious of what a pretty picture she made in her bright frock, with the old, grey fence for a background; but Bill in his blue

jeans, with his hands almost perpetually black from horseshoeing, was not devoid of an artistic sense. He enjoyed looking at Maggie, and still more talking with her, and he quickly came to the decision that for half an hour at least both pleasures should be his. So he replied good-humouredly, and with that inexpressible Irish cadence which is well-nigh irresistible.

"Ye promised not to *walk* with Bill Gilooly, but there was nothin' said agen yer standin' an' havin' a chat with him."

With this he planted himself in front of Maggie, and entertained and amused her for nearly half an hour; obliging the conscientious girl to listen to him, for if she attempted to continue her walk he would walk with her.

Maggie scolded, laughed, and expostulated in turn, but all to no avail, until a farmer drove along the quiet street. Then Bill said, "There's Jake Bender with his sorrel to git shod; the boss'll be lookin' for me." And he moved off in the direction taken by the man and horse, muttering disconsolately as he went:

"She'll cotton to no one but Sandy."

Bill felt so disconsolate that he decided, when he saw that Jake Bender was not going to the black-

smith's with his horse, to retrace his steps to the Mapleton House and get "a little somethin' to cheer him up."

When in the vicinity of the said house he met One-Armed Joe.

VIII

A SUCCESS AT CHECKERS

ONE-ARMED JOE was a well-known village character. He was an adventurer in a limited way, limited because his adventures never led him outside the county in which he was born. But every mile of that county he had travelled, with a worn-out old horse and a second-hand, single waggon, in the capacity of tin-peddler, rag-gatherer, patent medicine vender, or some other avocation which called for very little capital, brains, or work. He was born on a farm, but weeding, harrowing, and planting potatoes he found too laborious for him, even when a boy, and as soon as he was old enough he left home.

He was a few years out in the world when one day, when his funds were pretty low and he was somewhat depressed in spirits, he came into the village and met an attractive young woman. He wore a red necktie that day, and his hat was on the side of his head, and the attraction was mutual. Joe, thinking that it would be a little break in the monotony of life, and

that circumstances could not easily be much worse with him than they were, after a week's acquaintance persuaded the attractive young woman to marry him. He borrowed a coat and necktie for the occasion, and money to get the license.

It was in the little front parlour of the small, white frame Methodist parsonage that they were married, she giving her age as eighteen and he as twenty-one. Joe chose the Methodist minister for one reason: because he had attended Methodist meeting in the schoolhouse a few times when he lived in the country. Then, for another reason, because away in his inner consciousness he had a feeling that ministers of that denomination were more willing than some others to work professionally without being paid with money; he had seen them, many and many a time, officiating at the burying of non-church-going people and ne'er-do-wells. Joe's marriage was, of course, to him, an exciting event, and he forgot entirely to pay the marriage fee. This was convenient, as he had not at the time a cent in his pocket.

The new wife was Joe's complement, in so far as she was as energetic as he was lethargic, and it gave him much comfort to settle down and let her manage things.

They were not married very long when Joe, tour-

ing the surrounding country with a threshing-mill, lost his left hand. This furnished him with the excuse he had long wanted; to quit work, to become the gentleman of leisure he had long hankered to become; and from that day he assumed an invalid air and a collar, and spent most of his time lounging between the blacksmith's shop, the post office, the village tavern, and Johnnie Looney's tailoring establishment. Occasionally he made a quarter or two, enough to keep himself in tobacco, repairing a clock that had not much wrong with it, or selling a cheap print of the Queen, the Pope, or some other world celebrity; but the work of providing for the home naturally fell on the energetic little wife.

He liked his glass, too, and generally managed to be around when there was a prospect of treats. He did not very often get actually drunk, he could seldom get enough whisky to put him into that condition, but he drank every time he got a chance. The village naturally fell into the habit of calling him One-Armed Joe (he had really lost only a hand, but it was easier to say One-Armed Joe than One-Handed Joe) to distinguish him from various Joes who were in possession of both their hands.

From his habit of trying to talk and at the same time hold a clay pipe in his mouth—he had begun

to hold a clay pipe in his mouth when he was sixteen—diagonal wrinkles had worn down each cheek from his eye to the corner of his mouth; and from over-smoking or want of nourishment, his skin was as dry as parchment, and, as to colour, a cross between an olive-green and an orange.

But One-Armed Joe was the crack checker-player of the county. The flight of the imagination is without limit, and despite humbleness of position, poor clothes, and scant food, Joe at times rode upon the high places of the earth, and was fed with the heritage of kings. He felt that he ranked with the champions of the world, and this feeling gave him a certain elation of spirit which no curtain lectures from the wife of his bosom, nor rebuffs from a cruel, unsympathetic world, could quench. It was a matter for speculation, sometimes indulged in by some of the inhabitants of the village, what might have been made out of Joe if some master-finger had caused the entire diapason of his soul to vibrate.

Almost any hour of the day if you were to peer into the dim recesses of Johnnie Looney's tailor shop you would see One-Armed Joe, with a comrade seated opposite to him, bending over the checker-board, his white clay pipe crowded to the corner of his mouth, the wrinkles deeply set in his cheeks, and a scowl

down between his eyes; while the fingers of his one hand, bent like claws, hovered over the all-absorbing board. It was told that at one time, so hard-contested was the game, he and his opponent sat from Saturday morning till noon the following Sunday. This scandalised the village, and Joe felt it to such an extent that it was never repeated.

The sun rose and set with as much splendour over the village home of One-Armed Joe as anywhere in the world, but he never saw the glory. If he glanced in the direction of the sky at all, the clouds seemed to form themselves into checker-boards. Did he chance to raise his eyes to the stars, he thought they would make capital "men"—if they had only been two colours—for the checker-board.

Even the green fields assumed the appearance of great checker-boards, and when he looked at a noble tree he always calculated how many check-boards could be made out of the lumber. He was never known to hear a bird but once in his life; then he declared it said, "Checkers! Checkers! Checkers!"

The village schoolmaster, who was of a calculating turn of mind, reckoned that One-Armed Joe spent hours enough over the checker-board to take a university course, or learn the languages several times. But Joe thought languages and university courses

nowhere beside checkers for interest; indeed, he often wondered why more men had not discovered the merits of the game as a time-killer. Then it gave him influence in the village, and some surrounding villages, and he knew that it did. He was quite a hero among the "boys" and was always invited, if within hearing distance, to be a partaker in the treats.

On one occasion one of the village ministers ventured to remonstrate with Joe about wasting his time; he intimated that, as he was deprived of his hand and unable to do as much manual labour as other men, he had more time for reading and improving his mind.

Joe stared at the good man as if he were speaking an unknown language, and continued to play checkers.

Because Bill Gilooly was generous in spending his wages, Joe, although a good many years Bill's senior, spent much of his time in his company. He even generously promised, one day when he was half intoxicated, to bestow his checker player's mantle on Bill (whom he said was next best player to himself) in case anything should induce him to leave the country—go off to Australia, or British Columbia, as he sometimes threatened to do when his wife found too much fault.

IX

A CRACK IN THE MARBLE

IT was not until he went away from home that Alexander discovered, and I might say the rest of us discovered, his inherited taste for stimulant. Perhaps he missed the fresh egg that never failed his breakfast at home; or the cup of coffee, creamed to a delicate chocolate colour; or Maggie's companionship—brave Maggie, who always walked the path of rectitude; anyhow, as soon as he learned that stimulant was something that he liked, stimulant he would have.

The boy in the beginning only thought of having a good time; all his life he had gotten what he liked; if it was within his reach at all, why not now? Some people warned him once or twice that he was running into danger, but he laughed them to scorn. Very early in his life he had heard temperance cranks laughed at and ridiculed in a gentle sort of way in his village home. Some of the sarcastic remarks were made in a half whisper, as though the speaker did not think it well to allow children or the general

public to hear his or her opinions. But the boy was standing around more than once when he was not noticed, or supposed not to be noticing, and he remembered hearing some of the old friends whom he most respected express decided disapproval of said cranks.

One time in his boyhood a "temperance woman" (they were rare at that time) came to one of the churches to talk about total abstinence, and very few of the villagers would go out to hear her. An aged elder said in the boy's hearing, "Th' woman surely forgets that St. Paul said women were to keep silence in th' churches." Sandy was profoundly impressed, and young as he was he would have blushed to have been seen listening to that "Temperance fanatic." Then he had heard Peter McKim and some other men talk largely about "Anglo-Saxon liberty," and the "rights" of a man to have a bottle of wine, or a glass of beer, if he wanted to have it. He had even heard Mrs. McTavish say in an undertone that she had "very little respec' for a man that couldna take his glass an' let it alone when he had enough." She added that men were temperate not when their drink was regulated by law, but when they had acquired the power to regulate it for themselves. But Sandy did not take in that part of her speech.

Then the boy read in the one weekly newspaper which came into his home—he was just at the age to consider Gospel everything that appeared in print—this paragraph: “Prohibition is wrong in principle and impossible in practise. It is unwise to put it on the statute books as inducing contempt for all law. The only possible remedy is moral suasion.” He wondered vaguely what moral suasion meant, and decided that he would know when he grew up, as people had told him about many of his other questions.

It was a grandmother in the church who remarked in the boy’s hearing that “Christ didna forbid th’ use o’ wine, but drank it himsel’ an’ made it th’ occasion for a meeracle.” So he grew up with a profound contempt for the individual who was afraid of a glass of whisky.

He sipped and tasted on many little occasions; it was his way of curing every ill, physical and mental. He accepted treats, and looked forward eagerly toward receiving them. On one occasion, when with the boys and treating was general, he got decidedly intoxicated, and a whisper of it came back to the village. Almost everybody heard the whisper except the boy’s mother.

“Well, he came by it honest,” said Mrs. Brady in a careful undertone, “nobody can deny *that*.”

"Ah, I fear," said Mr. Vickers to his wife, in the privacy of the manse sitting-room, when they were talking over the depressing rumour, "that the boy was worm-eaten at his birth."

"Is heredity incurable?" anxiously exclaimed Mrs. Vickers.

"Incurable," returned the minister, "except through the Power that cast out devils, and healed the man that was born blind."

"And everything else must have failed people," said Mrs. Vickers, "before they'll venture on the Unseen."

"Chip o' the old block! Chip o' the old block!" said Peter McKim, shoving his hands down deep into his trousers pockets as he walked away from the party from whom he had received his information. "Ah, a crack in th' marble," said Mrs. McTavish to herself when the news reached her.

But others said it was just a boy's frolic—a grain of wild oats. They hoped it would be a warning to him, and not occur again; and the less said about it the better.

The following Easter, when he was home for his vacation, the Village Helper passing through the Mapleton House (she was in waiting on the ailing wife of the proprietor) saw him standing at the bar

surrounded by a group of followers, with a glass of liquor in his hand. She remembered the whisper that had come back to the village, and, although she had never posed as an advocate of temperance, she stepped inside the barroom (why should she be afraid of that boy, if he had been at college? She was present at his birth, and gave him his first dose of medicine; for in that day it was not thought that a baby's life was secure until it had taken a certain amount of doses), snatched the glass out of his hand, saying, "Here, boy, that ain't for sech as you," and threw the contents out doors.

She left as suddenly as she came, and Sandy, out of bravado before the "boys," drank more than one glass, and treated around as long as his money lasted.

"That's you, Sandy," said One-Armed Joe, slapping the lad on the shoulder, "don't you never let no woman boss *you*. My woman tries it on me sometimes, but it's no go."

As a consequence of Sandy's drinking the boys had to walk him back and forth in the fresh air for an hour before he was sober enough to meet Maggie, or go home to his mother.

This meeting of Maggie was a different thing to him, since he had come home this time, to what it had been before; somehow he had grown half afraid

of her clear, pure eyes, that seemed to look him through and through; her smooth, white brow, and the lustre and dignity of her aspect seemed sort of silent denunciators of everything that was crooked or evil. He could not endure for a moment the thought of letting her go out of his life, and yet this time of his home-coming, her world—where she habitually lived in thought and action—seemed another one from his. He wondered with something like a pang how they had happened to get into different worlds; there was a time when they had loved and hated the same things, when they saw, as it were, with one pair of eyes, and heard with one pair of ears. What had caused them to drift apart?

“Maggie has grown up too good,” he said to himself, “too good for me. But she’s a beauty; and when I come home to stay we shall soon grow into the old ways.”

That night before he retired he stood in his room regarding complacently his really handsome face in the quaint old mirror on his dresser. He adjusted his white silk cravat, bought with a dollar that his mother had denied herself of a certain kind of vegetable all winter to give him—braced back his shoulders, and laughed as he thought of the adventure which he had with the Village Helper.

"That old woman evidently thinks I can't take care of myself," he soliloquised. "How ridiculous! I can stop any time I want to. A fellow's a fool who can't. This making a beast of one's self may belong to such as Paddy Conley—perhaps Bill Gilooly, but not to one with the instinct of a gentleman. I'll go on and take my degree," with another pat of the white necktie—"perhaps with honours—and be—be somebody out of the commonplace. Somebody Mother shall be proud of; somebody Maggie shall be proud of; somebody the village shall be proud to acknowledge. They're all proud of me now. Take care of myself, indeed! Take care of myself, ha, ha! I'll take care of myself, I'll take care of Mother, I'll take care—of—Maggie, of course. I'll build churches, asylums, hospitals; I'll make my mark in the world, and let these poor simple villagers see a thing or two." In his exhilaration of spirits he picked up a small fancy cane he had brought with him from the city, but had not ventured to carry in the village, and made two or three turns with it across the room. He was an hour in bed that night before he slept.

While Alexander was a student in the city money of necessity was very scarce with him. His mother at home felt it bitterly that she was able to give her darling son such a scant supply. At intervals, by

denying herself every luxury, and perhaps selling some of the vegetables she had put in the cellar for her own eating, she would scrape together an extra dollar, which she would carefully send in a registered letter.

"MY DEAR SON:

"Inclosed you will find a one dollar bill, which I send you with much love, to get any little needful for yourself. I wish from the bottom of my heart I could send you more. Do try and be careful of yourself; eat a-plenty, and do not work too hard.

"The minister's wife has presented me with a small mug of orange marmalade which came from her folk in Scotland; I've just put it by till you come home, Alexander."

Then followed an account of the village happenings, and a scrap of intelligence about his old playmate, Maggie Thompson.

All other days of the week were of small account to this mother beside the *one* day that brought Alexander's weekly letter. The first thought when she opened her eyes in the morning was, "This is the day for his letter; I must rise early and get all done up to have time to read and enjoy it at leisure." Her heart throbbed faster each time the letter was put into her hand, and she always opened it with trembling eagerness.

If the boy carelessly forgot or neglected to write,

she would spend anxious hours until the delayed letter arrived.

Rising in the morning her first act was to raise the curtain of her bedroom window, and if she found the sun shining she murmured with a grateful heart, "Sandy'll have a fine day to-day," and if it was wet or cold, she would sigh, "The poor laddie'll be miserable."

The various vacations were the events of the year; everything in the small household centred around when Alexander came, and when he went. All the necessary, disagreeable duties of housekeeping were painstakingly performed during his absence, and all the little luxuries for the table were laid aside until he came home. When Mrs. McTavish remonstrated with the Widow for not giving more consideration to her own comfort, she would reply cheerfully:

"My good time is coming, Agnes, when Alexander gets his degree. Oh! I'll be that proud then—that proud that I'll forget all the past!"

The spirit of unrest, the spirit of the time, that was stirring in the outside world, had somehow crept into our village, and seized on no less a personage than Maggie Thompson. It was shortly after Alexander had gone that Maggie became possessed with a desire to go out into the world and do something

—something worth while. Suddenly the village life had become slow, she longed for greater activity; she felt as though there was some great mission for her to perform in the world. As she dreamed and dreamed over it, that something seemed to materialise in the profession of sick nursing, and she ventured after a while to ask her father and mother to allow her to enter a hospital for training.

“Nurse, indeed!” said her mother aghast, “a child of mine, my only one, go off to wait on other people, who are no kith an’ kin to her—be their servant? Don’t ever mention it in my hearing again, Maggie. Be contented to stay at home with Father an’ Mother—I’ll give ye two new frocks this summer, bairnie,” she added coaxingly, as she saw Maggie’s great disappointment.

“Nurse?” said her father in bewildered surprise, eyeing the daughter whom he did not realise was grown up until that moment. “Why must you go off from home? Surely I can support one bairn. I’ll let you keep my books for me, Maggie, if you want to work. Can’t let you go away from home nohow.”

So there was nothing left for Maggie to do but look hungrily into the future and long for something to open up the path of what she thought progress.

X

THE WIDOW'S PRIDE

THE years passed; Alexander won his degree of Bachelor of Arts, and came back to the village. The day he arrived the village felt to be the proudest in its history. A small crowd of people were at the station to see him come home. Some were actuated by real friendship, and some came merely from curiosity to see whether Alexander would look or act "anyways different" now that he was a B. A. Maggie Thompson was there, and a number of the other girls, all dressed in their Sunday best. Bill Gilooly was there, and, with his hands black from the forge, grasped soulfully the white hand of his old schoolmate.

But Bill, a few moments later, had to acknowledge to the old twinge of jealousy when he saw Alexander walk off from the depot with Maggie by his side—something of the same feeling that had agitated his bosom when the little girl Maggie had given Sandy a bite out of her apple. Then he heard Mrs. McTavish say, as she looked after Alexander's retreat—

ing figure, "He's the village B. A., an' we've reason to be proud o' him. Wonderful to think he knows Greek now."

Bill wondered why all the good things were for Alexander; and with a strange feeling of surprise, as if it had never occurred to him before, he remembered that he—Bill—was the brighter scholar of the two when they were both little fellows in the village school. Alexander never could help Maggie with her "sums," and he was even worse in spelling than Bill himself. There came a day early in Bill's life when his father thought that he had "learnin'" enough, and took him into his blacksmith shop. For the first time it occurred to Bill that perhaps human hands had pulled his destiny awry.

"Maggie's proud o' him 'cause he's the B. A.," he muttered, looking after the retreating figures of Maggie and Alexander. "I might 'a' been a B. A. ef I'd stuck to books." He felt so disconsolate that he went around to the Mapleton House for a drink.

Alexander was not home a week before Maggie became conscious of an occasional air of excitement about him that she had never observed before. In two weeks she had discovered that his breath at times was a little suspicious, and, although the "temperance question" had never previous to this cost her

even a thought, a nameless fear crept into her heart which made it very heavy. She would like to have spoken to Sandy about it, but dread of wounding his feelings kept her silent.

Before three weeks had elapsed, about ten o'clock one night, Alexander staggered into his mother's sitting-room, and into her presence, muttered a few incoherent words to her, and as she smelled the fumes of the whisky, dropped on the couch in a drunken stupor.

She arose from her chair and stood gazing at her son as if turned to stone, then she raised both hands as if to ward off a blow, and cried bitterly, "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children! Upon the children! Upon the *children!* O God! O God! is there no escape?"

An hour afterward, when Alexander was sleeping heavily, his mother crept to her own bedroom. She could not weep, she could not pray, so she lay on her bed staring dry-eyed into the darkness, and listening to the clock in the sitting-room striking the passing hours. After a while the silence seemed to suffocate, to craze her, and she cried:

"O God, I cannot think of Thee; when I would my mind turns back to him—my boy. He is my only one, my only one. It is such a short time since

he was so little and so warm lying here on my arm. If you let him go down to a drunkard's grave, if you let him be lost!—What are my curses to Thee? Give him back to me! Give him back! I want him as he was! Give me back my pure, young boy!"

Did reason at that moment totter from its throne? Or was it pride which enabled the Widow to enact the part she thenceforth played before the village? The villagers never could decide the question. The following morning she presented to the village, and to the world, a smiling face, and the neighbours looked on and wondered. Some of the "curious bodies," a few of whom are found in every village, went so far as to steal suddenly into the Widow's summer kitchen, when she was out there working, "to ketch her unawares"; but no matter how suddenly they swooped in upon the little woman they never failed to find her clothed in her smile. When Alexander was staggering around scarcely able to stand on his feet, his mother spoke about "that nasty dizziness in his head," and when he was dead drunk she said that "Poor Sandy was tired right out," or was "seriously ill." The villagers soon learned that they dare not speak of his infirmity in any other way than as his "*illness*."

Not even to her minister did the Widow show the

least quaking of heart. . . . She walked to the church Sundays clasping her Bible and psalm-book in her black-gloved hands, her head, if anything, held a trifle higher, as became the mother of the village B. A.

"My, my," whispered Mrs. McTavish confidentially into the ear of Granny Neilson, "Jessie McBain is so carried away wi' pride she'll no unburden her heart til even her old friend an' next-door neighbour."

"Dinna be hard wi' her, Agnes," said Granny gently, "she's bearin' in silence as her Lord hae taught her. . . . An' there's no denyin'," she added with a quizzical twist of her sweet old lips, "that her son is th' village B. A., why should she not be proud o' it?"

It is not to be supposed that Alexander made no resistance to his own downfall. The morning after that first night on which he came intoxicated into the presence of his mother he berated himself bitterly in the privacy of his own bedroom. "I must stop this!" he said, walking the floor in long strides. "I will give them up—the drinks! Give them up entirely! I *can*, of *course* I can—if I make up my mind to do it; and I *must* do it! Suppose Maggie had seen me! When Maggie and I are married I'll quit all this, and of course we shall be—some day.

The sooner the better I think now, if I have got to quit. I haven't said anything to her about it yet, but I know it's all right."

Then he began to dramatise himself walking up the steps of a brown stone mansion where Maggie was the mistress; he made her very beautiful, and her smile of welcome to him, her husband, was bewitching. The house was furnished with every luxury, but Maggie was never happy in it when he was absent. He was a leading man in the place, looked up to by everybody, consulted, by reason of his education, on all subjects of public interest. Maggie was a handsome, talented woman, much above the average in both respects; people remarked when they saw her or heard her name mentioned in connection with something literary or philanthropic that she was *his* wife. He brightened up very much while he was painting this picture, and before he went down to his breakfast he was quite sure that he would never drink again—to excess.

But in one short week the unfortunate dreamer was drunk again.

"A chip o' the old block," whispered a few of the less sympathetic in the village, when Alexander's drinking habits became generally known.

When he had been home about two months his

mother sent out invitations for his birthday party. He had been sober now for several weeks, and she thought to live down and ignore the past. On the evening of the party, shortly before the first guests began to arrive, the young man walked home so intoxicated that he could scarcely stand upright. His mother, with the help of Bill Gilooly, who had assisted him home, helped him upstairs to his room. When they had placed him on his bed, the mother locked his door and hung the key on a hook in the hall.

"An' she came right down to meet us all wi' th' same awfu' smile on her face," said Mrs. McTavish; "pit one in mind o' th' grinnin' death's-head on a p'ison bottle, and regretted so that Sandy's *illness* wouldna permit him to welcome his guests."

High and low in the village (if we recognised such distinctions) were at that party. The minister and the elders of the church were there, as befitted the occasion. One-Armed Joe was there to entertain the company by some tricks of jugglery. Granny Neilson was there because out of respect for her years she was invited to every gathering. Bill Gilooly was there to play "pieces" on his jew's-harp. It took Bill half an hour to put on the first stand-up collar he had ever worn, and when it was on it scraped

his neck terribly, felt too tight, and made his face redder than ever. But Maggie Thompson had given him a smile of approval, and Bill would have endured twenty collars for that smile. Maggie Thompson was there, the belle of the evening in rose-coloured frock and ribbons. Mrs. McShane was there because she had offered her services to wash dishes and do waiting. Indeed, it would be easier to mention who were not there than who were.

When the evening was about half spent Bill Gilooly suddenly disappeared from the company and stole down to Joe Pepper's tavern. When there he procured some whisky from Joe in a bottle. Shoving the bottle into his trousers' pocket he hurried back to the scene of merriment. When he thought no eyes were upon him he slipped upstairs, unlocked Alexander's door, placed the bottle to his not unwilling lips, and poured half its contents down his throat.

"He'd come to, fur sartin, ef I didn't give him more," soliloquised Bill, "an' put poor Maggie to the blush."

