"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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THE DOCTOR'S MIXTURE.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER XXIV. MR. MACFARLANE OVERTHROWN.

IT was when the Doctor was going home one night, furious at the rebuffs he met with from the imperturbable Macfarlane, that he said very often he would be "a match for him," and would find his weakest and most contemptible corner yet.

The next day, when he was going up "to see his dear child," he took something in his pocket for one of those he called his parishioners. At lunch that day he extolled in the most extravagant terms the merits of his D.D., its softness, oiliness, sweetness, and fragrance; it might be given to infants as "mother's milk." A spoonful of it down the windpipe would call back the departing spirits. He often brought it to his parishioners, and physic was really nothing to D.D.

"And why should you call a good spirit of the kind D.D.?" asked Mr. Macfarlane. "These are queer letters."

"They stand," said the Doctor, with great gravity, "for the 'Doctor's Delight.'"

"Whatever the delight," said the other, dryly, "it cannot rival the Scotch Glenlivat. I have tasted nothing like it since I left Scotland. There you have the true mellowness and strength combined; and in my ain country it was considered unrivalled—some of the older kinds particularly."

This not rhapsodical praise was eloquence for Mr. Macfarlane, and our Doctor looked at him with curiosity. "I happen to have some that I am taking to a parishioner, and we might divert it from its original purpose, and have it in here to taste, eh?"

"I should not care for it," said the other, dryly. "I never drink anything but Glenlivat."

The Doctor said no more. Later, as he was leaving the patient's room, he passed through a little ante-room, and took a small bottle out of his pocket, and showed to his friend, dilating on its merits—praise which was coldly received. After a short delay the Doctor went away. When he got home, he discovered, or said he discovered, that he had forgotten the precious flask.

When he came the next day it was where he had left it. The ante-room was only to be reached through Mr. Leader's bedroom. As soon as the Doctor saw an opportunity he "slipped in," held the bottle to the light, smelt, tasted, and laid it down again, with an exclamation of impatience. He "forgot" it again that day, only he placed it in a less conspicuous position. On the next day he looked again, and saw with delight that the level of the liquor had descended from the cork about an inch. There was always a little copper kettle kept on the fire, or hob, for the sake of the invalid, a fact which the Doctor noticed, and had, perhaps, suggested.

The Doctor noticed some fresh matters; and, among other things, a change in the manner of Mr. Leader to him. There was a sort of timorous shrinking away and restraint, especially as Doctor Findlater grew affectionate and soothing. Consulting with his Katey, the Doctor found that she, too, had observed nearly the same symptoms. "Oh, Peter, I am afraid he is taking a dislike to me, perhaps from seeing so much of me!" Mrs. Leader and her brother also had an air of insolent triumph in their eyes, which they hardly cared to conceal.

That night, Mr. Macfarlane had undertaken to keep watch, and established himself carefully by the fire in the ante-room. Mr. Leader had been "low" all the day, and was now restless. Mr. Macfarlane had the evening papers, a little cold fowl laid ready, and was apparently going to make a snug cosey night of it, though he was considered in the house a sort of ascetic. Katey had gone to rest, not a little disturbed about her father and some contemptuous hints which Mrs. Leader had dropped. The wretched and perhaps unholy sacrifice which she had made of herself, came back on her, as she thought of the miserable intrigue going on about her, the chilling bondage into which she had sold herself. She could not sleep; and, as the hours wore on, the gathering gloom of future prospects seemed to weigh yet more on her.

Her room was directly under Mr. Leader's, and, as she pursued her dismal meditations, suddenly she heard a crash over head and the sound of trampling feet. In great alarm she jumped up. Mary Leader's room was next to hers; and as she went out she met her friend, who had just risen, alarmed by the same sound.

Both hurried up, for both were courageous women. Mr. Leader was still asleep, tossing in some uneasy dream; but in the ante-room, stretched on the floor, his feet in the fender, his arms extended, an overturned chair beside him, was the figure of Mr. Macfarlane, vainly striving to rise.

The air reeked with the fragrance of hot mixed spirits, and on the table was the bottle of the Doctor's D.D., quite empty!