Locking the door again Bill stole downstairs, hid the bottle containing the remainder of the whisky under a currant bush in the garden, and came back to the company looking as innocent as if he had been

just out taking a breath of fresh air, and feeling as satisfied as if he had been performing some philanthropic work.

The party broke up at the usual hour, and on the road home the guests whispered their worst fears to each other in awed undertones.

After a time of waiting for something to turn up, Alexander secured a position as bookkeeper in the village general store, an establishment which kept a little of everything, from quinine pills and codfish to at least one piece of silk and a case of cheap jewelry, did a large country trade, and "gave credit." An old friend of Alexander's mother, an elder in the church who had been at the boy's christening, owned the store, and with a desire to help the young man gave him employment.

About this time intelligence began to creep into the village that various positions had presented themselves to Alexander while he was yet in the city, but an inquiry into his habits dispelled all thought of an engagement.

In a short time it became evident that the elder's act of kindness but supplied the young man with money to indulge his appetite, and in a few months his round, boyish face became thin and nervous-looking.

By this time Maggie was going around with a very sober face, and a look of wounded loyalty in her eyes. But beneath it all was a resolute expression, as though she clearly saw her duty, and nothing was going to deter from doing it. Maggie had the stuff in her of which martyrs are made; somehow she felt that it devolved upon her to sacrifice herself—to be crucified, if need be—for this weak piece of humanity whose life had so early touched hers. And, like other martyrs, she felt a sort of ecstatic joy in the crucifixion.

“He must be mine to take care of,” she said to herself; “he came to me first—that day that he started out from home. It is the work that was given me.”

Her love seemed like that of a mother's; that great brooding, protective feeling which only women can fully understand; and which becomes stronger and more tenacious in proportion to the weakness and failure of the object that calls it out. More than once when Alexander was coming staggering along the sidewalk, liable at any minute to fall headlong, Maggie was seen by the neighbours running out to take his arm, and safely conduct him home. If at any time he acted stubborn and refused to comply with her wishes, all she had to do was to whisper

into his ear, "Giant Despair will get you," and immediately, in his condition of dethroned manhood, the old fear of his childhood would seize him, and she could lead him whither she would.

One Saturday afternoon, when the village was fuller of loungers than usual, Maggie saw Alexander staggering into the Mapleton House, scarcely able to keep his feet. She knew that inside that house meant more drinking, and, forgetting all about the great impropriety of a *woman* being seen going into such a place, and all about the bleared eyes of men that would boldly stare her out of countenance, she stepped quickly over the threshold of the barroom, grasped the young inebriate by the arm, whispered into his ear the talismanic words, and led him out.

Maggie's parents were a very indulgent pair, who had allowed their only child to do much as she pleased all her life—except leave home—but this act shocked them out of the lethargy of a lifetime, and they were determined that the "friendship"—they were careful afterward to let the village know that nothing more existed among the young people—should go no further. That night they had a long and serious talk, indeed the talk extended into the small hours of the morning, and at the breakfast table the mother said:

"Maggie, dear, your father and I have changed

our minds; after a long talk last night we've decided to let you go to th' hospital an' study nursing. After all, it's better for a young girl to see life from various sides, an' a hospital course can do you no harm whatever, so your father an' I think."

"Yes, yes," said the father, trying to pacify his lonely heart, and taking a sup of coffee to cover his emotion.

"We think it better for you to go now soon, dearie," continued the mother, "an' have it over with."

"But Sandy, Mother!" said Maggie, in a tone that sounded like the cry of a heart, "who'll take care of him?"

"Tut, lassie," returned the mother, "Sandy'll be a heap better off without you. A man grows weak always dependin' on a woman. It's far better for you to go an' leave him by himself. That's just what he needs—to be left alone. You mind, Maggie, when you were a wee baby, an' awful slow about learnin' to walk, we cared for you so, havin' only yourself; till one day we just let you go, an' your father stood across the room an' said, 'Come, Maggie, here's a sweetie for you,'—holdin' up a big pink bull's-eye—an' you started off, balancin' yourself with your little arms. on which I had tied two pink bowknots, an'

walked clear, all by your lone, across that room. An' from that day you stopped fallin'. People never can really do anything until they can do it all by their lone."

"No, they can't," said Maggie's father, taking another sip of coffee at the recollection of Maggie's first steps alone.

"We'll write to-day, girlie, an' find out where you'd better go; I'm anxious to have it over with, an' get you back with us again."

Maggie said no more; she never even dreamed of setting aside her mother's authority; but now that the path of progress, as she had once chosen to consider it, was open, it did not look nearly as inviting as it once did. Was it right to leave Sandy? she asked her secret heart many times.

After much writing to various places, which Maggie's mother at once commenced, the girl received a call to a hospital in New York, and her thrifty managing mother went about preparing her for the new work.

"I'm glad to have her go away as far as possible; she'll be gone two or three years, an' who can tell what will happen in that time?" said the mother to her husband in the privacy of their own room. "Nurses' holidays are few an' far between, for which

I am also glad; an' who would have believed my mother's heart could have been brought to feel so? Her father an' mother will have to go an' see *her*," she added after a moment's silence.

"Yes, yes," said Maggie's father; he was unable to steady his voice for more.

XI

BILL GILOOLY'S INSPIRATION

SHORTLY after Maggie left, great discrepancies in Alexander's bookkeeping obliged his mother's old friend to dispense with his services; and when out of employment, and without the girl's restraining presence, his down-hill course became more rapid. He began to lounge around the Mapleton House, and seat himself in one of the large armchairs in front of it.

Those who believe in the "souls of things," cannot but think that some evil genius has taken up its abode in those wooden arms, empowering them to lure to their embrace the idle and unwary.

As time passed, and Sandy lingered longer and later at the Mapleton House, all of his old friends seemed to grow ashamed of him, and fight shy of him, except Bill Gilooly. Some said it was the Irish good nature in Bill which would not allow him to neglect his old schoolmate, and some said it was Bill was fond of whisky himself, and came in for treats by

being with Alexander. But the truth was, although no one suspected it, Bill was doing it all for Maggie's sake. Poor Maggie, she was sent away where she could do nothing, and he, Bill, would take her place and be "company" for Alexander. It gave him a warm glow about his heart to feel that he was doing Maggie a favour. Bill had never been taught to regard whisky-drinking as anything out of the normal, but Bill had better nerves than Alexander, and had not the craving for stimulant that possessed the latter. "I git full juist fur the fun av it," was the reason he gave for drinking whisky.

Many a night in the barroom of the Mapleton House Bill played "*Molly Darling*," "*Money Musk*," "*The Old Folks at Home*," and other familiar airs to an appreciative audience; at times with his jew's-harp "running the whole gamut of feeling" in such a manner as to wring tears from bleared and bloodshot eyes, and cause the intelligent listener to wonder whether Bill was fated to be classed among the "village Hampdens," "the mute, inglorious Miltons," and "the flowers that blush unseen, and waste their sweetness on the desert air." Perhaps it was more the desire for companionship and appreciation than anything else that attracted Bill to the barroom; he had nowhere else to exercise his natural

musical ability except the cramped, uncomfortable cabin he called home.

All the men and boys of the village and surrounding country, with the exception of Crazy Tim, were admitted and welcomed on cold nights and rainy days into the light and cheer and music of Joe Pepper's barroom.

Poor Crazy Tim had no money, and there was little prospect that he would *ever* have any, so he was felt to be an incumbrance in the barroom. The villagers walking past the tavern at night could often see Tim hovering around the open door, or trying to "peek in" through a slit in the window blind. No place in the world seemed so much like heaven to poor Crazy Tim as Joe Pepper's barroom when Bill Gilooly was playing on his jew's-harp within.

One night Bill and Alexander had stayed until a late hour in the said barroom. As it happened, Bill was so taken up with his music—having improvised several numbers that evening—that he did not drink much, but when it came time to go home Alexander was so "full," to use Bill's expressive word, from the many treats the music had elicited that Bill had to lead him home.

Having accomplished his self-appointed task, Bill went to his own home.

Somehow the music had stirred the divine in Bill that night, and as he was preparing for bed he had a discussion with that higher self something after this fashion:

"The village B. A. is goin' to fail 'em; nothin's plainer. Sandy ain't goin' to pull up, spite o' Greek, spite o' Latin, that's as sure as shootin'. What will the village do then for a lad as knows Greek an' Latin? What? . . . Why can't you fire up, Bill Gilooly, an' be somebody the village 'd be proud av? Learn Greek? Why not? Learn Latin? Why not? Drap yer jew's-harp; drap yer checkers; drap the drinks an' take to books; that's th' hull av it in a nutshell. Ye was quick at larnin' as fur as ye went; why can't ye go funder? Do ye hear me, ye lazy spalpeen! . . . My! wouldn't ye s'prise 'em! They think now yer no good fur nothin' but shoin' horses, playin' the jew's-harp an checkers. . . . Wouldn't you s'prise 'em, though! Bill Gilooly, B. A.; wouldn't they laugh fit to split! . . . William Henry Gilooly, B. A.; wouldn't that knock the spots off." He jumped to his feet. "I know I could do it! . . . I *know* I could if—if Maggie'd care——"

He stopped short, strode across the room to the seven-by-nine mirror hanging on the wall, and look-

ing at his freckled reflection there, he shook his fist at it, laughed hysterically as if intoxicated with his great idea, and struck his breast a resounding slap.

There was a something in Bill's face at that moment which caught his own attention, a "feeling" which an artist would have called fine. He gazed at himself a few seconds in wonder as if he had just found himself. Then he added suddenly and fiercely, "Pshaw! what's the good? Who cares what becomes of Bill Gilooly? Ef Maggie'd care——"

He turned from the mirror, puffed out the candle, and jumped into his sheetless bed.

If "prayer is the heart's sincere desire uttered or unexpressed," Bill fell asleep praying—with scant faith—that the time might come when "Maggie'd care."

The next day the thought of trying to make something of himself would not let go of Bill; it haunted him from morning until night. His father kept him in the blacksmith shop from daylight until dark; where was he to get time for self-improvement? Suddenly a bright idea shot into his head—he would rise early in the morning and begin on some book.

Bill wondered as he was going to bed how he would

ever wake, for he generally slept soundly until six o'clock, at which time his mother called him. But the following morning he woke at four, and he learned for the first time the power of the will over sleep. The morning was cold, for it was now winter time; to waste wood on a fire merely for himself was out of the question, so Bill bethought him to go to the cellar.

Lighting one of his mother's tallow dips, he groped his way down the narrow steep steps, dropped some melted tallow on the end of the bench on which she kept her washtubs, stuck the unlighted end of the dip in the hardening grease, and sat down on a soapbox to study.

The only book which he had succeeded in finding in the house was his old school arithmetic; so by the dim light of the tallow dip, with the mice from their crannies in the wall peering curiously out at him, Bill "done sums"—he was a natural mathematician—until six o'clock.

The next day, in Joe Pepper's barroom, Bill found, in brilliant paper binding, "*Red Rat's Daughter*," and the three following mornings he improved his mind reading that book.

"She ain't nowheres as good-lookin' nor as as smart as Maggie," he soliloquised (referring to the

heroine) as he finished the last page and shut the book.

It seemed as if Bill's resources were now exhausted; he could find no more literature around Joe Pepper's, nor in his own home, and the early morning study ceased.

XII

THE WOMEN INTERFERE

ALEXANDER, like other drunkards, passed through various moods in the process of becoming intoxicated. The first glass made him genial; he shook hands a good deal. The second glass induced him to quote poetry; Shakespeare was his favourite. Sometimes the quotations were amusingly appropriate, and sometimes they were wide of the mark. At a more advanced stage of intoxication he became quiet, and seemed to wish to hide himself from the eyes of his fellow-men; even from Bill Gilooly, with whom he now spent every evening.

"It seems to be in the blood of thim Scotch to drink," said Mrs. Brady to me in a confidential whisper one day we were talking about Alexander's sad career. An hour afterwards Mrs. McTavish said with a sigh, "If we could get Alexander away frae the influence o' Bill Gilooly there might be somethin' done wi' him; them Irish take to whisky like ducks to water."

Alexander differed from Bill in many ways, but

nothing more than the attacks of remorse and humiliation which he suffered after every heavy carouse. There was more or less sameness between them all.

The day of the fall fair a number of farmers had come into the village, lingered around the tavern, and vied with each other in treating; as a consequence by noon Bill and Alexander were both quite intoxicated.

Bill climbed into a hayloft to sleep off the effect of his over-indulgence. In some incidental way Crazy Tim found him there, and spent the rest of the day climbing every half hour the ladder leading to the hayloft to gaze with solemn wonder at Bill's motionless form. When it began to grow dark Crazy Tim gathered great armfuls of hay and spread it over Bill. Then saying to himself, "There, the bears won't git him now," he climbed down the ladder and went home for the night.

Alexander went home, and climbing upstairs to his room, he staggered across to the small fireplace where his mother had lighted a fire, the day being cool. He sat a few moments gazing with bleared eyes into the wood flames. His whisky had made him nervous.

"Alexander McBain,—B. A.—successor to—Paddy Conley," he muttered as the result of his reflections. "I was once a little white babe," he continued, "rocked so" (clasping his hands and swaying

them back and forth); "then I went to school holding Maggie's hand—holding Maggie's hand—I said my prayers—said my prayers—prayers—prayers." He dropped on his knees beside the bed, burying his face in his hands.

After a few moments he straightened up, raised both arms to Heaven, and cried:

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below,
Words without thoughts never to Heaven go. No, never,
never, *never!*"

Then he rose from his knees, walked the floor, beat his breast and wept aloud. "The rankling serpent's teeth that succeed debauch were biting into his soul." God only knows how far on the downward road a man goes before the divine in him ceases to rise up, and expostulate, and seek for its rightful place of sovereignty.

Ten minutes after he was down at the Mapleton House, where he tossed down glass after glass, until he could no longer stand on his feet. As he was one of the village boys, and a Bachelor of Arts, he was allowed to sober up lying on the barroom floor behind a screen, instead of being pitched out of doors like Paddy Conley and all no-account and foreign drunks.

The women of the village talked the matter over,

and it was the general opinion that Joe Pepper should refuse to give whisky to the Widow's son. But who was going to convince Joe of his duty in this matter?

At last Mrs. McShane's warm Irish heart could contain itself no longer, and she determined to make at least one attempt to work on the good nature, or conscience, of Joe Pepper.

Mrs. McShane was a little woman, less than five feet in height. She wore short skirts, leaned forward from the waist when in locomotion, at what was calculated to be about an angle of thirty degrees, and walked so fast that not an ounce of superfluous flesh ever got a chance to accumulate on her active little body. She swung both arms energetically, and grasped in the middle a half-folded umbrella, which she carried rain or shine. On dress occasions she wore, in honour of her husband, Michael McShane, who had died a dozen years before, a long crape veil fastened to the back of her bonnet, and a pair of black lace mitts, which covered her wrinkled yellow hands to the knuckles. Michael in his lifetime often got drunk and abused her roundly, but she seemed to think that was no more than should be expected of a husband, and held no grudge against him whatever.

Michael McShane married Bridget when she was

young, hearty, and an Irish beauty. He had just returned from the Civil War, in which he had received a few slight wounds; and on the strength of these wounds a few years after his marriage he retired from the conflict of trying to wrest a living from the world, and left to poor Bridget the work of providing for the home. He drank very often, and on those occasions made a practice of venting his over-excited feelings on his wife. The village was not slow about expressing itself regarding his shortcomings; but even the villagers forgave poor Mike when they saw him, with meekened face, stretched in his coffin—a grand one covered with black cloth, provided by a certain order of which he was a member—with the prayer-beads twisted among his fingers and the crucifix clasped in his folded hands.

After her husband's death, Bridget's vocation, that by which she earned her living and that of her son Jimmy, was growing vegetables on five or six acres of land, and raising chickens, both of which she sold through the fall and winter to the villagers; and her avocation, that by which she got recreation, was managing things for her neighbours—"givin' 'em a help-in' hand or a word av advice." She had thought about interviewing the proprietor of the Mapleton House for a week, and at the end of that time he said

to herself, "Bridget McShane, ef ye can't do that much fur a neighbour, yer no worthy branch av the Dooly family from which ye sprung," and she screwed her courage up to the point of bearding Joe in his den. With the idea of making a stronger impression, she donned for the occasion her crape veil and black mitts.

"Thinks I to mesilf, faint heart never won fair lady," she said in recounting her experiences with Joe, "an' all unbeknowst to anny one av 'em I walked right up to the front door av the Mapleton House dressed in me Sunday best, but thryin' to shrink me physical frame up as shmall as possible, to kape people frum noticin' me—it may be all right fur *men*," she added parenthetically, "but a tavern is no place fur a *woman* to be seen goin' into—an' niver a one av me can tell how I ever had the stren'th to walk in; but onct inside the door I took a sate inside the settin'-room, all fixed up wid tissue-paper flowers as grand as you please, while the hired girl went fur Joe.

"He comes in all smilin' an' bowin', but mind you, I wint there to spake me mind, an' I waren't goin' to be smiled out av it, nor bowed out av it, aither. So I burst right out, as a body may say, before he had time to upsot me nerves, an' says I:

"'Mr. Pepper,' say I—I calls him mister, thinkin'

to plase him, but nary a gintleman I thought him—
 ‘it’s terrible the way that poor b’y Sandy takes on
 afther he has been on a spree,’ says I. ‘Them as has
 heerd him tells me he groans an’ walks the floor, cryin’
 an’ talkin’ to himself; sayin’ poetry—an’ that’s a bad
 sign, I’ve heerd ’em say—min’s goin’—an’ falls down
 on his knees an’ gits up again; wan ud think he was
 clean gone out av his senses. An’ his poor mother’s
 hair turnin’ grey listenin’ to him downstairs—she’s a
 woman to be pitied amongst us.

“ ‘An’ it’s ourselves as knows him here all our
 lives,’ says I, continuin’ on, ‘sence he was a little fel-
 low playin’ weighdee bucket-tee on a boord across the
 rail fence wid Maggie Thompson an’ the other chil-
 dren, an’ it’s the breakin’ av our hearts to see him
 troubled so.’

“ But, God bless ye, Joe was lookin’ up at the
 ceilin’ rubbin’ his two fat hands together, an’ almost
 smilin’. An’ before I had time to ketch breath, says
 he, kindly-like, as if he was more sorry fur me than
 fur Sandy or the Widdy:

“ ‘Don’t you fret, Mrs. McShane, he’ll git over
 that soon; that’s the way wid all av thim when they
 begins; but by the time he’s forty he’ll git drunk an’
 stay drunk a week, an’ not care a haporth. I’ve seen
 ’em take on awful, scores an’ scores av time,’ says he,

'but they all git used to it after a while, give up all tears an' regrits, an' it becomes quite nachural, as nachural as day.'

"'Bother *you*,' says I to mesilf, but I kep' a civil tongue in my head, for why? I was in his house.

"Just thin he heerd a noise in the barroom, an' bate a hasty retrate.

"'Sorrow go wid ye,' says I—to myself again—an' I came away lavin' such a miscreant fur the Almighty to dale wid.

"'Twasn't like I was thryin' to upspot the man's business," she continued after a short silence. "I ain't no timperance woman, God forbid! Let him sell whisky to everybody he wants to, barrin' the poor Widdy's son, who can't sthop whin he has had as much as is good fur him—an' wan as we all knows around here."

By a strange coincidence the Village Helper had also decided to have a talk with the proprietor of the Mapleton House, and, as it happened, went in about ten minutes after Mrs. McShane came out. Dress up for the occasion? Not she. Her blue gingham apron and her sleeves rolled up to her elbows showed that she had just come from her work. She stepped deliberately over the threshold of the Mapleton House without any nervous tremors. It was ac-

knowledgeed that the Village Helper was ready with her tongue, but not only her tongue, but her whole body talked. The poise of her head, her carriage, her step, spoke in a manner that struck terror into the hearts of evildoers. Even when she was in repose her large sinewy hands looked as if their pent-up energy was struggling for freedom to work some reform.

She was not so choice in the selection of the words in which she addressed Joe Pepper as the former visitor. She was a tall woman, and as she stood in front of Joe she seemed to grow three or four inches taller. With her arms akimbo she thus addressed him:

"Why are you here in the village, Joe Pepper, takin' up the room useful people want, eatin' the bread they are hungry for, wearin' the clothes they need to keep them warm? Do you know yourself what yer here for, or are ye only standin' 'round not knowin' what to do with yerself?"

Then she launched into what he was doing for Sandy McBain and a number of other young men in the village and surrounding country, not being careful to mince her words. "Ef ye want to sell whisky," she added, "why kin't ye go off among the Indians or Chinese, an' not be botherin' *our* boys?"

Joe smiled grimly all through the denunciations,

knowing well the uselessness of trying to stop her, but as soon as she went out he stood as if transfixed, gazing at the wall. In spite of his smile some of the Village Helper's strong words had struck home. A shiver shook his rotund form; he was not an old man, but suddenly he *felt* old—old in sin. The despairing eyes of more than one man seemed to glare and glare at him out of the recesses of the room which was now darkening for twilight, more than one young man who had come into his bar, strong, alert, manful, and had gone out, perhaps after years of coming, tottering, maudlin, unmanned. Bony fingers from premature graves pointed at him, and voices shrieked, "You did it! You did it! You did it! Joe Pepper." Weary-eyed wives wailed, "You did it, Joe Pepper! You have fattened on our heart's blood." Hungry children cried, "You ate our bread! You did it! You did it! You did it, Joe Pepper!"

He shuddered again, and sank heavily into a chair.

Joe Pepper was born and reared in the village, and people said he was a round-faced bright little fellow with as good a promise of growing to be a man of whom the village would be proud as any child in it. But Joe always disliked work; he had tried his hand at several things in the village, and eventually he gravitated to the position of bartender in the Maple-

ton House. He found this less like work than anything he had ever attempted, and he stayed at it until he became the proprietor of said House. He had more money than he ever made at any other business, and this he liked well. He drove such a showy turnout that one day when he and his wife were out for an airing Mrs. Brady looked after them as they flew past, and said, "Well, whatever kin be said again whisky, it's done a good deal for Joe an' Jemima Pepper." He could now wear fur in winter, and white duck in summer; but every year his eyes were receding in his head, his cheeks growing heavier, and his nose thicker. It was Mrs. McTavish who said that she could almost *see* his brow contracting, and it was hard for her to believe that he was the same little chappie that used to run about the village streets with the bright eyes and white round forehead. "What think you," she added, "must be goin' on in th' heart when th' face, which they say is but th' index o' th' buke, is growin' like yon?"

He was a little ashamed of his business at first, and tried to make it as respectable as possible by wearing the cleanest of aprons and keeping the cleanest of bars. He prided himself a good deal about having a comfortable place for a man to get a meal, and a horse to eat his peck of oats, but as the years ad-

vanced he grew to priding himself on his skill in drawing money out of pockets for nothing but the poorest and cheapest of whisky. To-night, as he looked in the darkness at the mocking phantoms of his memory, he wondered for one short moment whether it was worth while to make such havoc in the world for the sake of the bread he and his family ate, the garments they put on, and the little wad he was accumulating in the bank. "I suppose," he said to himself, as he continued to gaze into the dark corner of the room, "it would be better for the village and the world if I had never been born." He remembered dimly hearing a scripture verse which read, "*Good were it for that man had he never been born.*" He wondered whether that would apply to *him*—Joe Pepper. A vision of what he *might* have done to leave the world at least as well as he had found it—and not simply be in debt to it for the food he ate—by being a producer of tubs and pails, horseshoes or man shoes, or some other useful commodity, flashed for an instant before his mind's eye. What right had he to be consuming the earth's products and giving no adequate return? But he drew the back of his hand across his eyes, and walking to the bar, he poured out a glass of whisky and swallowed it in a gulp. His qualms of conscience vanished immediately. "I'll leave a wad some

day to a church or a hospital; that'll straighten accounts," he said as he replaced the glass on the counter.

It was night, and consequently a busy time for him. It was Saturday night, and the law required him to clear off his counter and shut his front door at an early hour. But nothing apparently obliged him to discontinue his sale of whisky, and by midnight Alexander McBain, Bill Gilooly, One-Armed Joe, along with a couple of farmers, had torn off their crown of Godhood and manhood, and were laid out in a drunken stupor on the floor of a small room adjoining the barroom, among beer kegs, broken chairs and bottles, and other barroom *débris*.

Joe took a final look at his victims before shutting the door on them for the night, saying to himself, "They're far enough gone not to make any disturbance before mornin'." Then he went back to his till and counted with much satisfaction the coins which he had taken in through the day.

As he was slipping his coins into a small soiled cotton bag, the door which he had a moment before unlocked opened, and One-Armed Joe's little Reuben stepped into the barroom.

"Is my paw here?" he piped in childish treble, looking with a child's direct gaze at the proprietor.

Joe Pepper looked up suddenly from his money bag and saw standing before him a small pathetic-looking urchin dressed in short knee pantaloons and blouse of a faded olive. He was hatless, and his hair was shoved straight back from his high, prominent forehead.

For one instant something like compassion stirred in the hard heart of the man at sight of the child. The village people had often said that they were sure they did not know where that child of One-Armed Joe came from with that face and those great searching eyes. But Joe Pepper, feeling provoked at himself for his chicken-heartedness, as he chose to consider it, said roughly:

"What would bring yer pa here, I'd like to know?"

"Your drinks would bring him here," said the child artlessly. "My maw says if it were not for your drinks he could make many a copper, even with his one hand, and have them to give to his fam'ly. Won't you stop givin' my paw drinks, Mr. Pepper?" he added plaintively, looking at the hardened man with a wide comprehensive expression of eye as if he could see things in a wider sense than those who had longer contact with the world.

"Go 'way home with you, child; you don't understand," said Joe uneasily, touched in spite of himself

by the innocent face and words. He had risen from his seat and opened the door while speaking.

"Well—well—where's my paw?" stammered Reuben, as he walked to the door.

"Go down to Johnnie Looney's shop," said Joe Pepper; "p'raps ye'll find him in there playin' checkers. That's where he spends most of his time."

"Here, buy yerself some sweeties with this," he continued, shoving a small silver bit into the child's hand.

The child passed out, and Joe shut and locked the door.

"The devil!" he muttered to himself, "I must git rid o' him somehow. I don't like these young uns comin' 'round lookin' like—like *that*. Gives one the shivers." He felt the necessity at this point of taking another glass of something stimulating.

As little Reuben proceeded along through the dark street he was saying to himself:

"I'll find my paw in Johnnie Looney's tailoring shop playin' checkers, an' I'll take him home to maw." There was a ring of assurance in the childish voice that, under the circumstances, was truly pathetic. "Poor maw," he continued, "home there cryin' with the neuralagy. I won't play checkers when I grow big; I won't take the drinks when I grow

big. I'll stay all the time at home with maw; wash the dishes fer her, mind the baby fer her, gather wood fer a fire—when she's got the neuralagy. I'll buy her dresses—lots, an' peanuts, an' bunnets, an' ribbons, an' taffy, an' flowers, an'—an'—an'——” At this moment he stubbed his bare toe against a snag which he failed to see in the dark, fell heavily to the ground, and the sentence was never finished.

The moon shone full, throwing a glamour over the fair hair and white pinched face of the child as he trudged along, and Mr. Vickers, looking out of his study window, just before retiring for the night, had seen him, and knowing pretty well his quest, felt himself hoping that the artist was divinely inspired with a great truth who put into marble the idea that a guardian angel with brooding wings walked closely behind each little helpless child.

Toward morning Alexander McBain had a dream, and in that dream Paddy Conley appeared to him, and with a bow of mock obsequiousness, such as he had practised while yet in the flesh, he told him that he had come to appoint him his successor.

“There must always be a village drunkard, you know,” said Paddy; “the country demands it. I have,” he added, with another low bow, waving his hands downward with his head, “filled that position

for many an' many a year; now whin I cannot hould it anny longer I make you my successor."

With this he took off his coat that had rolled the earth with his body many a time and put it on the younger man. Then he placed his battered old fur cap on his head, and saluting him as the "village drunkard, good luck to you!" he made another mock bow and disappeared.

Clutching at his badges of position, the obnoxious coat and hat, in a wild effort to get rid of them, Alexander awoke.

It was still dark, and reaching out his hands to the form nearest to him, he said, "Bill, Bill, did you see anybody around?"

"Anybody," muttered Bill, "anybody."

"Did you see Paddy Conley? Was he here?" said Alexander.

"Paddy Conley—he—'s—in a better place than this—or worse," sleepily answered Bill.

In a short time streaks of dawn began to appear in the east. Alexander could sleep no more, and rising to his feet, he made his way to the outside door, unbolted it and passed out.

He was thoroughly aroused now and frightened. "I'll stop drinking!" he cried. "I'll give it up! I can do it, I know I can! I never intended to take so

much—never intended to grow to like it! I intended to grow to be a great man! I loved it once, now I *hate* it! I'll give it up! I'll give it up! I'll not be Paddy Conley's successor! I'll not be the village drunkard!" He stretched his right arm toward the heavens above him, and shook his clenched fist in defiance of something, he knew not what.

At that moment a screech-owl in the top of one of the shade trees uttered his peculiar blood-curdling "Who-o-o-o-o"; it seemed to Alexander the derisive laugh of a fiend, and he cowered almost to the ground beneath it, covering his face with his hands. He shambled on a few yards and dropped down on a bench; already the spirit of elation was leaving him, and somehow he knew he *would* not stop, *could* not pass by the tempting drink if it were possible for him to get it, and with the pale fading stars looking pityingly on, he wept.

His dog, which had lain outside the Mapleton House all night waiting for him to come out, had followed him, and seeing his dejection, he lifted his long pointed muzzle toward heaven and uttered a piteous howl.

XIII

BILL TURNS PREACHER

WHILE Alexander was staggering around the Monday following his night in the barroom, still under the influence of his debauch, he had various experiences.

Mrs. Brady met him, and shying off several feet, she made a commiserating sound by striking her tongue against the roof of her mouth, which caused him drop his eyes and feel like throwing himself into the river.

Peter McKim came across him, and thinking to make an example of him before the boys standing around, he extended his hand with an orthodox smile, and was about to utter a carefully prepared reprimand, when Alexander interrupted him, saying solemnly as he returned the handshake:

“A man may smile and smile, and be a villain.”

Granny Neilson met him on a quiet back street, and going up to the swaying figure, she grasped his hand, which at that moment was more palsied than her own, and said:

"My son, th' Faither is waitin' yer return."

This made Alexander go away by himself into the cemetery and sit for fully an hour on one of the rustic benches, thinking, thinking—as seriously as his unsettled condition would allow.

"*Return*"? What did Granny Neilson mean? Was it possible for him to retrace his steps?

He remembered dimly hearing it told by one of the men in the barroom after whisky had made him loquacious, that Hiram Jenkins, a farmer who had often been seen staggering around the village, had "gone for'ard at a Methodist revival," and had never been seen to stagger afterward; and he wondered in a helpless way whether the Methodist revival could do anything for him.

His reflections were cut short by Bill Gilooly (it was a public holiday; Bill was free from the blacksmith shop, and One-Armed Joe had gone off on the excursion), who sauntered in to the graveyard swinging a bottle by the neck. In a very short time the two of them were wandering off to a small wood skirting the village.

On reaching the wood they sat down in the shadow of a pine tree with the bottle between them, out of which they drank enough to make them communicative, but not enough to satisfy their craving.

Bill was in a sullen mood, an unusual state of mind for him; growled something about being down in his luck, or born under an evil star. Turning to face him, Alexander said wisely:

“ ‘The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.’ ”

“ Shet up! ” said Bill, “ or talk some common senset a fellow kin understand! ”

The tall, straight pine over their heads, the embodiment of rectitude, kept whispering its messages; the veined green banners of the surrounding maples fluttered in the soft breeze, all the delicate scents of the woods and the wild flowers permeated the air, and from out the depths of a feathery willow a Canadian warbler's joyous heart overflowed in countless little trills, but the young men were blind and deaf to all the sweet wooings of nature.

When Alexander became so intoxicated as to forget his usual reticence, he confided to Bill his idea about going to the revival meeting.

Bill, who had been lying down, raised himself on his elbow, showing some interest, and said:

“ They'll want ye to repent fust thing. ”

“ How-do-you-know? ” hiccoughed Alexander.

“ Know? I've been to Methodis' meetin' an' heerd 'em.

" 'Whoever repents an' forsakes every sin '! " he burst out, singing in such a loud, cracked voice that the chipmunks scurried into their holes, and the squirrels as instantly took higher branches in the trees. " I've heerd 'em sing that time an' time agin," he added, " but I disremember the rest o' the words now."

" Well," said Alexander in a thick, hesitating voice, " I want to repent,—but—not half as much—as I want—a glass of whisky."

" No use'n ye goin' then," said Bill, with the air of a parson. " Ye've got to repent worse ner nothin', or it ain't no use."

" They say—Hiram Jenkins—has all—the desire for—stimulant—taken away—from him," stammered Alexander; " how is—that? "

" He repented," returned Bill, " in coorse he repented."

Alexander broke down in maudlin tears at the helplessness of his case, while Bill burst into another stanza of the revival hymn, the words having come to his recollection.

After that they both fell asleep.

They had been asleep but a short time when Crazy Tim, the semi-idiot boy of the village, came wandering through the wood. A pair of Squire Murray's cast-off knee boots, several sizes too large for the

present wearer, were drawn up over his trouser legs; a short smock, as much too small as the boots were too large, protected his shoulders and arms; his hands were thrust deep into his trousers pockets. He shambled from side to side as he walked, gazing up into the treetops, whistling disjointedly. At intervals he stopped the meaningless whistle and attempted to imitate the trill of a bird or the chitter of a squirrel. His pallid, usually expressionless face wore a placid look of semi-interest in the great nature world about him. Coming suddenly on Alexander and Bill asleep under the trees, he stopped abruptly. Tiptoeing slowly nearer, he gazed down at them several minutes in silence; then he began to gather off the ground great handfuls of old leaves and pine needles and spread them over the sleepers. When he had them pretty well covered up he went away muttering to himself:

“Well, the bears won’t git ’em now, all covered up. Can’t see ’em, bears can’t see ’em.”

Somehow Tim had caught the impression that the two sleepers whom he had come upon must be “the babes in the woods” about whom his mother had told him so often, and he felt considerable satisfaction in leaving them covered with leaves, with which, according to the story, they should be covered.

Having completed his work, he shambled off toward home. Meeting his mother on the way in company with the Village Helper, he went up to her and said:

"Maw, I found the babes in the woods out yonder, an' covered them with leaves."

"What does the boy mean?" inquired the Village Helper.

"Och, it's them two good-fur-nothin's, Sandy McBain an' Bill Gilooly, the dear child has found," said his mother. "They're both drinkin', of course, this bein' a holiday—layin' dead drunk out there, like enough. You'll never drink, will ye, Tim?" said the mother, addressing her son.

"No, ma'am," said Tim, "I won't drink."

"He won't es long es he ain't got the money," said the Village Helper, "you may be sure o' that; Joe Pepper 'll give nothin' without the money."

Bill Gilooly was the first of the sleepers in the woods to wake, and feeling in his pocket for his jew's-harp, and not finding it, he became restless, struggled to his feet, and wandered toward home.

Arriving there he fumbled under the doormat, drew out a key, and dropping on his knees in front of a cracked unpainted door, he endeavoured in vain to put it in the keyhole.

McClosky's boy, who happened to be passing, called in, "What are ye huntin' fur, Bill?"

"Huntin' fur," returned Bill in a muddy voice, "I'm huntin' fur nothin', but this blamed keyhole keeps runnin' 'round so fast I can't ketch it.

"Who be you?" he inquired, turning around, as it was now quite dusk, to look at his questioner.

"I be Bill Gilooly," said McClosky's boy, seeing a chance for some fun.

Bill stared at him a moment in blank astonishment before he said slowly:

"Then who in thunder be I?"

The good nature of McClosky's boy got the better of his desire for further fun, and going up to Bill, he took the key from his fumbling fingers, opened the door, and pushed him inside the house.

XIV

DEVIOUS WAYS

SOME time after Bill had left, Alexander awoke from his sleep; his bones ached, and the dampness of the dew had penetrated every part of his enfeebled frame. Looking up, he saw the stars, and feeling about him he discovered that Bill had gone. His dog was licking his hand, and there was something in the unmerited devotion that hurt him; so pushing the faithful creature aside he struggled to his feet and started off toward the village.

There was a treat going the rounds when he entered Joe Pepper's tavern, and he got one glass of whisky. In his weak condition this affected him seriously, but seeing no immediate chance of another he wandered out on the street again. Chancing to pass the Methodist church, he heard singing:

"Whiter than snow, yes, whiter than snow,
Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."

The words and music floated out to the poor inebriate, and he stopped. "Wash me—white," he

stammered, looking down at his soiled hands and clothes. "I need to be washed, sure enough." The last glass of whisky had made him brave, and opening the church door he walked in.

Something made him think of Hiram Jenkins, and without any invitation he went forward to the front of the church, and knelt down at the altar, burying his face in his hands on the rail.

The congregation were thunderstruck; they all knew him, and a strange hush fell on the hitherto demonstrative meeting.

When he had knelt a few seconds in silence, he rose to his feet, and turning to face the people, he said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen—I rise to inform you that I have renounced the intoxicating cup, with all the evils that follow in its train."

Then raising his right arm, he continued in a declamatory tone:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in misery."

The orator at that moment presented rather a striking appearance; he held his hat in his hand, and his short dishevelled hair stood up in all directions;

the pine needles among which he had been lying in the wood had stuck plentifully into his woollen clothes and bristled like so many porcupine quills.

"Poor fellow!" whispered the women, while the tears rolled down the cheeks of more than one mother of boys.

The men, who knew that he was under the influence of Joe Pepper's whisky at that moment, regarded him with troubled countenances, longing in the depths of their hearts for the old-time power which enabled the disciples to cast out devils and do many wonderful works.

Immediately after making his declaration, the object of so much solicitude left the church, and looking furtively around to see that no one was watching him, he shambled over the space of ground lying between the church and the tavern, and entered through the back door into Joe Pepper's barroom.

His dog, which had been waiting around for him outside the church, seemed to understand that there was no use of waiting any longer when he went into the tavern, and he trotted home.

Creeping stealthily up to the counter as if he still felt that someone was watching him, Alexander wheedlingly said to the proprietor:

"Give us a drink, Joe."

Something in his tone and manner informed the man of experience behind the bar that Alexander had no money to offer for what he was asking, so he replied with great firmness:

"Can't do it."

Alexander eyed the bottles on the shelf hungrily, then glancing down at his threadbare coat, and grasping it with both his hands, as if he were about to take it off his person, he said, "Have this for one glass?"

"Naw, no old clo'es wanted here," returned the important dispenser of strong drink.

Alexander looked down at his boots, beginning to break.

"Naw, too seedy."

Then the suppliant stood bewildered, and the proprietor of the Mapleton House saw his opportunity.

"I say!" he exclaimed suddenly, "you split up that pile of kitchen wood in the backyard an' I'll give ye a glass."

The proposition was instantly accepted, and in a few moments Alexander McBain, "*graduated in Arts at Toronto University*," as the people of the village had once been proud to tell, was splitting wood for the tavern kitchen by the light of a lantern, while Joe Pepper, "*Licensed to sell wine, beer and spirituous liquors*," as the sign over his door declared, was lean-

ing against the doorjamb watching him; and the maid of all work peered at the whole scene through a slit in the paper blind of the kitchen window in open-mouthed wonder.

As it happened, the Village Helper was in the tavern waiting on the wife of the proprietor—the poor woman's many infirmities made frequent demands on the kindness of her stronger sister—and through an opening in the floor intended for a stovepipe overheard every word of what transpired in the barroom.

Clapping the mustard plasters she was preparing to the small of her patient's back, she was downstairs before Alexander had split three sticks of wood.

"Here, Joe Pepper," she said with the voice of one accustomed to being obeyed, "that's too one-sided a bargain—that pile o' wood is wuth a gallon o' whisky——"

"Come, Alexander, you ain't goin' to work for nothin'," and seizing the young man by the arm she led him out into the street.

"Go right home to your ma, Alexander," she continued, "an' git her to make you a cup o' coffee—it's her as knows how to make one—it'll take the hankerin' out o' you fur whisky. Go now!" she commanded, stamping her foot, and giving him a push as Alexander hesitated.

She stood on the street and watched him until he had nearly reached his mother's door; he had to turn a corner just before doing so, and as soon as he had made that turn the Village Helper thought him safe, and strode off to see Connie Hallam, who was "down with the croup."

Alexander was just in the cunning stage of intoxication, and glancing furtively through a space between the buildings, he discovered that his would-be protector had gone in another direction. The craze for whisky was strong upon him, and turning, he ran with the frenzy of a madman back toward the tavern.

The village streets were quiet, as it was past the post office hour, and the meeting in the church was not yet out. No sound was audible but that of Alexander's feet as they struck the ground. No face was visible but the white spirituelle face of Granny Neilson pressed close to the window watching for the people who were to come from meeting. Granny saw the running figure without recognising that it was a son of the village, and said to herself, "Ay, somebody's in a hurry." Then as she drew back from the window, and readjusted the white muslin curtains, she whispered to herself absently, "'He that believeth shall not make haste.'"

Alexander rushed to the door and again begged for a drink. The tavernkeeper silently pointed to the pile of wood, and the young man crept like a whipped cur out through the door, picked up the axe and split half a cord of wood for one glass of whisky.

That glass, as can readily be imagined, whetted rather than satisfied his craving; he retired to bed, his last thought about whisky, and as a consequence he awoke with it as his first thought in the morning. He arose early and procured his mother's little worn passbook, which all through the years had lain on the clock shelf in the kitchen, and looking it through he learned that some of the women in the village were owing her small amounts. He took the book to his room, and while his mother was cooking breakfast, doing her best to have it appetising for his sake, he carefully wrote out each account. Immediately after his breakfast he dressed himself with unusual care, blacked his boots, his mother looking on in pleased surprise, thinking, hoping that these might be the first signs of improvement, and went out through the village collecting the accounts in his mother's name.

The women, greatly pleased by his improved appearance, said to themselves, "The Widow McBain's boy is doin' better," smiled encouragingly on him, and without hesitation paid their accounts.

The Village Helper, chancing to be in the last house in which he received money, "suspicioned" that all was not right. She said nothing; it was too late then, but determined to watch proceedings.

She followed Alexander out of the house; it was then near noon, and saw that he went directly to the Mapleton House. She was unable to continue her watch just then, as she was on the way to change the linseed poultice she had placed on Connie Hallam's chest, and she had an afternoon's work ahead of her with other patients; so she deputed Mrs. Brady, whose house commanded a good view of the tavern, to keep an eye on the young man.

"He'll be on a big tear this time," she said. "Ready money hasn't to wait fer treats; an' he'll need lookin' after right smart."

Mrs. Brady, who sat all afternoon at the window, glancing alternately at a sock she was knitting—she had selected that kind of work as needing little attention—and at the tavern door, saw Alexander come out about dusk and wander off toward the country. He had reached the state of his intoxication where he felt like hiding himself. Usually when in this mood he went off toward the country, or some quiet corner where he could stay until he had regained his equilibrium. This did very well in warm weather,

but in late October was considerable of a risk to health.

On this occasion he had wandered out half a mile, when stumbling against something, some small object in his path, he fell down on the ground, and stayed where he fell.

In a short time his dog, which had been looking for him everywhere, found him, and settling down on his haunches, he looked pityingly and helplessly at his master, and waited.

After a while Alexander became conscious of a warm tongue licking his face, and he roused sufficiently to mutter, "I can't be such a bad fellow—Trusty likes me yet."

XV

THE VILLAGE HELPER UNDERTAKES

IT was an hour later that the Village Helper found Alexander seated in a ditch talking to himself. She paused a moment or two to listen, and heard:

“Of comfort no man speaks;
Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs;
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.”

“Talkin' that trash po'try agen!” said the Village Helper, picking her way down the slippery bank. Alexander heard the voice, and raised his bleared eyes to hers and continued:

“Let's choose executors, and talk of wills;
And yet not so; for what can we bequeath,
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
Our lands, our lives, our all are Bolingbroke's
And nothing can we call our own but death,
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.”

VILLAGE HELPER UNDERTAKES 169

"Git up an' come home with ye," she said, taking the inebriate by the arm and giving him a shake. "Yer poor mother is up there, I 'spose, settin' with a lighted candle watchin' fer ye—smilin' all the time, like enough, too!"

By main force she drew him to his feet. "An' that's what ye collected the money fer," she added with another shake. Then folding her fingers around his arm with a grip of steel, she seemed to electrify him with power to walk; and leading him down to where the side of the ditch was less steep, she helped him into the road, and with her firm grip still upon his arm they started toward his home.

It was a dreary muddy walk; the wind sighed and shrieked like a lost spirit, or a world of lost spirits giving expression to their agonies of remorse; the trees beat their breasts with their long, bare arms; the moon had hidden her face behind a cloud, and an occasional star blinked as if ashamed to look down with steady gaze on fallen humanity.

They trudged along in silence for some distance, the strong woman and the weak man; then, as if not able to contain herself any longer, the Village Helper said, while her grip tightened on his arm:

"Law, but it's nothin' but adversity yer mother hes seen ever sence she sot eyes on ye!"

"Sweet—are the—uses—of adversity,
Which—like the—toad—ugly—and—venomous,
Wears yet a—precious—jewel in his—head,"

muttered the Shakespearian scholar.

Arriving at Alexander's home, the Village Helper without ceremony opened the door a few inches and saw the Widow in the dimly lighted sitting-room seated in her rocker. Holding her charge at arm's length, the woman outside the door thrust her head far enough within to say:

"I'm bringin' Alexander home, Mrs. McBain; he's a bit muddy from a fall he got—but nothin' to speak of—nothin' whatsoever," she added as the Widow jumped to her feet.

"Just set down, set down," she continued in her masterful, managing tones, coming in, leading the poor mud-bespattered dejected creature with one hand, while with the other she pushed the Widow back into her chair.

"I'll 'tend to this boy. It 'tain't the fust time I did it nuther—mind the doses of catnip I give him when he warn't more'n a fut long?"

While talking she was conducting the boy across the sitting-room to the foot of the stairs.

Having succeeded in getting him upstairs and into his room, she led him to the bed, pulled off his coat

VILLAGE HELPER UNDERTAKES 171

and boots, raised the battered felt hat from his head, and gave him an energetic push back among the pillows.

His face was red and bloated, and spattered over with mud; his hair, the curls of which his mother used to brush around her finger with unspeakable joy and tenderness when they were pale gold in colour, and silk floss in texture, was now a coarse tousled mass, the mud which was tangled in it smirching the fair bed which the Widow prided herself on keeping in a state of immaculate whiteness. The contrast between the purity of the bed and its occupant touched even the sensibilities of the Village Helper, who was a woman of many experiences, and therefore not easily moved, and she muttered:

“Purty creeture you air to lay in a pure white bed—must feel somethin’ like the Ol’ Chap ef he could get by mistake into heaven.”

The word heaven seemed to arouse some dormant recollection in Alexander’s mind of his college days, and raising himself on his elbow, he recited in a broken declamatory voice, with little halts between the words:

“I sent my—soul—through the—invisible,
Some letters of that—after—life to spell:
And by and by—my soul—returned—to me,
And answered—I myself—am Heaven—and Hell.”

"Sure enough you have been—to your poor mother," said the Village Helper, again pushing him back among the pillows. Then taking the lamp in her hand she passed out of the room.

"He'll not git out o' there till he knows what he's doin'," she soliloquised, turning the key in the lock.

She went downstairs, and without making any remark to the Widow, who sat rocking herself to and fro in her chair, she passed in to the kitchen and put a couple of dipperfuls of water into the kettle which stood on the range.

When the water had boiled she made coffee. Then going to the sideboard she brought forth a cup and saucer belonging to the Widow's best china set, and one of her triple-plated spoons, kept for state occasions—"for who," says she to herself, "has a right to the best if not that poor woman." Finding the pint of milk which the Widow had procured from the milkman early in the evening and had placed away in a flat dish to gather cream for Alexander's breakfast, she carefully skimmed the cream into the china cup. Then she poured in the coffee, the fragrance of which by this time permeated the small house, put in the spoonful of sugar, and placing the cup on a tray she carried it up and presented it to the protesting, smiling woman.

VILLAGE HELPER UNDERTAKES 173

Returning to the kitchen, she poured out a second cupful of coffee, this time using one of the Widow's everyday cups, selected one of the everyday teaspoons, then carrying this cup into the sitting-room, she sat down to drink its contents.

In half an hour Alexander had fallen asleep, as the Village Helper learned when she came before going home to take another look at him.

"He'll probably be dry in the mornin' an' want another glass," she said to herself, there being no one else around to whom she could give such free expression of her thoughts, "so I'll turn the key in the lock agin."

While she was standing there Alexander stirred and muttered thickly, "As—the—hart—panteth—after—the—water—brooks—, so—panteth—my—soul after——" He stopped short as though sleep had overcome him.

"He's talkin' Bible words," whispered the Village Helper.

She regarded him a few moments, her mouth tightening at the corners, and a curious look creeping into her grey eyes, "They didn't take much holt on *him*," she continued; "I reckon too many tares crowded out the good seed," she added, after another short silence.

Then, leaving the room she locked the door and went downstairs.

"You never pay no attention to Alexander, Mrs. McBain," she said, when she reached the sitting-room again; "I'll see ter him till he regains his usual health. Jest leave him ter me, an' go ter yer bed; it's on'y one o' his—illnesses.

"I'll be 'round in the mornin' an' get him a bit o' breakfast," she added as she was going out the door, "I'm used to cookin' for—the sick."

The Village Helper then hurried off to make another visit to the wife of Joe Pepper. She had to pass Granny Neilson's home on her way, and she said to herself:

"I'll go in' an' tell her about Alexander's verse; that'll tickle the old lady; she sets great store by Bible verses."

"Aye, aye," said Granny Neilson softly, drawling out the words, when she heard the Village Helper's story, "as th' sea-shell to th' listenin' ear keeps mournin' for the sea, so th' human heart keeps mournin' for oneness wi' its Source—but," she added, after a short pause, "it's on'y now an' then a human ear gets close enough th' heart to hear its plaint."

As soon as the Widow was sure that the Village Helper had gone, the smile, which her neighbours

VILLAGE HELPER UNDERTAKES 175

thought she wore constantly, dropped from her lips. She rose hastily, and with lamp in hand crept quickly upstairs. Unlocking Alexander's door she entered the room, placed the lamp on a table, and stood at the foot of the bed looking down on the sorry-looking figure there.

The noise of her entrance disturbed Alexander, and again he brokenly muttered, "As—the—hart—panteth—after—the waterbrooks—so panteth——"

"One of his Sunday school verses!" cried his mother, throwing up her hands.

Then reaching her arms out over the bed she cried a lonely, piercing cry, "My little boy! My little boy! Where have you gone?"

A slight quiver in the form on the bed was the only response, and in a few moments the Widow turned and crept wearily downstairs.

XVI

WHAT SOME OF THE VILLAGERS THOUGHT

IT was shortly after this experience of Alexander's that a number of the women and Peter McKim, who had accidentally met in one room, talked over Alexander's sad career, and gave their opinions as to the cause and cure.

"Ef the poor laddie could only hev had Maggie by his side all the time," said the romantic Mrs. McTavish, "she'd 'a' kep' him straight. Love is th' one powerful thing to exorcise evil spirits. A lassie is a powerful brake for keepin' a lad fra runnin' at too great a speed."

"I think," said Mrs. Brady, "that it's too much learnin' that's the matter with Alexander—all this here Latin and Greek seems to kind av make 'em weak and puny—no backbone in 'em, nor nerves to speak av. Now there's Bill Gilooly, he's nowheres at all as bad es Alexander after the whisky, an' niver a word av Latin or Greek knows he. Sure an' ain't it one of the great poets himself that says too much

WHAT SOME VILLAGERS THOUGHT 177

learnin' is a *dangerous* thing, an' that's my mind about it, too."

"It's work he needs!" broke in Peter McKim vehemently; "ef the Widow McBain hed put that boy to *airn* his livin' when he wuz—mebbe fifteen or sixteen, there'd be none o' this here caperin'. No, no, it's work what takes the caperin' out o' these lads ahead o' anythin'."

"The stuff ought to be put out of the village and country entirely, then there'd be no temptation in the way o' young men," said a "teetotle woman," who had recently come to make her home among us in the village, and did not know our views.

But Peter McKim blustered out so fiercely about "Anglo-Saxon liberty" and "human rights with which no one has any bizness to interfere," that the little newcomer fairly wilted in her chair, and never dared open her mouth to say another word.

Even one of our own women muttered that because some misused a privilege she did not think others ought to be made to suffer for it.

"What would we do in case o' sickness—collery, for instance?" said Mrs. McTavish. "Or some-one might be took sudden wi' a colic, or get a chill?"

"Or in case o' a barn-raisin' or a heavy harvest?"

said another woman, who had been brought up on a farm.

"New Year's an' weddin's would be poor affairs without th' bit cheer," added a fourth.

The villagers recognised that there were three classes—drunkards, drinkers, and abstainers. The first and the last class they regarded with about equal contempt.

Peter McKim left soon after this; he never stayed long in one place—all the village needed looking after, more or less, and as he walked away he said to himself—Peter said things to himself he would not dare to say to other people:

"Why should I deny myself my comfortin' little glass to please other people? I kin take alcohol in moderation, an' it does me no harin; an' I kin go to prayer-meetin' after my temperate glass, an' I'm within my Christian liberty in doin' so. All that God has made is good. . . . Guilty o' the blood o' souls," he added crabbedly, as if repeating words he had heard; "if meat make my brother to offend I will eat no meat as long as the world lasts. Phoo! some people are always goin' to extremes!"

After Peter had left the women continued to talk.

"Boys is terrible hard to bring up," sighed a

hitherto silent member of the party; "but I 'spose if we start 'em off right we've done all we can."

"What's the use in baptisin' 'em, an' 'noculatin' 'em, an' bringin' 'em through teethin', an' mumps, an' measles, an' whoopin' cough ef whisky is goin' to carry 'em off in the end?" said Mrs. Brady.

"Strange," said another woman, "with the Methodists, an' Baptists—an' some o' the Presbyterians an' 'Piscopals, prayin' all the time that the drink habit may be put down, that still it goes on an' grows."

"That reminds me," said Mrs. McTavish, who was given to reminiscences, "o' my pet lamb, which I had when a wee girl on the farm. It was a sickly bit thing an' everyone said it wouldna live. I mind the night I carried it into the house lyin' in my arms as helpless as a young babe. I left it by the kitchen fire when I went off to ma bed, stretched on a piece o' old blanket. I was all happed up snug an' warm, wi' the bedclothes over ma head, when, all at once, I remembered that I had forgotten to pray for ma lamb. An' that minute I hop-ped out on th' floor, an' kneelin' down I prayed that ma lamb might live. But just as I rose from ma knees I betho't me to gi'e it some milk; so I slipp-et doon the stairs, warmed some milk, an' gave th' lamb a few spoon-fuls. Th' wee, white thing was very much stronger

in th' mornin', an' continued to get stronger every hour; an' I tho't then it was all owin' to ma prayers, but I think now that it was owin' to th' milk—of course I might not have tho't o' th' milk if it waur no' for th' prayer," she added.

"An' yer thinkin' the churches are takin' it all out in prayin'?" said the first woman.

"Ma prayer without th' drop o' warm milk would hae meant a dead lamb, I'm convinced o' that," returned Mrs. McTavish sententiously.

At this juncture Peter McKim came back for his walking stick, which he had forgotten, and when the women had helped him find it they dispersed toward their several homes.

But Mrs. Brady, bursting with a desire to tell somebody all that had been said, dropped in on her way home to see Granny Neilson.

Granny, seated in her small armless rocking-chair with her knitting in her tremulous but capable old hands, made a picture an artist might hunger to immortalise; her soft black merino dress fell in soft folds around the shrunken little figure, while the white muslin cap with its full border, which had been fixed into many a pretty little pucker on the old-fashioned "sad iron," formed an aureola for the snow-white hair, and the sort of veiled glory of

her holy face. One looking at her might understand as never before, perhaps, the possibility of a bodily frame becoming a "spiritual body." Even Mrs. Brady, not giving much to reflections of a spiritual character, remembered dimly reading, or hearing at funeral services, the words, "shall charge the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto the body of his glory"; and somehow she leaped to the thought that the change might begin right here in the material clay and among the distracting things of earth.

Mrs. Brady told her story about what they all had said regarding Alexander's failing, and what each one had proposed as a cure.

"Ah, ah," responded Granny Neilson, "it's life the puir laddie wants, *life*."

"Faith, an' it's too much life I'm thinkin' the lad has," returned Mrs. Brady; "did ye hear o' the window-smashin' an' chair-breakin' t' other night at Joe Pepper's?"

Granny seemed not to have heard her question; she was saying softly, as if to her heart, "*He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*" She had the same expression on her face that Mrs. McTavish had seen when she remarked, "One feels that it is th' face o'

a wumman who has looked upon th' great things o' God."

"Oh, it's religion she be thinkin' av," Mrs. Brady said to herself, looking curiously at the older woman, who had laid the white stocking she had been knitting down into her lap, and was gazing into space.

"I'm reminded," continued Granny, after a short silence, "of a story I heard once of a rich man who bought a picture o' th' infant Christ surrounded by a company of angels; a picture painted by some one o' these great artists. When he got th' picture home an' went looking closely at it he saw that the Christ head painted by the great artist had been cut out an' a false head put in. The rich man searched th' world over till he found the true Christ head and put it in. Th' picture now hangs in some great art gallery an' is called 'The Restored Christ.' So I'm thinking' th' world is busy cuttin' Christ, th' creator of life, out, an' puttin' somethin' else, somethin' false, in his place. Ah, we must hae th' restored Christ before we can hae ony real life."

Mrs. Brady left soon after that, and Granny still held her knitting in her lap and continued to whisper; and these were the words she was saying:

"O God, Thine aged handmaiden will not cease

WHAT SOME VILLAGERS THOUGHT 183

from this day until Thou callest her to higher work, to pray that th' Widow's son may find life."

The evening of the same day the Rev. Nathaniel Vickers sat in his study preparing a sermon for the following Sunday on Christ's first miracle in Cana of Galilee.

"Brethren," he wrote in conclusion, "to change the water of our ordinary life into wine, the insipid and common into the uncommon and holy is still Christ's prerogative. He who can change water into wine can transform a character—change a life——" Here he stopped suddenly, with the pen poised over the manuscript; something had brought to the plane of his consciousness the story he had heard that afternoon about Alexander McBain's continued down-going. He thought for a few minutes, then, dropping the pen on the table, he fell on his knees before his large armchair, and, in an agony of spirit, prayed:

"O Lord God, am I labouring for naught in this village? How have I failed—how have I failed, O God, to present Thee as the great miracle worker to the people—to the young men bound hand and foot in the shackles of sin? The young man, Alexander, I presented him to Thee in baptism while he was yet

an infant, was it all in vain, O God? Why am I not now able to direct him—to compel him to come to the great miracle worker—the great transformer of human character—the great eradicator of inbred wrong? O God!—O God!—why have I failed? There are churches here—there are sermons preached here continually—still our young men are hastening—hastening to destruction!”

He knelt long in a sort of silent agony, which continued until there was borne in on him the thought, that not until the prodigal was forced to eat of the husks upon which the swine did feed, was he even *willing* to turn his face toward the father's house.

XVII

THE HUSH IN THE VILLAGE

THERE came a time when Alexander was completely out of money, and consequently sober for a much longer period than usual. His mother noticed this and the strained smile was fading from her face. The villagers noticed it and remarked to each other, "The lad is seein' the evil o' his ways."

This good behaviour had continued even into months, when one night he came home and went up to his room earlier than usual. His mother went to her bed feeling secure and happy. When the small house was wrapped in silence Alexander tiptoed downstair. Craftily opening the door of the little parlour he entered and began to feel his way along the wall of the dark room until his hands touched the bracket between the windows on which rested the silver bowl, the invaluable family heirloom, and the pair of little red shoes, which the mother hand had placed there and kept in dainty cleanliness all through the years. With feverish haste he picked up the

shoes and dropped them into his pocket, then seizing the silver bowl he concealed it under his coat and quickly left the house.

In the morning the mother had no response to her call to breakfast, and, going up to Alexander's room, she discovered that he had not slept in his bed. Shortly after she learned that the silver bowl and little red shoes were gone.

As if by a lightning stroke the smile was stricken from her face, never to return

Search was made for Alexander by Mrs. McTavish, the Village Helper, and some more kind neighbours, in Joe Pepper's barroom, in Johnnie Looney's tailoring shop, in the blacksmith and cooper shops, in the barns and outbuildings of the village, in the small belt of wood where he was known to resort. Bill Gilooly, One-Armed Joe, and others with whom he was in the habit of associating were inquired of, but no one seemed to know anything about his whereabouts. It was learned in the end that he had been seen about midnight boarding a train that took a long journey toward the west. His dog was lingering around the station house sniffing and searching everywhere, and could not be persuaded to leave it, which confirmed the statement that had been made by One-Armed Joe's little Reuben, who had been out

THE HUSH IN THE VILLAGE 187

about midnight looking for his father, that Alexander had gone off on a train.

Before night of that first day it was known generally in the village that Alexander was gone, and the story of the missing bowl and shoes was known to a few confidential friends.

"The sin of the father is hurled down on the head of the son, and on the heart of the mother—perhaps that of another woman," said Mr. Vickers to himself, when the sad story was told him. Late that night he walked his study floor groaning in spirit, sorely tried in faith. Again and again he asked himself was he preaching in vain, was a mother's love in vain; were there cases—deep-rooted, hereditary sins—that lay beyond the pale of redemption?

"Are you ill, Nathaniel?" inquired Mrs. Vickers, opening the study door at a late hour; "you seem so restless. You have walked this floor for an hour without ceasing."

"No, dear, not ill," returned the minister, wondering whether he was telling the exact truth, and whether there were not diseases of the spirit as well as of the body. Feeling, too, that "not e'en the tenderest heart, and next our own, knows half the reason why we smile or sigh."

"An' that's all a woman's love weighs wi' a man

when it comes in conflict wi' his appetites!" cried Mrs. McTavish distractedly. "Ah, th' poor mother! an' th' young thing, Maggie!"

"Th' prodigal wanders farther from home," whispered Granny Neilson, and her lips continued to whisper, but what she was saying was not heard by human ears.

"I have no sympathy at all with those drinkin' fellows," said Peter McKim; "they could stop if they wanted to."

The next evening the minister was in his study still troubling over the case of the lad, Alexander. Involuntarily he picked up a sermon which had been preached by one of his contemporaries, and read the text: "*But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Serepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus, the prophet; and none of them was cleansed save Naaman, the Syrian.*" Then he began to read the sermon which followed:

"We watch Christ as the sick gather around Him

on some happy, evening hour, or as the ten lepers cry to Him from afar, or as the blind man breaks in upon Him with a clamour, which will not be denied, or as the bearers of some poor paralytic force their way through the roof to secure His comfortable touch. Blessed indeed to set free the redemptive energies of God for the sick and the sorrowful. But why should the area covered be so small? If this much is possible, why not much more? If the few can be healed, why not the many? Here in my text we see our Lord thinking of those who never drew near, of those who would not press in. Time after time He must have passed a blind man sitting by the wayside, who never met Him by any cry, '*Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.*' But if he would not cry the Lord must pass on unarrested, uninvoked. Ten lepers have lifted up their voice, but what of those others who went shuddering past, shut up in their own misery, without eyes to see what might save, without the awakening of any hope that might cry for help? What of the sick who moped in sullen gloom, and never put out a hand to touch the hem of His garment? Surely He was only waiting to give them this opportunity. Surely the pent-up pity was ready to leap out at a touch. Surely His heart burned within Him as he looked upon them. Why will

not they speak? Why cannot they understand? And yet if they will not He must pass on and do nothing. He could not do any mighty works there because of their unbelief. The power is there by their side, in their midst, and yet idle because uninvited. And the worst is, as our Lord notes, it is among his own peculiar people, in His own house that this misadventure is at its height. It is those who know Him best who call upon Him least; it is they to whom He has been familiar from childhood who are unable to make use of His compassions. Familiarity itself has blinded them. Elsewhere, in strange places, among outlying heathen, He wins recognition. Out there in Syrophœnicia He cannot be hid even if He could. Out there in the wild hills beyond the lake He is followed by heathen crowds, when He had fled away to be in secret. They pursue Him with their sick even when He has set himself to escape. It is only at home, at Nazareth, where He had lived as a neighbour, that He failed to win His way. He is honoured as a prophet everywhere, anywhere, except among His own people and in His Father's house."

The minister dropped the sermon and bowed his head, crying, "Lord, Lord, I am admitted through my suffering into fellowship with Thee in Thy suf-

THE HUSH IN THE VILLAGE 191

fering; unto the heart of Thy bitterest sorrow. Always the privileged has missed what the outcast has discovered."

The same evening Squire Murray and his wife were talking over the event with which the whole village was ringing.

They were seated together in their cosy sitting-room; the perfume of hyacinths filled the room, and a soft, warm light from a shaded lamp fell over the Squire's newspaper, which he was not reading.

"I cannot get over it," Mrs. Murray was saying; "seems as if I cannot settle my mind to anything, thinking of that dear boy going to destruction right here in our midst. What was the reason of it? What was wrong? There never was a sweeter baby born than he. Why is evil in the pathway of our children? Why does it seem easier for them to sin than to do right?"

"Longfellow attempts to answer the question," returned the Squire.

"It is Lucifer,
The son of mystery;
And since God suffers him to be,
He, too, is God's minister,
And labours for some good
By us not understood."

"Husband!" cried Mrs. Murray, "it is the people's will—this traffic in intoxicants, or it never would continue!"

From the day of Alexander's disappearance a hush fell over our little village; with common consent, it would seem, we stopped talking about him, and in the weeks and months, ay, years, that followed his name was never mentioned except with bated breath. "The poor woman!" was sometimes whispered, when his mother's pale, drawn face was seen on the street or at church.

A short time after Alexander had left the village Maggie Thompson's father and mother decided to bring her home again, and sent her the following message. "We're kin' o' lonesome here without ye, Maggie, an' want ye to come home."

But Maggie, still pursued with the idea of a *great* work, begged to be allowed to remain.

XVIII

BILL GILOOLY LEAVES HOME

AS soon as it became evident that Alexander McBain was not in the neighbourhood, the village awoke one morning to find that Bill Gilooly, too, was missing. Just after dark, the night before, he had tied a shirt and a pair of socks into a handkerchief, strung the bundle over a stick, which he carried across his shoulder, and walked off down the main street, out toward the wide country.

On his way he had to pass Granny Neilson's house, and glancing in he saw Granny in the window reading her Bible. Her lamp was placed close to the glass, because a ditch had been dug that day across the street to drain a cellar, and, no light having been placed by the diggers to warn the travellers, dear Granny had taken it upon herself to put the light in the window for fear a wayfarer might fall into the open ditch.

Bill looked at the bent form and kindly face for a minute, and with a pang he thought that as he was going out of the village probably not to return

for a long time, he might never see Granny again. He remembered that he had sat on her knee when he was a little chap, and more than once she had given him a cookie or a "sweetie."

"I'll bid old Granny good-bye," said Bill to himself, and, suiting the action to the thought, he stepped up to the door and rapped.

In response to Granny's invitation he walked in, saying, "I'm goin' away, Granny, an' I came in to say good-bye."

"Goin' away, laddie," said Granny, laying her Bible in her lap and taking off her spectacles, "where away?"

"Off to—to be somebody; I'm nobody here," returned Bill with a catch in his voice, extending his hand to the old woman.

Granny clasped his hand in both of hers and was silent a moment, while her thin, old lips moved gently, as they seemed to get the fashion of doing more and more as she grew older; then she said, slowly and quaveringly:

"William, would I ever reach Toronto if I started off toward Buffalo without turnin' square around an' walkin' the other way?"

In a few minutes Bill was out on the road with his bundle over his shoulder again, whispering to him-

self as he trudged along, "I'm walkin' th' other way! I'm walkin' th' other way!"

All day he tramped, passing odd wayside taverns, whence issued the tempting odour of beer and whisky; indeed Bill had never before known how loud was the call that odour made to him, but he kept steadfastly on, murmuring as he turned his face from the intoxicating whiffs, "I'm walkin' th' other way, I'm walkin' th' other way."

Bill's money was scarce; it had never been his habit to save, and he did not feel now that his purse allowed him to seek a night's lodging where he would have to pay for it; so as it grew dusk he began to look about him for a hayloft.

He was not long about finding one, for he was travelling through a farming country. It was quite dusk when he climbed up the ladder leading to a hayloft over a stable, and threw himself down on the soft, fragrant hay. The night was chilly and he scooped out a hollow and buried himself all but his head. The horses in the stable below were restless, the mice were gnawing in the wall, and some belated swallows were twittering sleepily in the eaves, but Bill's couch and covering, smelling of clover, mint, and all the sweet grasses that are found in a hayfield, carried him away from the hayloft, away from all the present

sights and sounds, back to his native village. He was again in a certain meadow picking wild strawberries from the growing hay, with a number of other children who had run away from school at the ten minutes' recess. They were all very much alert during this picking, keeping an eye out for the farmer who objected to having his hay trodden down, keeping an ear out for the school bell, and trying in the limited time to pick and eat as many berries as possible. They had come a long way for those berries, and climbed several fences, and they would not have time to snatch more than a dozen berries before that bell would ring, but, oh, they tasted *so* good! He heard again the singing of the birds, and found the blue-bird's nest in the stump, from which he would have taken some of the eggs only Maggie Thompson would not let him. He knew he would not have stopped for any other girl, but Maggie could always make him do as she wanted. The drone of the bumblebees on the meadow clover made him drowsy; he thought again of Granny Neilson's words, and, still smelling the hay, he fell asleep whispering, "I'm walkin' th' other way, I'm walkin' th' other way."

He awoke in the morning saying the same words, which were surely as intelligent a prayer as "the cry of the raven," and from the fact that all that day

BILL GILOOLY LEAVES HOME 197

Bill walked by taverns, and even spent twenty-five cents of his spare cash on a meal in one of them without touching a drop of whisky, we are assured that the prayer was heard.

Bill continued his walk many days until he reached a lumber camp, a small settlement of houses temporarily built for the accommodation of lumbermen. There were no streets in this settlement, no churches, no public libraries, no preachers, lawyers, or doctors; but one public building, and that a general store where the necessities of life might be purchased; and in this settlement lived, during the months of the long Canadian winter, as many people as are sometimes found in a good-sized village.

As soon as Bill presented himself at headquarters experienced eyes saw his fine muscular physique, his energetic air, his hands, expressive of hard labour, and in a few minutes he was engaged for the winter to do chopping in the woods.

When Bill was within a few hours' walk of the lumber camp there arrived at the nearest railway station Arthur Halton, B. A., a graduate of Toronto University. He had finished his course the spring before; and, looking about in the autumn for something to do, he had read the advertisement in one of the Toronto dailies for a teacher to take

charge of the reading-room in a lumber camp of northern Ontario. He applied for the position and was accepted, and, as it happened, he and Bill Gilooly arrived at the camp together. They both sat down by the great camp stove to warm themselves, and looked each other over critically.

"Comin' to chop?" said Bill, who was of too sociable a nature to remain long silent, eyeing somewhat doubtfully the slender figure of the city-bred young man.

"Coming to run the reading-room," returned young Halton cheerfully.

Bill was silent; this was unintelligible news to him; he had never seen a reading-room, and had no idea as to its use.

The young men talked about the weather and the prospects for the winter, and Bill remarked to himself that this white-handed stranger used mighty fine words, such as Alexander McBain used after he came from college. Arthur said within himself, "That's a bright-looking young chap, not much education, but with a most magnificent forehead, and the muscles of a gladiator."

The cook of the camp, knowing that the two young travellers would probably be hungry, and it was yet two hours until supper time, brought each

of them a half of a mince pie, and they ate their first meal together, and strengthened their bond of good feeling.

Bill did not start to chop that day, and as Arthur Halton was going to the small log shanty standing by itself, with the words "*The Reading Room*," painted in large, white letters over the door, he asked Bill to accompany him.

Entering the building, they found a square room with rough board floor and unfinished walls, in the middle of which was a large red-hot stove. Tables on which lay books and papers flanked the walls, common wooden chairs and benches furnished the seating accommodation, and a few posters pinned up on the logs added a touch of colour to the scene. In half an hour Bill had learned that it was to be young Halton's winter work to take charge of this room, and to teach any of the lumbermen who were desirous of learning.

In one short week Bill was thoroughly initiated into his chopping, and Arthur Halton had well under way his various classes of grown pupils.

Bill was thoroughly interested in this new young man who had fallen across his pathway; he had never seen anyone exactly like him before. He watched him a fortnight before he said anything, even to

himself. He saw that young Halton knew something about the stars by night, something that the other men did not know; and something that the other men did not know about the trees, birds, animals, and other objects of nature, and he, Bill, was filled with wonder and desire.

One Sunday he left the company of men in the lumber camp and went alone into the solitary pine forest to have a talk with himself. As he walked along the dim aisles of the forest, the pine needles forming a carpet which rendered his footfall noiseless, his thoughts became very solemn. It seemed to him that the very trees were whispering over his head, "Bill, Bill, be somebody, be somebody." A strange bird called sharply out from the thick forest, "Bill, be somebody, somebody, somebody." A red squirrel with his tail over his back saucily repeated the same words; and Bill soliloquised after this fashion:

"*He* don't play cards, *he* don't drink, *he* don't go fur any o' the fellows' low tricks. Now, Bill Gilooly, you kin play cards, an' you kin drink, an' you kin smoke, an' hang 'round an' have yer fun, but ye won't have what *he* has ef ye do. Ye kin go on an' run to seed, an' end worse in this lumber camp than ye began, or ye kin make up yer mind to—to—be

somebody. Ye kin keep on walkin' th' other way ef ye want to, an' ef ye don't want to ye kin have a good time an' end nowhere—'ceptin' where the devil leads ye."

The result of Bill's soliloquy was that the next night he visited the reading-room to see what they were doing there. And when he saw full-grown men learning their alphabet, and spelling a-n, an, and o-x, ox, he felt that his education was pretty well advanced. Johnny Lorrimer, a married man with two children, was painfully making great pot-hooks as the first step toward writing a letter to the home-folks. Johnny was also trying to learn to read, but sensitively alive to his backwardness he stayed in the room every night after the other men had left, to say over his alphabet, and spell his words of two letters.

Something in the perseverance of these men encouraged Bill Gilooly to think of improving his education; if *he* knew more than the shanty men, Arthur Halton knew much more than *he*. He delicately hinted his desire for more knowledge to young Halton, and the latter grew enthusiastic at once, and urged Bill to begin various branches of study.

The young university man had the magnetism to draw the young wood-chopper unto the uphill path

of progress. Every night, during the succeeding weeks and months, Bill was a faithful student, and his teacher spared no pains to further his efforts. At this time Bill had but one prayer, and every night the last thing before he went to sleep, if your ear had been close to his heart, you could have heard him breathing most earnestly, "I'm walkin' th' other way, I'm walkin' th' other way."

Among the lumber men Bill soon became a character; when invited to drink he replied, "No drinks fur me, gentlemen, I'm walkin' th' other way." The men were amused and mystified, and after a while nicknamed him "Thother Way." It is said that Stanley declared that a brass band could walk unmolested into the heart of Africa, such is the love of the natives for music. It is quite certain that Bill Gilooly walked into the hearts of the men of that lumber camp with his little jew's-harp. It became quite the custom, when time hung heavy, for someone to call out, "Come, Thother Way, give us a tune." And Bill, seated in front of the great camp fire, with groups of men around him in almost every conceivable attitude, would stir old memories, and move souls, with "*Annie Laurie*," "*Home, Sweet Home*," or "*Old Folks at Home*." Bill had a good voice, and sometimes he would make the rafters ring

with "The Irishman's Shanty" or "*Don't Tread on the Tail of My Coat.*" If his repertoire of songs ran out before the men's music hunger was satisfied, Bill would give them some of the old revival hymns of the home village, and the men would listen in awed silence to "*Whoever Repents and Forsakes Every Sin,*" or "*Whiter Than Snow, Yes, Whiter Than Snow.*"

By spring Bill had made considerable advancement with his studies. A number of the other men had learned to read during the winter; and the delight of poor Johnny Lorrimer at being able to write his first letter home was touching. "They'll think it's from somebody else," said Johnny, with a little self-congratulatory laugh, as he signed his name to the first epistle to his wife, written by his own hand.

When the camp broke up for the winter Arthur Halton, who was going out with a surveying party, secured a place for Bill, in whom he had become deeply interested, as chain-bearer. Bill continued his studies under young Halton's guidance, and in two years he was far enough advanced, and had saved sufficient money to enter, for further training, a school of practical science.

XIX

MORE OF ALEXANDER

WHEN Alexander boarded the train at that midnight hour in his home village he crept into a baggage car and slipped down unnoticed behind a large bale of goods. He slept during the hours of darkness, but waked at the first peep of dawn. The train rolled on and on past miles and leagues of miles of fields and forests, passing tracts of beauty, rare with purling stream and autumn-tinted leaf, leaving in its wake many a sleeping village and stirring city, but Alexander, in his dark corner behind the bale of goods, could see nothing. The passenger coaches were full, and no doubt were carrying many a sorrowing heart—sorrow is the only weight that the rail-trains carry in tons through the country free of freightage—but among the world of travellers there was not a more miserable, sorrow-stricken being than the one who lay behind the bale of goods in the freight car of that west-bound train. Shut out

from seeing, he had nothing to do but think. As he lay there through the hours he could not divert his mind from going back over all his life as far as memory could carry him. When he had taken his first glass or two, after disposing of the silver bowl and little red shoes, he seemed to suddenly awake to the enormity of his deed, and, rushing out of the tavern with the intention of doing something desperate, he knew not what, he heard that night train come in, and suddenly conceived the idea of boarding it and being carried away out of the sight and hearing and memory of all those who had ever known him. Nothing now could wipe out that deed, and death itself was preferable to going back to face his mother and others who must learn of his dastardly act. He remembered now as keenly as when it happened the time his mother had taken down that silver bowl and that pair of little red shoes, when he was yet a very small lad, not scorning to sit on her knee, and tell him the story of the christening. He remembered Maggie being in the house, sitting on his mother's other knee, and hearing the same story, not once or twice, but a dozen times, for, childlike, they would have it repeated over and over again. He remembered that his mother never seemed tired of telling it; he could see the gleam of interest in her eye. What

would Maggie say when it was written to her what he had done? What would Mrs. McTavish say? and Granny Neilson? and all the rest of the village? He lived over again the scenes of his boyhood, the self-denials of his mother, which he could understand now as never before, the prayers he had been taught, the Sunday school training, the warning and encouraging words which his minister had spoken to him all through his growing years, Maggie's devotion to his interests, the times he had beaten Maggie saying the verses; they all were like live coals heaped on his head. Did Maggie really care for him, he asked himself, or had she learned to despise him? He felt somehow that she still had hopes that he would amount to something; she had spoken that way when they parted; and he felt as though he ought to write and scatter them; tell her to drop him from her memory forever—yes, *forever*. Why should that peerless Maggie be harbouring such a reprobate as he in her heart and memory? Looking about him at this moment he saw a white sheet of paper on the floor, which evidently someone had dropped, and, reaching for it, he wrote by the dim light which entered by a crack the cranny where he lay, with a stub of a lead pencil he found in his pocket, a letter to Maggie.

Some time the next day, finding that the train had stopped, he crept out to get something to eat. The place was a city, and, finding a pawnshop, his first act was to pawn his watch, the old silver watch which had been his father's.

After satisfying his hunger he intended to buy an envelope and stamp for the letter to Maggie, which he had written on the train, but he wandered around the streets for a while, smelling the whiffs of beer and whisky as he passed the places where these commodities were kept on sale. He ended by taking a drink and having his money stolen from him. Then he boarded another train, rode some hours among the freight, was discovered and put off. He next pawned his coat for food, and kept stealing rides on freight trains, going hither and thither, he knew not where, sometimes retracing his way.

At length he stole a long ride on a freight train that carried him into the great Northwest of his own country. When the train stopped to take on water, faint, hungry, coatless, he crept out from his hiding-place. He found a hamlet, not much more than a tavern. "Wayside Tavern" was printed in large, bold letters over the door of a frame building which stood not far from the track. The train almost immediately passed on and Alexander walked up to the

tavern. He had no money, but he must get something to eat. He was met at the door by the proprietor, who, eyeing him over and recognising his dilapidated condition, asked him gruffly what he wanted.

"I'll do some work for you for something to eat," said the miserable young man.

"You will," returned the tavern-keeper, Mark Ahrens; "what can you do?"

"Cut wood," returned Alexander hesitatingly.

"Cut wood, hey? I ain't got no wood to cut just now; you'd better clear out."

"What does he want?" called in from the kitchen the sharp voice of the tavern-keeper's wife.

"He wants to cut wood fer somethin' to eat," returned her husband; "I ain't got no wood, so we've no vittles to spare," he added with a laugh.

"Can't he come out here an' peel these potatoes?" said the woman; "there's a lot o' railroaders comin' in here for supper to-night, an' we ain't half help in the kitchen, sence our kitchen girl run away."

The tavern-keeper looked at Alexander and waved his hand out toward the kitchen, and the latter walked meekly in the direction whence the woman's voice preceeded.

"Here," said the woman as soon as she saw him, startled for a moment by the air of gentility in his

face, and knowing without being told that he was somebody who had come down a long way to have reached the position he now occupied; "peel these potatoes," pointing to a bushel of potatoes in a large pan.

"Did you ever peel potatoes before?" she asked sharply.

"No," said Alexander, feeling for a moment that his education had been neglected.

"I thought not," said the woman, as she eyed the long white fingers picking up a potato; "played the piano, I suppose," she added sarcastically. "Well, don't pare 'em too heavy, that's all; an' you've plenty o' time to learn on this bushel; they're not wanted till supper time."

"Supper time," said Alexander, like one talking in a dream; "I haven't had anything to eat since supper time yesterday."

The woman looked at him sharply. "No wonder you're white, hands an' all," she exclaimed. "See here," she added after a moment's thought, "you'll promise me you'll stay 'round and work, not light out, ef I give you something to eat first?"

"Certainly, Madam," returned Alexander.

The woman hurried off after some food, feeling somewhat flattered at being called Madam. "'Cer-

tainly, Madam,' " she whispered to herself, " instid o' ' yes, mum ' ; he talks just like the college professor." The college professor was a geologist who at one time stayed a week at the Wayside Tavern for the purpose of studying the rocks of the vicinity, and he was the only other person who had ever addressed the tavern-keeper's wife as " Madam."

She returned very soon with a plate of cold meat and bread, and set them on the table quickly; somehow she almost felt shy before this new domestic she was bringing into the kitchen to peel potatoes, and as soon as she had set a pitcher of milk on the table she left the room.

Betty Splan, the one female domestic in the Wayside Tavern, had been out bringing in her washing when Alexander arrived, and she regarded him with undisguised surprise and admiration when she came in half an hour later and found him in the kitchen.

Betty had a strong, little Dutch pony figure, and a pair of cheeks like two great red apples; she never knew anything in her life but perfect health, and, consequently, anything delicate or fragile, anything long and thin, had a special charm for her. To do Betty full justice, it may have been that the frail and weak made an appeal for protection to her superior physical robustness. When she saw Alexan-

der's white brow, from which the hair was pushed straight back, making it look higher,—Betty had no brow to speak of,—his thin, exhausted face, from which the blue eyes looked out weirdly, the long, white fingers, she cried in her secret heart, "That beauty peelin' potatoes!"

She hung her sunbonnet on its nail, disposed of her basket of clothes, and hastening breathless into the presence of the tavern-keeper's wife, she whispered sharply:

"What's that pretty man doin' out there with them potatoes?"

"Now see here, Betty Splan," returned the mistress, "if you go takin' a shine to that man I'll send him away, do you hear?"

"Yes'm," said Betty, and she withdrew without saying anything more.

She came back to the kitchen and began to sprinkle the clothes preparatory to ironing them, but her eyes were not very many seconds off the interesting stranger.

Alexander worked on, never raising his eyes, which gave Betty more liberty to gaze, but despite his efforts he was making very slow progress with his peeling, which fact Betty recognised.

It was drawing near the time when the potatoes

should be placed on the stove to boil, and they were not half peeled. Betty, fearing that the mistress would come and find fault with the new help—perhaps dismiss him—seized a knife, and moving up to the great pan she began to peel dexterously, saying apologetically, “I’ll give ye a helpin’ hand with these, seein’ I’ve not much else to do.”

That night Alexander was sitting moodily in the darkest corner of the kitchen, when Betty rolled out a churn and began vigorously to work the dasher. He watched her absently for ten minutes, then he said, rising from his seat:

“I’ll do that churning for you, if you’ll give me a postage stamp and envelope.”

Betty would have been delighted to have given him the required articles without any return, but this was the first time he had actually addressed her, and to encourage him into further conversation she let him churn, and ran off upstairs for them. She soon returned.

He had worked but a short time when Betty noticed his air of languor; coming near the churn she presented the stamp and envelope, saying coyly—she had planned while she was upstairs how to find out his name: “Here Mr.— I don’t know what to call you.”

"Call me Jock," said Alexander.

"Jock! That's a queer name."

"I'm Scotch," returned Alexander.

"Well, Jock, here's your stamp an' envelope; an' leave me do that churnin', you look as weak as a baby," and she seized with her two strong, red hands the handle of the dasher.

Alexander expostulated in vain—she would not let him churn any more. But, as a reward for this generosity, she insisted on his talking to her; the number of her questions left him no chance of escape.

Later, when the churning was done, Alexander, with a tallow candle stuck in a slice of turnip, which served as a candlestick, climbed two flights of stairs to his small attic room. No carpet or even mat covered the unpainted floor. No curtains or blind screened the one window, and the black night looked so boldly in that the young man shuddered. No pictures adorned the yellow plastered wall, except a leering, red representation of Mephisto, which was pinned on the wall at the foot of the black-posted bed; it had been the advertisement of some theatrical company, and Betty had pinned it there just before he came upstairs, thinking to beautify his room. Alexander looked at the picture and went

over and took it down, saying to himself, "I've enough of his company without looking at him at the foot of my bed."

He was quite sober now, and he undressed decently and lay down on his straw pallet.

"Well, I'm in a corner now where no one will find me," he soliloquised, or rather thought, "and I'll stay here, yes, *stay* here for my lifetime! I'll get something to eat for the work I'll do, and that is all anyone—anyone like me—requires. I'll disgrace no one here, no one will be made miserable looking at me. I wonder how long I shall live—not long, I hope; and I suppose they'll bury me in the great desolate prairie around this house. It is fitting that I should have a hotel-yard for a burial place. They've given me up by this time in the village. I wonder what they're all doing—Bill Gilooly, One-Armed Joe, and all the rest of them. Mrs. Brady, Mrs. McShane, the Village Helper; *they'll* call me the bad names that I deserve; Mrs. McTavish, Mr. Vickers, *they'll* be trying to comfort Mother. Mother is sitting white and silent—nobody will get Mother to speak much—thinking—thinking." Here Alexander clenched his teeth and buried his face in his hard corn-husk pillow. "It would be easy to end it all—all this misery," he continued. "I could throw my-

self under the passing train, or plunge into some pond, or borrow a pistol—or—or——” He shuddered and stopped. Something held him back from self-destruction, his mother, Maggie, Granny Neilson, all the good folk of the village seemed to be stretching out hands to save him.

The wind sighed and moaned dismally around his attic, the black night seemed to frown at him through the curtainless window, which he could see even from his bed; some cats were quarrelling on the ground beneath, and the noise they made sounded demoniacal to his overwrought nerves. He thought of the picture of Mephisto, which he had twisted up and thrown under the bed. Shivering, he drew the bedclothes over his head. This act made him remember how his mother, when he was a little fellow, used to pull up the bedclothes and tuck them around him. Almost unconsciously, as in that olden time, his lips began to say, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I—no, no!” he cried aghast; “I dare not take such words on my lips!” He remembered that he used to add, when he had finished the first prayer, “God bless Mother, and Maggie, and Mr. Vickers,” and wondered confusedly whether he could dare to say even that. How did God regard him now? Was He willing to hear any prayer at all from such as he?

At that very instant he was licking his lips, and his throat was parching for a drink of whisky.

A heavy stupor gradually stole over his senses and he was asleep.

Over in her corner of the attic Betty was also talking to herself: "When I says 'goin' he says 'going'; when I says 'git,' he says 'get'; he may be a lord—or a count—or a dook, travellin' 'round in disguise, sayin' them nice words; I've read about them in the novels."

XX

LIFE AT THE WAYSIDE TAVERN

THE next morning Alexander rose at the ringing of a bell and dressed himself. When he went to put on his collar he saw that it was soiled and crushed, and he laid it back again on the table. His mother had always been careful to keep him supplied with a collar, and now for the first time in his life he would have to appear in society without one. He turned his coat collar up around his neck and went downstairs.

Betty at once noticed the absence of the badge of distinction and felt grievously disappointed; it did not fall in with her ideas that a disguised nobleman should be collarless. After awhile she worked up courage to tell him that he had forgotten to put it on, and learned that he had but the one, and it was too soiled to wear.

That night when he went to his room he found the collar on the table freshly laundered by Betty's hands, but he decided to keep it for occasions, as he had but the one. He further discovered before retiring that

Betty had put the picture of an angel with hovering wings at the foot of the bed, in the place formerly occupied by Mephisto. He noticed at a glance that the face of the angel looked wonderfully like an actress.

Early that evening Betty had walked three miles to the post office, ostensibly on some errand for herself, but really to post Alexander's letter. Within a week after it was dropped into the rough box at the prairie post office it was received at the hospital.

Maggie had by this time finished her probationary term and was duly installed into the arduous work of a nurse in training. Somehow, however, she did not enjoy her work as she had expected. She could not get out of her mind the lonesome look on her father's face when she was leaving home; and it had grown, in some mysterious way, to seem like a greater work to stay at home and be a comfort to him, than to wait on strangers. When she thought about Sandy she pressed her lips tightly together, and something choked her in her throat.

Then she was present at the dissection of an etherised dog, and she could not get it out of her foolish little head that it was Trusty, dear old Trusty, that had padded around for so many years in the very

footsteps of herself and Sandy. It worked on her nerves, and she went out from the dissecting-room to shed many tears.

Sandy was not writing to her; he had been angry with her for leaving the village, and he had never written a single letter. But Maggie always felt that the anger would be short-lived—she and Sandy had been friends, chums, almost from babyhood, they never could be anything else. She still wore the ring crowned with two hearts, “I will always wear it,” she had said to herself, looking down on the little ring, which had grown somewhat tarnished.

One particular day, looking over the pile of mail that had been brought in for the inmates of the house, she descried the one addressed to herself in Alexander’s handwriting. She snatched it up hungrily and ran off to the privacy of her own room to read it. Tearing open the envelope she read:

“DEAR MAGGIE:

“I am out in the world—gone for good from home and all decency; so I am writing this letter to tell you to wipe me clean out of your memory. I shall never be seen or heard of again by anyone who has known me. For fear you might have hopes that I am not altogether depraved, and that I might some time amount to anything, I must tell you that I was base enough to steal the silver bowl, out of which I was christened, and the little red shoes which I wore on that occasion,

and traded them off to gratify my appetite for whisky. You remember, Maggie, when you used to sit on one of Mother's knees, and I on the other, and she used to tell us the story of the christening, and all about the silver bowl and the red shoes. I could not sink to deeper degradation; at last, Maggie, I have eaten the caterpillars and worms I used to threaten you with. You shall never be bothered again by the boy on whom you wasted so much precious time and thought. Dig a little hole in the ground and bury the ring crowned with two hearts.

"SANDY."

She read it over several times before she could fully comprehend it—fully believe it. Then Maggie, brave Maggie, strong Maggie, buried her face in the pillows and cried, "Oh, Giant Despair has got him! Giant Despair has got him at last! I should never have left him! God gave him to me to take care of when he was only a little fellow; I should have stuck to my work! I should have stuck to my work!"

When this first spasm of weeping was over she rose and hid the letter away in the deepest recesses of her trunk. And she shoved the ring crowned with two hearts more firmly down on her finger.

Glancing at her small clock she saw that it was time for her to go on duty; the suffering of others left her scant time to nurse her own grief, and she hurried off to the wards to spend the night with the sick and the dying.

LIFE AT THE WAYSIDE TAVERN 221

Among his new, strange surroundings, perhaps owing partly to the invigorating air of the prairie, Alexander had not, since his arrival, felt the craving for drink as he had aforetime felt it. Immediately he jumped to the joyous conclusion that he would never drink again. He was walking on the prairie when he had been in the locality a week, and, finding a feather out of an owl's wing, he said to himself, "I'll make a quill-pen out of this, write a pledge with my heart's blood, sign it, and make sure that whisky shall never again cross my lips."

He carried the feather home and that night in his room he whittled, with a knife which he had carried from the kitchen, a pen from the quill. Scratching his wrist with the sharp point of a needle, he dipped the quill into the red blood from his veins, dated his paper—which was the white side of a label off one of Mark Ahrens' whisky bottles—and wrote the following pledge:

"I promise from this day forward to all eternity, to totally abstain from all forms of alcoholic drinks.

"ALEXANDER MCBAIN."

He had not been more than two weeks in his new home, when one day the proprietor, who was also the bartender, conceived a sudden notion to go hunting

for the day with a party which had just paused at the Wayside Tavern for "the drinks."

"Here, Jock," he said, rushing into the kitchen, where he found the latter scouring some tinware, "you must tend bar while I'm away for the day. There's nothin' pertickler to do but sell all the whisky ye kin; that's mostly what this house is kep' up on."

A flash as of fire shot from Alexander's eyes, as he looked up from his work, and for one moment he thought of confessing his weakness to the tavern-keeper, but the next moment the man was gone—the party of hunters had already started and he must hurry and overtake them.

Alexander dropped the pan he was scouring, went up to his room and put on his collar, although Mark Ahrens had never thought it necessary to wear a collar to sell whisky. For the first time in his life the young man was going to figure as a bartender, and the mere thought of dealing out the fiery liquid put him all in a tremble; but he said to himself, "I'll let it alone. Of course I can't touch it—I've signed the pledge."

During the forenoon the customers dropped in at short intervals; there was the blacksmith of the settlement, whose shop was not far from the tavern,

LIFE AT THE WAYSIDE TAVERN 223

and there were some of the section men from the railroad, and others; and the smell of the liquor, as he poured it out into the glasses, caused the perspiration to come out in cold drops on Alexander's brow.

Once, when left for a space of time alone in the barroom, he raised a bottle and slowly poured out a glass of whisky. "It's for the next customer," he said, "to have it ready." He regarded the amber-coloured liquid for a moment, turned hot, then cold, red, and pale, trembled, clenched his teeth, and swallowed a sob in his throat. His mind flew to the home-folk—to Maggie—to the pledge he had signed; he threw out his arms into the air, as a drowning man clutching for something. "My God," he whispered hoarsely, "just this one!" And, snatching frantically at the brimming glass, he swallowed the contents without taking a breath.

Some of the patrons of the bar coming in shortly after recognised that there was a new bartender, a gentlemanly-looking chap, and insisted on treating him; there was no escape, he had drunk another brimming glass ten minutes after his first. By noon he was in his happy, poetic mood; he made Betty blush so furiously that her forehead grew as red as her cheeks, quoting to her, when he went into his dinner of boiled beef and cabbage:

“‘I am; in my condition,
A prince, Miranda; I do think, a king;
(I would, not so!) and would no more endure
This wooden slavery, than to suffer
The flesh-fly blow my mouth. Hear my soul speak:
The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service; there resides,
To make me slave to it; and for your sake,
Am I this patient log-man.’”

“He said he was a prince,” soliloquised Betty, as she washed the greasy pots and pans after dinner, “an’ I kin well believe it; he’s such a pretty man he might be anythin’, even a king. Did he really mean me,”—and Betty blushed again at the thought—“when he said, ‘the very instant that I saw you did my heart fly to your service’?—What did he see about me?” Betty took her hands out of the dish-water and ran across the kitchen to peep at a reflection of her face in a seven-by-nine mirror hanging on the wall. “But my name is not Miranda,” she said droopingly, coming back to her dishpan. “P’raps he had a girl once, an’ she died, an’ her name was Miranda, an’ when he saw me I put him in mind of her—it must be that. Well, I’ll do all I kin fer him fer Miranda’s sake.”

When the tavern-keeper returned about four o’clock he found Alexander laid out on the floor behind the

barroom counter. He was allowed to lie there, as he was not in the way, and he was out of the sight of customers, until he became sober enough to walk away.

When he could stand on his feet, the tavern-keeper's wife came into the barroom to look at him—the college professor had appeared in a new rôle.

Fixing his dazed eyes upon her, he said brokenly:

“‘She pined in thought,
And with—a green—and yellow melancholy,
She sat—like Patience on a monument,
Smiling—at grief.’”

Now, the tavern-keeper's wife was always secretly jealous of Betty Splan's red cheeks, and to be taunted right to her face about her own green-and-yellow complexion was too much to endure, and the unfortunate Shakespearian scholar had made for himself another enemy. He would have been turned away right on the spot only that help was hard to get that was willing to stay in that out-of-the-way place, and Alexander had made himself very useful. It was decided, however, between the united heads of the house that he must be confined to the kitchen work; and the mistress, now that she had once seen him drunk, bossed him around with much more ease.

He ventured one day to ask the proprietor for some wages, but after his day in the barroom the tavern-keeper guessed pretty shrewdly that he was some poor derelict hiding away from civilisation, and he saw his opportunity to reap some advantage to himself, so he answered gruffly:

"Whose goin' to give a drunken cuss like you wages? Wages, indeed! Ef yer allowed to lay 'round the place, like an old spavined horse, an' git somethin' to eat, ye may thank yer stars!" Crushed and cowed, Alexander walked away from the presence of the tavern-keeper, and he never spoke of wages again.

He peeled potatoes, washed dishes, scrubbed, and scoured, month after month, all for his board and an occasional glass of whisky. When his boots and clothes began to get unwearable he was allowed to put on some of the tavern-keeper's cast-off apparel, which was several sizes too large for him.

Betty, who, despite the episode in the barroom, could not get over her deference for that thin, pale face, continued to wash and iron his collar until it was worn out. "I'm doin' it all for Miranda's sake," she whispered to herself as she added an extra polish to the linen. Alexander put it on only on Sunday; indeed the wearing of that collar was about the only

LIFE AT THE WAYSIDE TAVERN 227

thing that distinguished Sunday from other days at the Wayside Tavern.

The place was bookless and paperless, with the exception of an occasional newspaper that was left by the passing traveller, and some outrageously silly novels owned by Betty. The latter, learning Alexander's desire for something to read, "that nobody else kin understand," she explained to herself, came in triumphantly one day with a paper-bound copy of Shakespeare, which she had found among some débris—it had been left by some travelling company.

"This will do *him*," she said to herself, as she turned the leaves of the book, "'cause there's no head or tail or anythin' else to it a common body kin understand." After that Alexander spent his spare time Sundays adding to his knowledge of the great dramatist.

In the course of time it was found out at the Wayside Tavern that Alexander could be quite entertaining when half drunk, and the proprietor began to boast about it.

"He kin quote po'try es easy es you an' me kin cuss an' swear, an' string off Latin like a Catholic priest," he said to some of his customers. And it became his practice to bring Alexander in to the

barroom on occasions—when a band of miners, hunters, or other jolly fellows were spending the night at the tavern, and give him enough whisky to “tune him up” to make fun for his guests.

One night he had been brought in to a group of roystering fellows; he was out of sorts that night, and even after his second glass was silent and moody.

“Come, Jock,” said the tavern-keeper, “we want some fun; give us yer po’try.”

Alexander stood to his feet and began:

“‘Am I not fallen away vilely since this last action? Do I not bate? Do I not dwindle?’” Clutching the loose garments that draped his form, he continued, “‘Why, my skin hangs about me like an old lady’s loose gown; I am withered like an old apple-john. Well, I’ll repent, and that suddenly, while I am in some liking; I shall be out of heart shortly, and then I shall have no strength to repent. And I have not forgotten what the inside of a church is made of, I am a peppercorn, a brewer’s horse: the inside of a church! Company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of me.’”

A loud guffaw followed his last words, and, turning to the proprietor of the house, the guests said, “That’s a bad one on you, Ahrens, ‘company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of me.’”

LIFE AT THE WAYSIDE TAVERN 229

The tavern-keeper was half drunk and he chose to see something in this to be angry about, so he bounded across the room and cuffed Alexander soundly, roaring, "Go back to your dishwashin,' ye dirty, cringin', miserable groundhog!"

Crouching and dodging the blows, Alexander crept out of the barroom, back to the great pan of dishes awaiting him in the kitchen.

But the spell of the whisky was still upon him, and, standing in the middle of the kitchen floor, he raised his hand and addressed his Shakespeare to the door that had just slammed against him:

"Use me as your spaniel,
Spurn me, strike me——"

Betty Splan, who was not in the least disturbed by seeing a man drunk, burst into a loud snicker. At this Alexander turned and said dramatically:

"And will you rend our ancient love asunder
To join with men in scorning your poor friend?"

Betty, having never even heard of the "Midsummer Night's Dream," thought Jock had composed the lines just on the spot especially for her, and, blushing charmingly, she insisted in washing all the dishes for him.

XXI

IN THE WILDERNESS

THE months stretched into years, and still Alexander continued at the Wayside Tavern, wearing the proprietor's old grey full-cloth clothes, the cast-offs, and becoming more stooped and spiritless with every passing day. After his collar had worn out he made no attempt to present a better appearance on Sunday than on any other day. The lower part of his face became covered with a forest of untrimmed whiskers, and it is doubtful whether his most intimate Mapleton friends would have recognised him could they have seen him.

Not many miles from where he was stranded grew great stretches of rippling wheat. The call of "life's incessant prayer" seemed to be more fully answered on these great, mysterious prairie stretches than elsewhere. From the beginning of the world the grasses, growing and rotting, had deposited a foot or two of jet-black mould, and the combination formed the greatest wheat soil of the world.

A little further on the mining prospector was drawing from the full veins of this great western land the precious metals, but the poor, shackled, dispirited Alexander was not in touch or sympathy with any of those absorbing interests.

If he heard at all about the gold he only thought of it as something with which he could get whisky, and he never went far enough from his shelter to even see the yellow waves of wheat running like an illimitable sea, away to the blue sky-line, nor to hear the hum of the thousand harvesters who came every autumn to garner in the precious grain.

There were fenceless, trackless reaches which were covered only with prairie-grass and wild flowers, and it was in some miles from the edge of the latter that the Wayside Tavern was situated, on the line of a freight express. In this situation it sold much whisky, and accommodated over night the miners, hunters, and other prospectors and wayfarers that came its direction.

Always Alexander's mind was turned toward the East, toward a country intersected by many fences, toward a village through which meandered a sluggish river, and a sluggish canal, toward a humble home and a plain little mother, and a fair girl in bright frocks. Betty at times caught him gazing dreamily

over the vast expanse of prairie, looking wistfully into the heart of sunsets or full moons, and on such occasions she would remark to herself:

“He wants somethin’ he ain’t got.”

Betty, it would seem, had also established herself permanently at the Wayside Tavern; she had no relations in this country, and, having nothing to entice her elsewhere, she somehow felt a reluctance about leaving Alexander to the mercy of the tavern-keeper and his wife. Much of her interest in life died out when she had no longer had his collar to wash and iron. In her secret heart she took pleasure in regarding him as a disguised and suffering scion of nobility—perhaps royalty—and the fact that he scarcely seemed to notice her existence but heightened her interest and confirmed her romantic imaginings. She was quite certain (she had gleaned the idea from her novels) that a day would come when the world would recognise him.

It was the day before Christmas, when the west-bound train was rolling by the Wayside Tavern, that a roll of papers either fell by accident or was thrown from a car. Jock saw it fall, and when the train had passed on he went out to the track and picked it up. Untying the parcel he found a bundle of Sunday school papers. He felt as if something had risen

from the dead to confront him—the dead past. He wanted to examine the papers by himself—where no eye would be upon him—so he carried them to the hayloft over the stable.

Opening one of the papers he read the following little childish lines:

“Under the stars, one holy night
A little babe was born;
Over his head a star shone bright,
And glistened till the morn.
And wise men came from far away,
And shepherds wandered where he lay,
Upon his lowly bed of hay,
Under the stars one night.”

What magic was in those lines that made him see again the little home schoolhouse, that made him feel again Maggie's child hand in his, that caused his mother's voice to ring in his ears? What did it all mean? It surely had no meaning for him. What was that Christ-child to the world now? He seemed to have utterly gone out of the world in which the inhabitants of the Wayside Tavern lived. Did he come near the world at all now? “He came when I was a little fellow learning such verses as these,” said Jock to himself, “but He is gone from the world

now—gone—gone! The devil is now ruling the world!" he cried in a voice of tragedy.

Betty down in the stable milking the cow heard the cry, and said musingly, "There he be agen, wantin' somethin' he ain't got."

On the same day, thousands of miles away, in the unknown quiet little village that had once been Jock's home, a sad woman with a wan face was sitting by an old-fashioned fireplace, smoothing across her knee a little stocking and thinking; going back through the years to the time when the rosy little foot that had worn the stocking faltered as it came across the room. Then on to the time when the steps grew more assured and boyish shouts of glee filled the small home. Then the hanging of the stocking by the chimney on Christmas Eve.

The hickory log had turned to coals in the fireplace, and the woman was looking into them, the depths in her wan face growing more unfathomable, when a tremulous tap came to the door, and Granny Neilson walked in. Granny always made it a practice to spend every Christmas Eve with the lonely mother. Seeing the little stocking on the knee of the latter, and guessing pretty correctly the mother's thoughts, she said:

"God is followin' our boy, Jessie; our prayers are never ceasin'; an' He never turns a deaf ear to th' cry o' his children."

About five miles from the Wayside Tavern was a schoolhouse that had been built some years before Alexander reached the locality.

The prairie had been a very fascinating place to the band of settlers that had come to take land and build homes in the neighbourhood where the schoolhouse was now situated. The parts of it that were undisturbed by the settler's plough were covered in early spring by the wild blue crocus. The little mounds of the prairie dogs were so set in a nest of bloom that it seemed as if Nature had provided a flower garden for the front and back yards of each animal. In June the vast expanse of colour turned pink when the wild roses held the field, pinning down for the time being the prairie grass. In places where the flowers gave it a chance, the delicate buffalo-grass raised its sickle-shaped head, grew during the short, fervid summer, and in the autumn dried as it stood, that during the winter the flocks and herds which roamed the prairie might "nibble sharp-toothed the rich, thick-growing blades."

After a while, however, the novelty wore off, and the

settlers longed for some of the privileges of their old home. Sunday was a long, dull day, and on that day the prairie became a dreary place. They had been brought up in their old home to regard Sunday as a day for assembling themselves together, a day for the worshipping of the Lord in the congregation of the people, and it was very hard to have to spend it sitting around home. No provision had been made for public service, no minister came within thirty miles of their district.

The schoolhouse which had been built after they had been there a few years for the education of their children was in use but a week, when one day in early summer one of the settlers' wives, as she was driving along the trail that ran past the schoolhouse, an old, firm, well-trodden path, partly grass-grown, where in bygone days the buffalo had trod in great black herds of hundreds, had an inspiration. At least something about the square, unadorned, homely building, part wood and part mud, standing all by itself among the broad acres, made her think of the old schoolhouse in the East, where she attended when a child, and of the Sunday school which was held there every Lord's day. And with this came the thought which Mrs. Hezekiah Hinks expressed aloud, "Why can't we have a Sunday school here?"

The little bronco, the wild pony which had been caught on the prairie and tamed, which she was driving, was so astonished at the unusual words that he almost stopped and tried to look around at her.

When Mrs. Hinks reached home she unhitched the bronco, for the prairie women were well skilled in such work; but all the while she was undoing buckles and sliding straps her mind was busy with the project of a Sunday school.

She came out of the stable which faced the west, and the great rolling prairie looked at that moment like a range of mountains: one slope crimson with the reflected glory of the sunset, while surrounding slopes lay in purple shadows. The very sight put her in mind of some of her Sunday school verses, and she whispered softly something about "*the pastures of the wilderness.*"

That night over the supper table she spoke of the project to her husband; but he said, "No use in your tryin' it *this* summer, Elizabeth; the grasshoppers et up everything last summer, and the farmers had nothing left after they fed themselves all winter but a little grain for seedin'—too poor to dress up for Sunday meetin'."

It was true; a flight of grasshoppers was a beautiful sight to the settlers, if they were very sure they

were not going to "light." Millions upon millions of them had floated over that section more than once, their white gauzy wings looking to the admiring gazers beneath them like a snowstorm in sunshine. One fateful day, however, they *did* "light," and that was the famine year among the settlers.

"But the children come to school during the week," said Mrs. Hinks, "why could they not come to Sunday school?"

"You forget," said her husband, "that they can walk there barefoot on a week day. Where are they goin' to get shoes for Sunday? Even the fathers an' mothers have to go barefoot *this* summer, last summer's crops panned out so bad."

Mrs. Hinks, however, could not drop her project so easily; she said no more just then, but the next day when her work was "done up," she harnessed the bronco and started off to make a visit to her neighbours within a radius of five or six miles.

The hot summer was setting in, and as she drove along the trails there were few salient points of beauty on the almost trackless prairie; the crocus and wild rose had smiled a brief season and passed on, the sunflowers which glorified the prairie with the sun's own royal colour had not yet made their appearance.

It was a disappointing afternoon; she went from one house to another without any encouragement. It was just as her husband had said, all the people felt too poor to get Sunday attire. Their clothing was not so bad, if a bit out of fashion; but their shoes were worn out, and they had no money to buy more shoes.

The next afternoon she started again, taking another direction this time, travelling the old buffalo trails, passing the "sloos," said to be great buffalo wallows, winding in and out between the mounds of the prairie dog and the burrows of the gopher. She called at several houses, but every woman gave a discouraging report.

"If you'll let us all, fathers an' mothers, an' youngsters, go in our bare feet," said Mrs. Hefty, who was known as the "funny" woman of the settlement, "the way we have to go 'round home, an' the way the children go to school during the week, you *might* get us there. Our shoes were not like the children of Israel's shoes; ours wore out in the wilderness."

Over the supper table that evening Mrs. Hinks laughingly told her husband what Mrs. Hefty had said.

"Well, why not?" said Mr. Hinks; "feet were made before shoes. Let 'em come barefoot."

"Hezekiah! that would be irreverent!" cried the wife reprovingly.

"I don't know why," said Hezekiah. "P'raps *more* reverent; Moses was ordered to take *off* his shoes when he stood on holy ground."

"Hezekiah Hinks, if you ain't the outbeatenest man!" cried Mrs. Hinks.

That night Mrs. Hinks did not sleep well, and every time she awoke the thought of the Sunday school presented itself. The more she thought of going there barefooted, the less horrible it became to her.

"Wasn't that an' idea o' Hezekiah's," she said to herself, laughing softly, "about Moses being ordered to take off his shoes. Hezekiah's a quick-witted man; there ain't a quicker witted among the whole batch o' men in the district. He'll have to be superintendent if we start the Sunday school. I'll make Hezekiah stand by it now."

Before the next Sunday, without saying a word to her husband about it, Mrs. Hinks went the rounds among her neighbours again, and told in each house that they were goin' to start a barefooted Sunday school, and inviting every man, woman, and child to come.

"You must come barefooted," she added, "for

sure. If *one* wore shoes the others might feel awkward; the only requirements for membership is a pair of bare feet."

"One bare foot if ye ain't got two, I s'pose 'll pass a fellow," said Mrs. Hefty's husband, who had been a soldier and had a left wooden stump where a foot had once been.

When the next Sunday came around it was considerable of a trial for Mrs. Hinks, attired in her blue Scotch gingham gown, a fine zephyr and kept for Sundays, to climb barefooted into the "democrat" wagon to be carried to the Sunday school. Her people had been well-to-do farmers in the East, and even as a child she had not gone to school barefooted.

As she stepped out on the bare ground the prairie-grass tickled her feet.

"Ouch! ouch! ouch!" she cried as every little sharp point and thistle seemed to find access to the soft flesh.

Her husband, it must be owned, felt decidedly strange, too. At first he argued that it was not intended for *men*; that it was usually *women* that ran Sunday schools; but his wife persisted that it was *his* proposition, and there was no backing out of it.

They drove along in silence for a while; then Mrs. Hinks said, "When we think of what the missionaries

endure when they go among foreigners, this ain't much for us."

"Not much," assented Hezekiah, covering his momentary awkwardness by touching the horses lightly with the whip, and shouting savagely, "Git along there!"

They felt less awkward when they reached the schoolhouse and found it full of barefooted people. These pioneers hungering for Sabbath services hailed anything that would be like the old home Sundays. Some of the feet were brown and calloused, as if they had long been accustomed to exposure to sun, wind, and thistles; others were more white and tender-looking, silently bearing witness that they had not come much in direct contact with the cruel world. Mrs. Hefty's husband was there with one bare foot and his wooden stump.

It was unanimously decided by the company assembled that Hezekiah Hinks should be the superintendent of the Sunday school.

"You've got the gift o' gab, Hezekiah," said one, "that the rest o' us hain't got."

"You kin hoist a tune, Hezekiah," said another.

Hezekiah had these gifts, and he knew it; but still he demurred about accepting the position of honour. He raised a tune that day, read a chapter, and called

on Mr. Hefty to pray. He confessed to his wife on the way home that the real reason for his hesitation was that he had no decent clothes for Sunday. It was enough for a man, a respectable man, to stand barefooted on a platform before his neighbours, but to be coatless and have shabby trousers he felt was more than he could endure. On that first Sunday, it being "a sign chilly," he had worn his heavy winter overcoat, and a cap, part cloth and part fur; but the scorching July and August days were coming, when he felt that it would be impossible to endure the coat and cap.

During the following week a very strange event happened; some Eastern friends sent the Hinks a box. Among other good things which it contained was a man's full suit of white linen and a straw hat. Hezekiah Hinks felt sure now of his call to the superintendency.

The next Sunday when he appeared before his wife barefooted, but attired in the white linen suit, and wearing the straw hat, she exclaimed, "Hezekiah Hinks, you're never going in that *swell* suit with your bare feet?"

"Just what I'm a-goin' to do," said Hezekiah, with a composure that surprised his wife. There could be no Sunday school without the bare feet, and there

could be no superintendent without the linen suit; they are intended to go together.

All summer Hezekiah Hinks, barefooted and wearing his white linen suit, earnestly and faithfully sang and prayed and reviewed lessons before a crowded Sunday school.

"Elizabeth," said Hezekiah to his wife one evening they were sitting in the gloaming within their own house, "sometimes when we are all standing there in our bare feet in the Sunday school singin' '*Safely through Another Week*,' or some one o' the other old hymns, it seems as if the heavens opened and the angels came down an' were flyin' 'round that Sunday school room; p'raps you never felt it that way."

"Yes, I have," said Elizabeth; "I know well what you mean. I'm most sorry that the crops are turning out so well, an' we'll not have to go in our bare feet next summer. Of course the winter's comin' on," she added, "when we'll just *have* to put on our shoes; an' the Lord's good to have provided 'em in time."

XXII

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

AS a reward for the labours of Hezekiah Hinks and his wife, assisted by their neighbours, by the next summer a minister was sent to the settlement. At least the young man who was sent from the East as a missionary was instructed to include that little schoolhouse among his appointments. Consequently at the time of Alexander's arrival in the West there was service in the schoolhouse every fortnight.

In the course of time the story of Alexander's accomplishments spread, and it reached the ear of the young minister who came once a fortnight to preach in the schoolhouse.

"Why," said his informant—a young man of education himself, and becoming too frequent a visitor to the bar of the Wayside Tavern—"the fellow is a Latin scholar, and would seem to have Shakespeare at his tongue's end. But he is right under the thumb of old Ahrens—I can't understand

it—and never ventures more than a half a mile from the house.”

The minister was greatly interested; young and enthusiastic, he was determined that he would become acquainted with this derelict. He rode by the tavern several times on his bronco, hoping to see the young man, but failed to even catch a glimpse of him. Then one evening after dark he called at the Wayside Tavern. He was met by the proprietor and given a seat in the sitting-room, which was likewise the barroom.

“I understand, Mr. Ahrens,” said the young minister courteously, “that you have a young fellow here who is highly educated—a Latin scholar, in fact; and that he has some Scotch in him. Now I am of Scotch extraction myself, and I thought I should like to meet this young man.”

The corpulent frame of the tavern-keeper seemed to shrink, and his small eyes receded in his head; he scented danger—the loss of his very useful and cheap servant—and he replied craftily:

“The beggar isn’t in just now; he’s gone off somewhere, I don’t know where—har’ly ever to home. I never know from one minute to the next when he’ll disappear for good an’ all; he’s a wanderin’ Jock—a rollin’ stone.”

The fine, sympathetic, penetrative soul of the young minister seemed to read the duplicity of the other man, and he asked no questions as to what direction Alexander had gone, but began to draw the tavern-keeper out in another line.

"The young fellow, I understand," he continued, "is quite well informed, and well behaved."

"It's a lie," said the tavern-keeper; "someone's been coddin' ye. He don't know nothin', kin har'ly write his name, an' the worst actin' cuss—has to be watched all the time. I'm hopin' every day he'll light out; kin't har'ly turn him out to starve—ain't wuth his board."

At that moment Jock was in the kitchen scraping carrots for a large dinner the next day; but Betty, who had seen the minister come in, and was determined to find out his business, was secretly hidden where she heard all the conversation in the barroom.

"The lyin' thief!" she said to herself, shaking her fist when she heard the tavern-keeper's statements; "I'll set some o' that right—ef I die fur it."

When the minister left the house a few minutes later, feeling somewhat disappointed at not having accomplished anything, Betty stole around from the back kitchen, and whispered sharply into the darkness:

"Mr. Preacher! Mr. Preacher!"

Betty never could have screwed up her courage to face a minister in her own interests, but for the "pretty," and (as she chose to consider) distinguished young man, she could have faced a dozen of them.

"Don't believe a word of it," she added when the minister halted at her call. "Jock's in the kitchen now scrapin' a bushel o' carrots for to-morrow's dinner; he's har'ly ever out o' the kitchen; they—him and her—keep him workin', workin' from mornin' till night—no wages—jest a slave."

The minister stood silent with surprise.

"An' he *does* know book-le'rnin'," continued Betty, "an' kin say off po'try like streak lightnin'. An' he's such a pretty man, an' says his words so nice—I think mebbe he's a lord or a dook," she added in a still lower whisper.

"Bring him out here so I can see him," said the minister, and he murmured to himself, "A prince in penury."

"Oh, glory, he wouldn't come ef ye'd give him half the world," said Betty.

"Well, tell him to come to the meeting Sunday night. Say I sent him an invitation, a *special* invitation, and shall be very much pleased to see him there."

"He won't go," said Betty despondently; "his collar's wore out; an' he's nothin' but the tavern-keeper's old clo'es; oh, he won't go!"

"Betty, Betty," screamed the tavern-keeper's wife from the back kitchen door, "where hev ye went, ye miserable dawdler; yer kettle's burnin' on the stove, an' this good-fer-nothin' Jock is moonin' away an' never noticin' it!"

Betty crept back to the house, and the minister went on his way.

As soon as Betty had an opportunity she gave Alexander the minister's invitation. The poor dispirited man was for a moment much impressed by the unwonted attention, but he looked down at his loose bag-kneed trousers and shook his head sadly.

When Sunday night came around, however, he crept out of the house, and almost involuntarily walked in the direction of the schoolhouse.

It was the first time he had ventured any distance from the spot which he had made his home, and the free breath of the prairie, instead of exhilarating him, disturbed his weakened nerves; the great expanse, the awesome lonesomeness made him shiver. Buffalo bones were piled in great ghostly white heaps along the railway beside which part of his path lay. He glanced fearfully at them, and whispered hoarsely,

"Bones, bones, bones; that's what we are all coming to." He started and shrank from everything he saw and heard by the wayside—some night birds, the startled flight of small prairie animals, the wind's weird whisperings and stealthy creeping in the tall, rank grass. The moon went under a cloud, and the dense prairie darkness would have engulfed everything but for the protective stars which kept watch overhead in the blue-black night.

When he drew near the meeting place he heard singing—an old familiar psalm tune, for it was a Presbyterian body that was holding the meeting—that he had been brought up on. The weather was warm, and the window was open, so he crouched down under it and listened.

"That man hath perfect blessedness
Who walketh not astray
In counsel of ungodly men,
Nor stands in sinner's way,
Nor sitteth in the scorner's chair;
But placeth his delight
Upon God's law, and meditates
On his law day and night."

The old psalm tune rolled along in its slow, solemn way, filling the small meeting place with sound, while Alexander outside laid his face down in the coarse

grass which grew up to the very side of the building and moaned.

The minister announced his text and began his sermon, but Alexander did not hear it; he was so overcome by that old tune, and the words laden with memories of the long past days. He was looking in on a meeting where all the home people were gathered. There was Granny Neilson with her steel-rimmed spectacles, her trembling hands holding the psalter; there was Mrs. McTavish, sharp and kindly, knowing the words without a book; the schoolmaster, his poetic face all aglow; his mother, and too, there was little Maggie with her red frock and the red ribbons tying her curls. He smelled again the Balm of Gilead which grew at the home church door, and the lilacs of the manse garden just across the fence. He did not know what the sermon was about, even, until toward the close, when he sat up on his elbow and heard the minister say:

"The longer the prodigal stays away the more he sins against his home."

"Oh, he can't go back," groaned Alexander, as if the words had been addressed to him, "without taking misery and heartbreak along with him—he can't—he can't! Oh, mother! mother!" he cried, in the anguish of his soul stretching his arms out into the

prairie darkness; "mother! mother! mother!" After a moment he shut his hands and drew them to his bosom as if they held something precious; but they enfolded nothing but bits of night.

He began to fear that the people would soon be coming out of the meeting—he must not let them see him; so he rose to his feet and stumbled back over the black, dreary road—back to his prison house.

XXIII

BILL GILOOLY GOES WEST

AFTER Bill Gilooly had finished his course in the school of practical science, and received his diploma, "This is to certify that William Henry Gilooly has passed all the examinations fitting him to be a mining engineer," etc., etc., he started with a band of surveyors out toward the great West.

When the party had travelled some days and nights, they left the train and secured lodging at the Wayside Tavern, it being near the railroad, and also the hotel that was nearest the base of their operations. The party expected to be obliged to camp out in canvas tents, but when near a hotel they found it more convenient to make it their lodging place.

Mark Ahrens welcomed his guests loudly and heartily. "Come in, gentlemen, come in; we'll give ye the best the country provides—good feed, good whisky, good service. There's a dog out here in the kitchen ye kin make black yer boots an' do all yer dirty work. Ye kin call him yer valet while yer here.

He don't dast refuse to do anything ye ast him to do for fear I'll sack him."

Jock was carrying a pail of swill to the hogpen in the backyard, and saw the party leave the train. Instantly he recognised Bill Gilooly—the same red head, the same generous, florid countenance, the same strong, manly bearing; the same, and yet not the same; Bill now carried about him an air of culture he did not have before; *thought*, as well as good nature, now looked out of the florid countenance. In his fright, Jock dropped his pail, spilling the swill, and ran behind the pigpen. He crouched down near the ground, turning hot and cold. He heard the proprietor calling loudly for him, but he did not stir.

After a few minutes' reflection he began to think that Bill Gilooly would not recognise him. He at one time had been straight and tidy, now he was round-shouldered and slatternly. His once smooth face was now covered by a heavy growth of hair. His hair, which had turned almost white, was cut straight around, and hung heavy and thick below his ears. His eyes, that had once been admired for their frankness, had now the look in them of some hunted, frightened wild beast. When he had fully decided that Bill would not know him, he crept out from his hiding place and responded to his master's call.

"Ye dog ye, where ha' ye been?" demanded Mark Ahrens in great excitement. "Some gentlemens have arrove at the house; see ye wait on 'em well; do ye hear? Git down an' lick their feet ef they want ye; do ye hear? They have the stuff, an' we must keep 'em as long as we can; do ye hear? Bring me two or three pails o' water to put in the whisky; do ye hear?"

Jock nodded assent to all these injunctions; and procuring two pails from the kitchen, he proceeded to the spring for the desired water.

When he was on his way to the spring, which was some rods from the house, he was saying to himself, "I must never speak in Bill's presence for fear he might recognise my voice." Then he felt conscious that even his voice, from being cheerful and frank, had become whining and cringing; that even Bill, familiar as he had been with him, could not recognise it.

"I must never drink a drop while he is here or I might give myself away," he further added; "I must stay in the kitchen and let Betty do the dining-room work. I'll scrub for Betty if she'll wait on table."

He had reached the spring, and getting down on his knees beside the small pool of water that lay

around it, he leaned on his hands and peered long and anxiously at his reflected face in the water.

"Bill will never know me; Maggie would not know me; my own mother would not know me. I am the scum and off-scouring of society. I am one of the submerged tenth that philanthropists write about. I am one of the non-elect that Calvinists preach about. I am a lost soul."

A sharp yell from Mark Ahrens put an end to his reflections; he jumped to his feet, filled his pails, and returned to the house.

The engineers were a jolly lot of fellows, making life as merry as possible, and Bill Gilooly was the leader in practical jokes. He had some of the born naturalist's love for everything living; even snakes were not excluded from his interested regard; and one day, picking up a small garter snake, he put it in his hat. Instantly it occurred to him to have some fun with it, so he carried his hat in and laid it on Mark Ahrens' bar. Mark came to pour out some whisky, and his eyes fell on the snake in the hat. "Look at that!" he cried, pointing toward the hat. "Look at what?" questioned the other men, whom Bill had instructed to help him with his joke. "Don't yer see the snake?" said Mark, feeling decidedly queer. "Snake?" said the others, "snake in your

eye." Then Mark became thoroughly frightened; he thought he was getting the "D. T.'s," and slipping out of the barroom, when he thought himself unnoticed, he ran to the kitchen pantry and took a strong dose of baking soda.

While he was out Bill quietly opened the front door and allowed the snake to run under the doorstep. Mark was sure when he returned and saw no snake that the soda had been an effectual cure.

Another day Bill secured a minnow, and placing it in his pocket, he carried it to the barroom. Mark had a bottle of whisky standing on the counter ready for immediate use, and Bill, seizing his opportunity when no one was looking, pulled out the cork and dropped the minnow into the bottle of whisky.

When Mark came to wait on his next customer the small fish floated out into the glass of whisky. Mark stared, and the customer stared; both for an instant were possessed with the one fear that they had delirium tremens, that the snake had this time taken the form of a fish. When they found out that a joke had been played upon them, Mark said, trying to cover his chagrin, "Try yer jokes on that drunken dog in the kitchen."

The week of the engineers' stay was almost through, and Jock had succeeded in keeping him-

self pretty well in the background. He had done all sorts of petty jobs for Betty on condition that she would go for him into the dining-room, or other places where he feared to go.

"It's shy the poor chap is, even of his own kind—men," said Betty wonderingly, "shy as a gal." But she was good natured, and easy-going, and did not ask too many questions.

Sometimes Bill Gilooly thought there was something familiar in the walk of the man-of-all-work when he caught a glimpse of him through the window carrying out swill in the backyard of the tavern. Then when the kitchen door would swing suddenly open, he would see the same man glance furtively in with a something strangely familiar in his eye. But Bill felt quite certain that he never could have seen the white-headed, white-bearded man before, and that these tricks of expression were but a strange coincidence.

It was the night before the engineers intended leaving to move to a point further on. A crowd had gathered in the barroom of the Wayside Tavern; there was no other sitting-room. Bill Gilooly, who was still musically inclined, had found a mouth-organ, and was filling the room with the plaintive strains of some of the favourite old airs. There is no form of

expression, no noise-making, which works on human emotions as music works; some of the section men who had began to grow quarrelsome suddenly subsided, and some who were laughing boisterously grew quiet; there was not much drinking being done. This did not suit Mark Ahrens, and he grew generous, and treated all hands who would drink—out of the whisky he had most freely watered. He called loudly for Jock to bring more glasses into the barroom, and the latter, not daring to disobey—Betty had gone out somewhere—walked cringing in with a tray full.

“See here,” said a great, heavily set section boss the moment he set eyes on Jock, “you must have a glass to help straighten you up,” and he slapped poor Jock’s round shoulders with his heavy hand. “Ye’ve company to-night, an’ p’raps ye’ll never see ’em again,” he added, pouring out a brimming glass of whisky and putting it into Jock’s trembling hand. Without a second’s thought Jock savagely drank the contents of the glass.

The deed was done; the leash of prudence that had bound Jock’s poetical muse was snapped; turning to the assembled company, but fixing his gaze on Bill Gilooly, he raised his right arm, and in a voice which had entirely lost its cringing, whining character, and assumed the authoritative tone of the orator, he said:

“The man who hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treason, stratagems and spoils——”

Before he had finished the eyes of all the company were fastened upon him; Bill Gilooly had dropped his mouth-organ and was staring at him as he might have stared at one who had risen from the dead.

Jock caught the gleam of recognition in Bill's eye, and suddenly coming to himself, he dropped the glass he held in his hand to the hearthstone, shivering it into a thousand splinters, and, turning, he fled out through the back door.

“Sandy,” said Bill in a hoarse whisper, and throwing down his mouth-organ, he dashed after Jock. Out, out, through the long prairie-grass sped Jock, knowing not whither he was going, heeding not the wild cry of the coyote, the gophers that scurried from under his feet, or the whirring wings of the nighthawk over his head. Bill ran after him, but not knowing the locality as well he could not overtake him for some time. At length strength overcame, and Bill laid his hand on Jock's shoulder.

“Sandy,” he gasped. “Sandy, what does this mean?—you're not going to stay here—you're coming off with me to-morrow—I'll get you a job on the

survey along with me. Do you hear me, boy?" as Sandy turned his face from him. "What did you mean by leaving us all these years?"

"Bill," said Sandy, bursting into tears and pushing away his friend with both hands, "go away from me. You can't do anything with me; I'm a lost soul, a lost soul; leave me, Bill, leave me."

"I'll *not* leave you, Sandy," said Bill fiercely, "so you can make up your mind to that. Leave you indeed, for that scoundrel, Ahrens, to treat you as I have seen him treat you! You're coming with me, Sandy! I'll shave off your beard to-morrow and make you young again," he added as Sandy made no further resistance. "I'll lend you clothes and collars and shoes out of my kit, and you'll be a new man. We do not go until ten o'clock in the morning; we'll have plenty of time to prepare."

"You can do nothing with me, Bill," hoarsely whispered Sandy. "You don't know me now; I'm a lost soul."

"Well, you'll be a *found* soul after this," said Bill. "You'll come with me to-morrow."

In half an hour Bill had talked Sandy into admitting that he was *willing* to accompany him. "Then it's settled," said Bill; "we're off in company to-morrow."

They walked back to the tavern together, shook hands, and parted for the night outside the back door. Sandy climbed to his attic room childishly murmuring, "I'll be a *found* soul to-morrow," while Bill retired to his room on the ground floor, and proceeded to pick from his wardrobe the garments in which he intended to array Sandy in the morning.

As soon, however, as Sandy was off by himself in the dark of his attic room, it seemed as if all the fiends that ever haunted his life fell upon him.

"You'll break away and drink the first thing, and disgrace Bill," said one. "You'll be a fine incumbrance on Bill's good nature," shrieked another. "You'll probably steal the engineers' tools, as you stole the silver bowl and little red shoes, and trade them off for whisky." "Run away to-night," urged a fourth, "and be out of here in the morning, and Bill will know nothing about you." This last seemed to Sandy a reasonable suggestion, and half an hour after he went to bed he rose, dressed himself, and stole off out in the darkness over the prairie. He started to run, looking behind him as if he thought he might be pursued. He continued to run until he was out of breath, and out of sight of the Wayside Tavern.

Bill slept all night; the joyous thought that he had found Sandy, and was going to henceforth care for him and take him home to his mother and Maggie meeting him like a warm embrace when he first awoke to consciousness in the early morning.

He jumped from his bed and hastily dressed. Something, even in his haste, made him think of the prayer he used to say in the old time, "I'm walkin' th' other way," but this time he said, "So help me God, I'm going to help another fellow to walk the other way."

He rolled the articles he intended for Sandy into a bundle, and proceeded in the dim light to grope his way toward Sandy's room, the bundle under his left arm, and a pair of boots, held by the straps, in his right hand.

He had seen Sandy climb the stairs, so he proceeded in that direction. He rapped on a door near the head of the stairs and received no answer. Then he went farther along the passage and rapped at another door, calling cheerfully, "Sandy, boy, where's your sky parlour?"

From within the second room Betty's voice called out:

"Mister, if it's Jock yer wantin', the other room is hisn."

Bill retraced his steps, opened the door of the first room, and went in. He saw at a glance that Sandy was not within; and a sudden chill smote him at the sight of the empty bed.

"But he must be around somewhere," he said mentally, recovering himself. "He'll be back in a few moments. I told him I would come early to dress him; he expected me."

Bill waited ten minutes; then he went downstairs and looked in the kitchen and barroom. He next went into the yard, and looked carefully around the outbuildings, even going to the pigpen to which he had seen Sandy carrying the swill.

Coming back to the house he met Betty, who, as she had been awakened, rose earlier than usual.

Betty looked frightened; her hair, which she kept cut short "so as not to have any more bother with it than men have with their'n," almost stood on end.

"Mister," she said, "I heerd a noise last night, and I jumped out o' bed, an' lookin' through the winder I saw Jock runnin' off out over the prairie; an' p'raps he never came back."

In spite of many earnest questions from Bill, no more intelligence could be gleaned from Betty, only that it was some "Saint's" night and she was

"afeard" to stay long out of bed, even to watch where Jock might be going.

Bill was grievously disappointed, but he could do no more than leave several addressed envelopes with Betty, with instructions to send him immediate word in case Sandy returned.

XXIV

THE DERELICT

THE night that Alexander left the Wayside Tavern he kept running on and on into the darkness until he was out of breath. Then looking fearfully behind him, and extending his arm to its full length, with the palm of his hand he shoved, as it were, something from him.

"Go away, Bill, go away," he muttered. "Cast not your pearls before swine—the dog has turned to his vomit again. Maggie, Maggie!" he cried pitifully, "I've eaten the caterpillars and the worms!"

Sometimes he would run furiously; sometimes he would walk.

After he had proceeded a few miles in the darkness that seemed thick enough to cut, and was somewhat tired, he attempted another spurt at running, struck his toe against a snag, and fell heavily to the ground, striking his head against a stone.

He lay there unconscious for a time, when over the trail, through the tall prairie-grass, Hezekiah Hinks

came in his "democrat" waggon, drawn by his pair of broncos.

The horses came to the human body lying across the road and stopped short. The owner urged them in vain to go on; then he climbed from the waggon to see what was the matter.

Seeing the prostrate form of a man, he stooped and put his hand on his brow. At the touch Alexander stirred and muttered, "I'll eat caterpillars and worms, I will."

"I'll be slivered," said Hezekiah when he heard the strange words, "if we can't give you something better than that to eat in this country of plenty."

He chafed the hands and brow of the prostrate man until he brought him to consciousness. In another half hour he had his man sitting up; five minutes later he was standing on his feet, and Hezekiah assisted him into the waggon.

Half an hour later, when the waggon stopped, a door of a house flew open, and a flood of light and warmth poured out into the chilly night.

"Is that you, Hezekiah?" called Mrs. Hinks. "My, what kept you so late? You must be starved. Do come in; I've a nice hot supper here for you, baked potatoes, piping hot; cold tongue, cottage cheese, fresh rolls——"

Just then she recognised that her husband had company, and stopped talking.

"Elizabeth," said Mr. Hinks, "bring out a chair and let us help this poor fellow out of the waggon; I found him lying insensible on the upper trail. Hurry, dear."

Elizabeth deftly snatched up a chair and carried it out; and she and her husband assisted Alexander, who was feeble and trembling, out of the waggon.

The friendly contact of human arms, the sympathy that he felt emanating from two human hearts, as he was being led in the open door of that home, Mr. Hinks supporting him on the right and Mrs. Hinks on the left, made Alexander think that he was entering heaven, attended by ministering angels.

When he was once inside, the warmth and cheer, the bright pictures on the walls, the plants in the window, the cat purring before the fire, brought back the old home. When they had placed him lying on a lounge, and Mrs. Hinks had brought him a cup of tea, he called her Mrs. McTavish; another time as she was arranging his pillow when he was nearly asleep, he called her "mother."

The lounge on which he was lying was broad and comfortable—made, the woodwork of it, by Hezekiah's own deft hands; the mattress of softest goose-

feathers was Mrs. Hinks' manufacture—and they left him on it for the night.

He slept well, and in the morning when he awakened he felt the soft feather pillow under his head,—his pillow had for years been made of cornhusks—and looked at the pure white pillowcase—his pillow at the Wayside Tavern never had a case—and ran his fingers over the soft white blanket, aromatic with the cedar boughs the housewife had put among her blankets in summer to protect them from the moths, and he thought for a moment that he was back again in old Mapleton. He smelled the appetising odour of frying bacon, the fragrance of coffee, and it brought to his mind the breakfasts his mother used to prepare—it seemed to him just then hundreds of years before. He attempted to lift his head, but it felt heavy, and he let it drop back on the pillow, and lay with closed eyes listening to the innocent prattle of the children as they were being dressed,—the house was small, and the partitions between the rooms thin—to the mother singing as she went about getting the breakfast, to the grace which the father said at the table, to the love-whispers which seemed to pervade the entire home. He felt as though he were one who had spent a period of time in hell, and was now suddenly transported to heaven.

The Hinks children, when they were being put to bed the night before, plied their mother with questions as to why she was allowing the strange man to sleep on the lounge in the sitting-room. The little mother, raised on Bible teaching, found the book, and turning to the thirteenth chapter of Hebrews, second verse, she read, "*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*"

The children but partially understood the great truth, and all next day watched the stranger curiously, thinking that at any moment he might develop wings, or that possibly he had a fine, large, white pair folded away under his rough, grey, full-cloth coat.

The stranger lay all day on his couch in a half doze; toward evening he was stronger, and he sat at the table for his supper, the awed children scarcely able to eat watching for angelic evidences. Mr. and Mrs. Hinks politely asked no questions of their guest, thinking that they should have plenty of time to learn all about him.

When bedtime drew near Alexander saw the cat being put out, and the clock being wound; he heard the little children saying their prayers and giving their good-night kisses. He came near seizing his hat and rushing out when one wee white-robed lad lisped, "*Now I lay me.*"

The family retired early, as was the custom among the prairie folk, and when Alexander was left the sole occupant of the sitting-room he drew off his boots and lay down, but not to sleep. He heard the snores of the head of the house, and the children talking incoherently in their sleep. During the day he had seen Mrs. Hinks give some patent medicine to one of the children. He had watched her as she had replaced the bottle on a shelf in the very room in which he was sleeping. He knew that alcohol would be used in preparing the tinctures that were component parts of the medicine. He had thought of that when he saw the bottle in her hand. Instead of going to sleep when left to himself he gazed in the darkness toward the shelf on which Mrs. Hinks had put the bottle of medicine. It was only hours since he had a drink of whisky, but it seemed like days and days. He gazed so steadily that after awhile objects in the distance became visible; he actually could see the outline of that medicine bottle. He sat up on his couch and gazed still more intently at the shelf, licking his lips. Then throwing off the blanket with one sweep of his hand, he rose from the couch, and with long, stealthy, tiger-like strides he crept toward the shelf in the corner.

Seizing the bottle, he drew out the cork, smelled

the contents, then placing the neck to his lips, he drank the noxious mixture, all for the small quantity of alcohol which it contained.

Frightened at what he had done, and fearing consequences, and detection, he put the empty bottle in his pocket, crept back to his couch, found his shoes and hat, and with the said articles in his hand he noiselessly opened the door and slipped out into the darkness.

He walked some distance, then he stopped to put on his shoes and hat, feeling none the worse for his draught except a terrible burning in his stomach.

He walked for hours far out into the prairie. Growing tired, he dropped down into a "sloo," which at this season of the year was dry, and fell asleep.

Suddenly he was awakened by a strange crackling sound; the whole heavens above him were lurid. "The resurrection and fires of hell!" he shouted, jumping to his feet. Over an illimitable space the tall prairie-grass was being licked up by a tornado of yellow flame which was coming fast upon him. His head was quite clear now; he grasped the situation; he instantly remembered reading in his boyhood days in the old village home about the manner in which some early prairie settlers had saved themselves during a prairie fire. Diving frantically to the bottom of his

trousers pocket, he drew out some matches that he had been in the habit of carrying about with him to light the fires in the Wayside Tavern. He struck one on the heel of his boot and set fire to the grass in several places around him. In a few minutes he had a great, charred, blackened ring all around his "sloo," and none too soon; the tornado of flame came up beside him, and finding nothing to burn, swept past his place of refuge, and went on its devastating way.

With the perspiration bursting from every pore, Alexander dropped down on the ground again, but not to sleep.

"Why did I wake up?" he asked aloud of the starry heavens above him. "Why didn't I sleep away and let the fire purge the earth of such as I? '*The tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the world,*'" he quoted. It began to rain, and he tried to crouch in under a low sumach. Near morning he fell into a heavy sleep, and did not wake up until the sun had risen.

Then starting up on his elbow a wondrous view met his gaze, a mirage of the prairie. There upon the atmospheric canvas of the heavens were clearly produced mountains, streams, and forests of a district of country hundreds of miles away. The ravishing beauty of the delectable white-capped moun-

tains bewildered the man, and he said in an awed whisper, "Am I dead, and is this heaven?" Then he moved and felt a twinge of rheumatism, caused by his night of exposure, and he cried harshly, "Not so; no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of heaven!"

He heard the rumbling of a train, and discovered that he was not far from a rail-track. He started out and walked the track until he came to a station. He stayed there until a freight train drew in, then watching his opportunity, he swung himself into a freight car, and dropped down behind some large boxes.

When the Hinks family rose that same morning the children opened the sitting-room door to take a fresh peep at the stranger.

"Ma, ma!" called little Bessie excitedly, "your angel's gone!"

Mrs. Hinks found on investigation that their protégé was indeed gone, and felt very much disappointed; she had hoped to have been able to do or say something which might have helped this poor fellow-being who had so strangely come under her roof. She thought that all she had done was as naught, little dreaming that the short stay in her home was the means of reviving a sweet picture of home life

and love that had become well-nigh obliterated in a human heart.

She missed the medicine bottle the next time she went to administer a dose to her children, but she never even thought of associating her loss with the stranger who had been so recently with her; she imagined that she herself had absently put the bottle in some out-of-the-way place, and that she would find it some future day.

XXV

IN THE OLD VILLAGE

THE little village that was the birthplace of Bill Gilooly and Sandy McBain was also going through the changes which time must effect everywhere. Many old people had died, and some not so old had laid down the burden of life. Among the latter was the Widow McBain; after a very short illness she suddenly passed away. The doctor gave some long name to her malady, but when Mrs. Brady heard the technical term she said:

"He kin give it whatever fancy name he pl'ases, but *I* know the woman died av broken heart."

It was Mrs. McTavish who at the last moment saw the faded, drawn face blossom into a smile which wiped out every wrinkle and trace of pain, and heard the glad, expectant cry, "He's comin' back, ma boy, ma ain son Sandy!"

"Aye," whispered Mrs. McTavish in awed tones, when a few moments later she was closing the glazing eyes, "she was seein' things that are on'y speeritually discerned."

At the funeral the widow's neighbours sat around her coffin, while the aged minister standing at its head read in low tremulous tones :

“ ‘ We are troubled on every side, yet not disturbed ; we are perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed.’ ”

And the church choir sang :

“ For All Thy Saints Who from Their Labour Rest.”

All the village was hushed in silence, even the little children stopping their play, as the funeral procession wound from the Widow's late home up the hill to the cemetery ; and each heart was asking the question, “ Where is the son ? ”

A month after the villagers stood over the Widow's open grave the little red shoes were seen on Joe Pepper's baby. It was Mrs. McTavish who noticed them. The silver bowl was never seen again.

Joe Pepper himself had grown to look like an animated puffball ; his body, mind, and soul, all seemed to have grown spongy. His delicate first wife had died, and he had married a young wife, and a second family of young children played around the hotel. He sat most of the time in one of the large chairs in front of the Mapleton House, sucking in God's air like a jellyfish, and emanating torpor and

stupidity. He no longer was disturbed by qualms of conscience regarding his business, or spasms of sympathy with the victims thereof.

He seemed to have grown blind to everything but the gleam of silver; Nature spread her wondrous, changeful panorama of form and colour before him day by day, month by month, year by year, but he never saw it. The birds warbled their ethereal music into his very ears, the winds made eolian harps of vine, leaf, and branch over his head; the spheres swung to music in the vast spaces around him, but he heard none of them. If, however, a poor bedraggled, unkempt fellow-being came within his line of vision, with a dime or a nickel in his hand, a glint of intelligence or cunning would shoot athwart the bleared iris of his eyes, and immediately he would set afloat schemes to make the silver bit his.

One eventful day he was sitting in his usual place in the large armchair, when One-Armed Joe came along. One-Armed Joe had just made a sale to Mrs. McShane of a portrait of the Pope—in which his Holiness appeared a glorious vision of scarlet and white lace—and was consequently the proud possessor of twenty-five cents. He was rolling the coin about in his one yellow, soiled, claw-like right hand, thinking in an irresolute way that he might buy some flour

with it, as they were out of flour at home, and his wife was suffering with neuralgia, when he sauntered past the Mapleton House. Joe Pepper at once saw the gleaming silver bit, and arousing from his torpor, and stretching himself like a great cobra, he began to show a new interest in One-Armed Joe.

"Good mornin', Joe," he said to the latter as he slouched along the sidewalk in front of him. "Come an' sit down a bit," patting with his hand another armchair beside him; "ye look most like a half-drowned rat," following the words by a hoarse rattling sound that was intended for a laugh. "Yer all drug out, workin' so hard; rest a bit, man."

One-Armed Joe, feeling flattered, dropped into the chair beside the tavern-keeper, never knowing that he was the simple fly that had walked into the spider's web.

"Man alive," continued the tavern-keeper, when One-Armed Joe had seated himself, "what's the use'n workin' so hard; you're on'y goin' through the world onet; ye ought to have as good a time as ye kin git. Take it easy, Joe, take it easy."

This advice exactly coincided with Joe's views, and he was as clay in the hands of the tavern-keeper.

After they had talked ten minutes, and had waylaid one or two other men, causing them to stop to

answer some questions, the whole company lurched into the barroom.

An hour later One-Armed Joe came out, minus his twenty-five cents, and more drunk than he very often became. He staggered down toward the railroad, became bewildered as to where he was walking, and was suddenly struck by a passing engine. In five minutes One-Armed Joe was dead.

The shocked village was unanimous in extending help; the women carried food and clothing to the widow and the fatherless, while the men subscribed money to pay the funeral expenses. A minister was procured—the only claim they had on him was that the children of One-Armed Joe had attended Sunday school in his church—to read the burial service over the pine coffin and the open grave.

The day following the funeral the widow commenced again her labour for the support of her family, with one less to feed, and cloth, and keep clean. In time young Reuben shot into a tall stripling, procured work in the village, and insisted on transferring the burden from his mother's shoulders to his own.

Many a time as the good people of the village watched the lad they nodded their heads and said, "One cannot help wondering where the good in that boy came from."

Maggie Thompson had been a year at the hospital, when one night she was at the bedside of a dying child, a little girl. The parents of the child were there watching the laboured breathing of their only darling with breaking hearts.

"Nurse," whispered the father hoarsely in a moment of quiet, "when that child's life goes out, mine goes out. I may walk the earth a few years longer, but my joy, my interests in life, are gone—gone."

"Nurse," said the mother, "you have never been a mother; you do not know the meaning of suffering; you do not know what it is to have your heart torn out by losing a child; but you are somebody's child; is your mother living?"

"Yes," answered Maggie.

"How many children has she?"

"I'm the only one."

"The *only* one, and away from *her*. Oh, nurse!"

"Is your father living?" asked the man who had been listening to the conversation.

Again Maggie answered in the affirmative.

"Can he afford to keep you at home?" was his next question.

"Oh, yes," returned Maggie proudly. "He has said to me more than once, 'Surely I can afford to support one bairn.'"

"Then go back to him, go back to him," said the man. "Life is too short, and if he has only *you*, your place is with him. He cannot do without you."

That night Maggie shed tears into her pillow, and received fresh revelations regarding *great* work in the world.

Strangely enough, the next day Maggie received the following pathetic note:

"DEAR MAGGIE:

"Yer old father wants coddlin' an' mindin' too; he has the rheumatics bad, and he does not feel that he can do without his wee daughtie. Maggie, ma pearl, come home.

"DADDY."

Maggie could resist no longer; that night, instead of taking her accustomed place by the bedside of strangers, she packed her trunk for home.

When she reached home her father folded her to his arms with the determination never to let her go again; and somehow Maggie felt as she returned the loving embrace that the grandest work she could do might be performed within the four walls of her home, within the precincts of her native village.

She settled happily down, and went on her simple way, wrapping in an atmosphere of love and cheer

the dear pair she called "father" and "mother," and being a thing of beauty and a joy forever to the entire village. "For," said Mrs. McTavish, speaking about her, "what noble, aspiring young woman walking the street of a village, in all her purity and integrity, can help bein' an insperation til every beholder—somethin' good for th' eyes to look upon, an' thae bright frocks o' hers; aren't they pretty?"

There was a certain expression of pain in the depths of Maggie's eyes, despite her smile and cheery ways, that made Granny Neilson, one day she was looking at her, whisper to herself something about a refiner's fire, and a purifier of silver.

Shortly after the funeral of the Widow McBain it began to be whispered around the village that on a certain night a man's figure, bent and unkempt, was seen standing over Mrs. McBain's grave in the cemetery. Those of the village not gifted with imagination said it was all fancy, that what was seen was only the shadow of a tree.

"I wonder *will* the poor prodigal ever come back?" said Mrs. Brady, as a group of us, one evening at a church "social," were discussing the apparition in the graveyard.

"Not likely," said Peter McKim emphatically, closing his lips down tightly over his few remaining

front teeth, "if you mean *reform*. Drunkards seldom reform."

"I havena a doobt he'll come back," said Mrs. McTavish. . . . "Back til th' Father's hoose at ony rate, an' I think back til his own village home. . . . Comin' back won't mean a restoration of what he has lost by goin' til th' far country, no more than it meant it til th' prodigal o' th' Scripture," she added, "but yon vision o' his mother's was a vision o' th' soul."

A little later Mrs. McTavish was in the shoemaker's shop, recounting the changes that had taken place in the village, along with the Village Saint.

"But of all the events that has ever happened in this village I don't call one more wonderful than th' transformation o' Bill Gilooly," she said. "My, I mind well when I first set eyes on that wee baby down in that Gilooly shanty, that's since been burned; I said to mysel'—in my heart like, so no other would be influenced by it—'Another little vagabond to run th' streets, an' by an' by curse th' earth'; I really did; an' now th' lad's a *gentleman*; I call it a meeracle—nothing short o' a meeracle."

"Ye forget," said the old man on the cobbler's bench, "that the lowest o' us is made in His image."

He pegged at the sole of a shoe awhile in silence,

then he added, "Man is a wonderful creature, a wonderful creature. There are other great creatures, but man is the greatest. A small rabbit can hear sounds that a man cannot hear; that great bird, the eagle, can see farther than he can see; a horse and a dog can run faster than a man can run; and an elephant is many times as strong as he; yet a man can go to the forest and with these two hands of his"—laying down his sole leather and pegs and spreading out the palms of his work-hardened hands—"can cut down a tree; he can dig into the earth and bring up metals; and with either one of them, or the two of them combined, he can make instruments that can carry sounds farther than the rabbit can hear, and another instrument that can see things that the eagle's eye cannot see. He can construct an engine that can outrun the horse or dog, or swing the elephant like a toy. Man can draw down God's power; we do not know that any other animal can."

"Yes," said Mrs. McTavish dreamily; "Bill Gilooly is a gentleman now."

XXVI

THE BEST ROBE

ALEXANDER MCBAIN stayed in his hiding-place in the freight car until hunger compelled him to creep out. By this time he was many miles away from the old haunts. He was no longer afraid of meeting Bill Gilooly, and with some confidence he approached a farmhouse and asked for food, offering to do some work in return. After this fashion, stealing rides on the train and stopping off to cut a little wood or rake a lawn for food when hunger assailed him, Alexander was carried on and on, he knew not whither. After many days' travel he landed in a great city, and he learned on inquiry that he was in Winnipeg.

He sought work and found it very soon with a nursery and seedsman. In a sort of accidental way the employer had found out that he was a Latin scholar, and, despite his unkempt appearance, he knew that he could be very useful in his business. The botanical names of plants and seeds was something that the majority of his employees could get

through their heads; he had a place which he felt this educated young man could fill admirably. He guessed pretty accurately the reason of his reduced circumstances and agreed to take him and pay him good wages at the end of the three months' season of gathering and packeting the seeds. He would agree to give him his board and lodging in the meantime.

Alexander, hope rising once again in his bosom, accepted the offer. "I can't drink," he said to himself exultingly, "when I cannot get any money. I'll be a teetotaller. . . . And when I break off entirely I'll go back home—to the village—to Maggie—and Mother."

Alexander kept sober and worked well; the growing things with which he came in such daily and hourly contact seemed to have an influence over him. Something was awakened in his heart that he never knew was there, or if he did know once, he thought such feelings had long been dead. Some hand from the Infinite seemed to reach out to him through the fragrance of a blossom, or the beauty and grace of a vine or leaf, beckoning him to something higher. He had more than once dropped a tear into the pure chalice of a lily, when no human presence was around.

A week before his three months' term was up, as

he was going on an errand for his employer, he had occasion to pass a saloon. By accident, or design, some of the intoxicating fluid in which that institution dealt was spilled on the sidewalk in front of the saloon. The sun shone hotly down on it and the fumes rose strongly to Alexander's nostrils as he passed. He shivered; then something like madness seemed to leap into his nerves; he started to run and never stopped until he reached the nursery. He picked up a bright new trowel and went off among some plants, apparently to work, but in five minutes he had gone back to the saloon, traded the trowel—the wife of the proprietor of the saloon just wanted a trowel to work among her house-plants—for a glass of whisky.

It was a fiery, adulterated draught, and so worked on Alexander's nerves that he began to quote Shakespeare. Evidently his thoughts were influenced by his recent labour among the plants in the gardens, for, turning to a man at his side, he extended his hand and said feelingly:

“ ‘Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with in-

dustry—why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills.’ ”

This so amused a bystander that he treated Alexander to another glass of whisky.

After this he wandered off out into the city streets; continuing with his Shakespeare as he threaded his way among the crowd, he muttered thickly:

“‘Jog on, jog on, the foot-path way,
And merrily hent the stile-a
A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.’ ”

He wandered around until night, and when too tired to walk he sat down on a doorstep. A policeman found him there and made him walk on. Every time he stopped to rest one of these uniformed protectors of the peace said, “Move on.” At last he came to a church, in which he heard music; thinking that he might at least rest a few moments in the vestibule, he crept in and sat on a lower step of a flight of stairs leading to the gallery. There was a musical rehearsal going on in the church, and, as Alexander listened, he heard repeated over and over again, in a sort of recitative:

“And while he was yet a great way off the father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran and fell

on his neck and kissed him, and kissed him, and kissed him——”

Alexander could listen to no more; jumping to his feet he ran out of the church.

Finding a place, after some more walking, where a sidewalk was elevated some feet above the ground, he crawled in under it to spend the night. He fell asleep to the sound of tramping feet above his head.

On that same evening, back in the old village home, Granny Neilson was sitting in her rocking-chair with closed eyes. A beautiful picture she made with her soft, white muslin cap and kerchief, and her dear old withered hands folded over her black gown. She had laid her knitting in her lap and taken off her spectacles, and her lips were softly whispering:

“‘Prayer makes the darkened clouds withdraw,
Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw,
Gives exercise to faith and love;
Brings every blessing from above.’”

In the early morning, before daylight, Alexander awoke; he was stiff and sore, and he crept out of his hiding-place. Wandering back toward the busy part of the city, his attention was attracted by a crowd of men, a wild-eyed, unkempt, starved-looking company in front of a door. Learning that they were

waiting for said door to be opened to admit them to a free breakfast, he joined himself to the waiting company.

In a few minutes the door opened and the hungry men filed into a large room provided with wooden benches, where they were served with hot coffee and rolls.

After the lunch a man stood on a platform at the end of the room and began to sing.

Alexander, feeling actually ashamed of having been driven to the necessity of accepting free food, had crept into the very back seat, and when he had eaten his roll and drunk his coffee he leaned his elbows on his knees and buried his face in his hands. The light was dim and the figure on the back seat was scarcely noticed by the other men. When the man on the platform had finished his song, having urged all the men to join him in the chorus, he began to talk. By this time Alexander had slipped out the door, which stood ajar, and was sitting on the doorstep.

The man on the platform read the story of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, then, looking up from his reading-desk, he said :

“Thirty-eight years of sin, suffering, disappointment, neglect, this man endured.”

"Only thirty-five," muttered Alexander out on the steps, "but it seems like a thousand."

"It is a pitiful story," continued the man. "But it was all changed in one moment by the pity and power of the wonderful Saviour. There were plenty of people as needy as himself in that great multitude by the pool, but somehow this man was alone in his misery."

"Yes, alone, alone," muttered Alexander.

"Poor, forlorn wreck! He had been left to drift on the rocks with no one to care," continued the man on the platform. "He had probably been a great sinner, and his suffering was his own fault, because Jesus told him to sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon him."

"Yes, his own fault, his own fault," gasped the poor wreck on the doorstep; "or his father's fault."

"Very likely his friends were tired helping such a good-for-nothing, so there he lay helpless and hopeless."

Two or three violent sobs was the only response to this from the figure on the doorstep.

"But there are no good-for-nothings in God's view in the humanity redeemed by His Son. If you would see the heart of God, here it is opened to us in the sympathy of Jesus with this outcast. Men and

women had seen him there for years, and perhaps had said, 'Poor fellow!' but nobody had offered to help him. Some were in too great a hurry; others thought it was not their business, his friends—his own people ought to look after him. Others said, 'I've known that poor soul for a long time; he is always sitting there; it is no use to do anything for people who never try to help themselves.' Christ saw things as they were; He knew that the man had not lived a right life."

"No, no," came in sepulchral tones from the doorstep, "he has not lived a right life."

"Christ saw him sitting hopelessly, as if there was nothing else to do; He knew that he had been that way a long time."

"A long time," said the voice from the doorstep.

"He was one of the 'recurrent' cases who wear out everybody's patience. But Christ saw what we often fail to see, a little spark in the dark of the man's soul; and to this possibility He appealed. 'Wilt thou be made whole?' He asked."

"Oh, yes, yes," responded the voice from the steps, "if there is any power in heaven above, or earth beneath, that can do it."

"Hope wakened at the sound of that sympathetic voice," continued the speaker, "and the man cried,

'I think I might, but I have no one to help me. Every man is for himself; they all get ahead of me, and here I sit a miserable failure.'

"Miserable failure," repeated Alexander.

"But although he was a miserable failure in his own eyes, Christ thought it worth while to help the one everybody else had given up. Miserable failure! are you here?" called the man on the platform.

"Yes, I am the man!" cried Alexander, jumping to his feet and staggering into the room; "I am the man!" he repeated, holding his hand at the full stretch of his arm over his head, and walking up the aisle between the rows of benches, right up to the speaker on the platform; "tell your Christ about *me!*"

"Tell him yourself," said the speaker earnestly; and the inebriate fell on his knees.

How did it happen? It is beyond the power of man to explain; the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit. Suddenly the poor inebriate felt as if the Everlasting Arms were beneath him, a spirit of exultation filled his soul, and he threw back his head and shouted—shouted.

He stayed in the building half an hour, then he

walked out and went down street as one moving on wings. He unconsciously went toward the railroad, and suddenly there smote his ear the wild shriek of a woman. He turned and saw a child toddling on to the railroad in front of an advancing engine. He ran, caught the child, and saved it; but he was struck and severely injured himself by the engine. The ambulance was called and he was despatched to the hospital.

It soon became evident to the attendants that owing to his depleted condition, their patient could not live, and Alexander seemed to know it himself. That same evening he told his attendants about the three months' salary that the nursery man was owing him; and he requested them to get the money and have his body sent to the old village home—the poor wanderer had never heard that his mother was no longer there.

Then he called for a sheet of paper and pencil, and, while his nurse propped him up in bed, he wrote with broken, uncertain hand, "*And while he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and—*" The pen fell—the spirit of Alexander McBain had fled.

The short letter containing Alexander's last message came to the village first, and we expected the

body. We all went to see it when it arrived in the village in the neat casket.

"Ah," said Mrs. McTavish, wiping away the tears, as she looked into the pallid countenance, "his mother has kissed that face a thousand times."

"*'This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'* Th' laddie has on th' best robe," said Granny Neilson exultingly. She and Maggie Thompson had come in, arm in arm, to look at the precious dead—Maggie would have it so.

"Dearie me," said Mrs. McTavish again, as she stood at the window watching Maggie guiding Granny Neilson's feeble steps across the street as they were going home, "one canna help thinkin' about all th' inheritance o' this world's joys that th' Heavenly Father intended for th' poor laddie, but which he forfeited by goin' til th' far country."

"He drank but a sip of the living water just as he got through the wilderness, when he might have had it refreshing him all the way along," said the Village Saint, when Mrs. Brady told him about Alexander's short note.

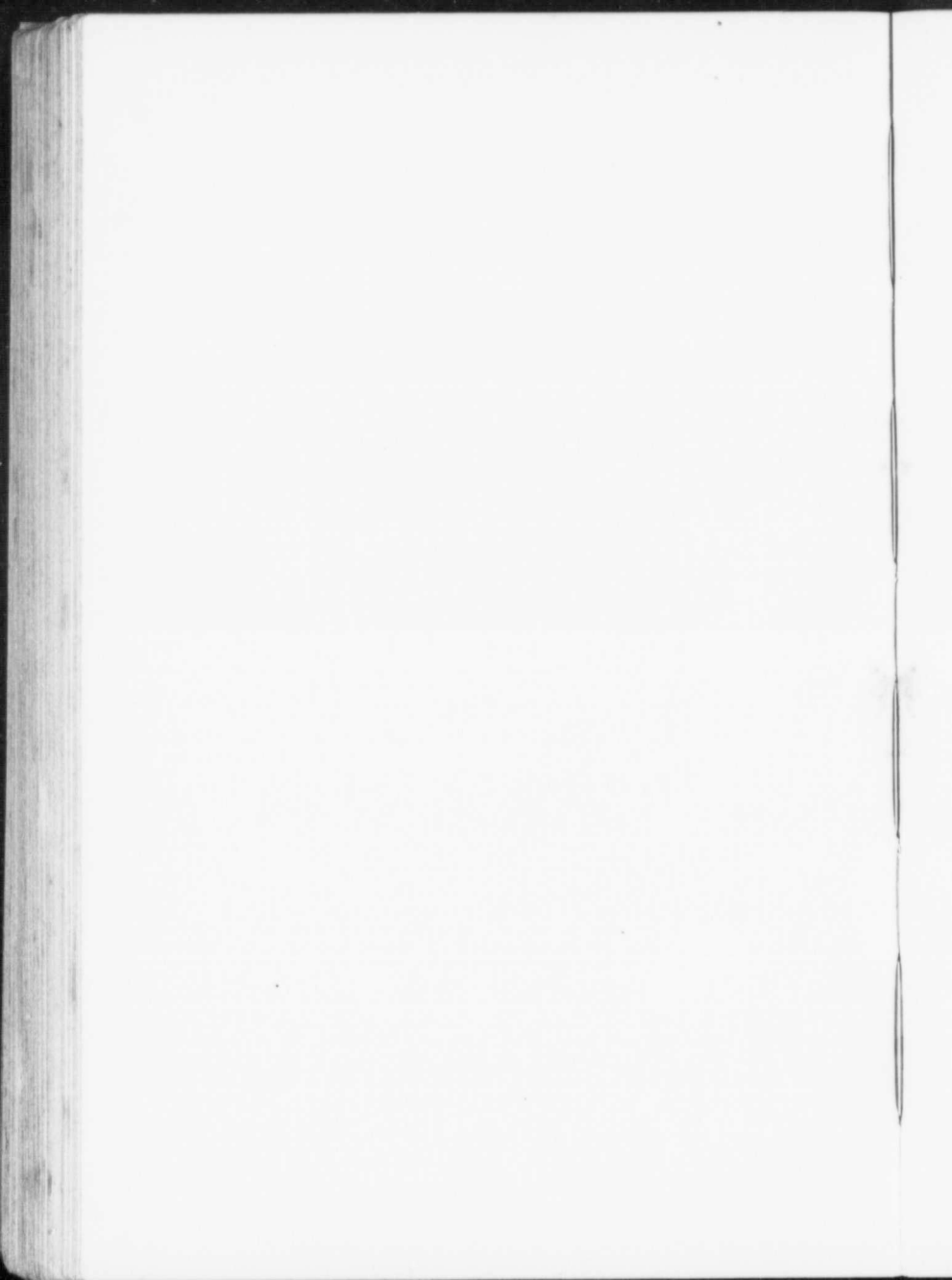
There was plenty left from his mother's estate to bury Alexander and erect a tombstone.

Strangers now come into our cemetery—the beauty

of our village attracts many summer visitors—and stand over that grave, more than any of the others, and read aloud, “*Alexander McLain, B. A., aged thirty-five.*” They pause a moment, then add, sadly, “A scholar—so young to be cut off—what a mysterious providence!” And we of the village listen and say nothing.

“Strange,” said Mrs. McTavish, “to think on it, that our village B. A. is lyin’ stretched out yonder in our graveyard.”

Matters in the village fell back into their old grooves after the excitement caused by Alexander’s funeral had passed away, everybody pursuing his and her appointed way as they had been doing for years. William Henry Gilooly continues to look wistfully in the direction of Maggie Thompson; but Maggie, like the rest of us, keeps her eyes fastened yearningly on that green grave in the old village graveyard.



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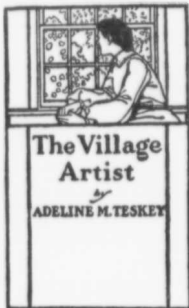
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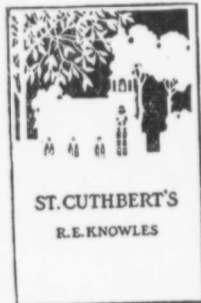
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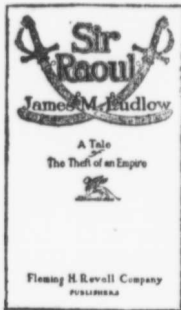
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