Thus had his plan succeeded, and thus was Fin once more, as he would say himself, "at the head of the poll!"

The unfortunate gentleman was drawn away out of danger by the two girls. They need not do more, as he was now in a deep slumber: D.D. resting heavy on his chest. It was close on morning, so they had not long to sit up. By that time Mr. Macfarlane began to recover, and staggered away to his bed. But Katey, with early dawn, despatched a letter to her father, begging of him to come: for Mr. Leader was indeed complaining, and wanted aid.

At eight o'clock Doctor Findlater had arrived, glossy and "fresh as a four-year-old." When he was told what had happened, he showed no surprise, but a smile played about his mouth.

"What a pity you forgot that flask, Peter dear!" Katey said simply.

"A pity for the flask!" said the Doctor, taking it up. "Now, dear, you haven't breathed a word of this to mortal? Nor you, Miss Mary? All the better. We don't want to ruin this poor porous vessel out-and-out. There's no need for that; besides he's safe in my hands, if you'll kindly leave him to me." Almost as he spoke, Mr. Macfarlane entered, wonderfully restored already, and but for a certain "bloodshot" in the eyes, quite his natural self. When he saw the Doctor he faltered. The latter surveyed him, smiling quietly. "Just leave us, dears; we want to have a consultation over the patient. Sit down, doctor." And Peter's fingers closing on the fatal D.D., moved it out of the way, giving it a shake en passant. The two sat for half an hour.

When the family assembled at breakfast, the Doctor was in the highest spirits, while Mr. Macfarlane was singularly humble and deferential to him. Desperate as were the odds against him and his cause, Peter Findlater was well nigh a match for them all.

CHAPTER XXV. A ROCK AHEAD FOR PETER.

But in these days the Doctor seemed to be drifting among rocks so numerous and crowded, that as fast as he got rid of one, another as dangerous was to succeed. It was on this very day that Mr. Webber came rushing up to the castle and desired to see Doctor Findlater.

"Oh, Peter! Peter, my poor boy!" he said, when they were alone in the study, "here's the stirabout spilt with a vengeance—I knew there was something going on from the curl on the nose of old Ridley."

"Ah, speak out," said the Doctor, "and don't go driving round by the back way. What is it?"

Then Billy Webber proceeded to explain. "They had made a committee—with turnip-nosed Ridley for chairman——"

"Committee, and for what?" asked the Doctor, turning pale.

"Why to hunt up—to hole and corner it—investigate charges—yes, that is the word—its scandalous——"

"Charges against me?" cried the Doctor. What d'ye—what do they mean?"

"They're going on about you holding an appointment at the hospital, and old Ridley says the guardians and ratepayers owe it to themselves——"

"I despise 'em," said the Doctor, furiously. "Let them do their worst. Let the two gangs—the gang in this house, and the gang in the town join together—I defy them, and shall beat them."

"But, Peter, the worst is, they have been fishing up proofs and papers. That Hickey has been away hunting up this and that. My goodness, Fin, what will you do?"

"What meanness—what ineffable meanness! Grubbing this way behind a man's back for any wild oats he may accidentally put in th' earth. But, Billy, I'll be even with the whole crew!"

"And fancy that cur, Shipton, is one of them—and says, 'he is always for inquiry, and for eliciting the truth.'"

The Doctor was quite speechless at this treachery, which was yet so like his lordship. The clergyman, "old Clarke," was also of the committee, with others upon whose corns he had trodden on various occasions. All were anxious for the truth to be investigated; while Mr. Ridley had hinted at some transactions, the very nature of which made it highly improper that the Doctor should continue in office. The latter was terribly disturbed.

"They want to ruin me," he said, "and they'll do it! I can't fight them all!"

He might well be in trouble. Never since he had started on his wonderful career did our Doctor stand in such peril. What had been taking place all this time was something of this sort:

The unrelenting Ridley, whose dislike and contempt for the Doctor had gone on steadily increasing from the first day, when he had been coolly put down by the Doctor, had ever since prophesied "a bad end," that "the fellow would blow up one of these days;" and had busied himself in writing letters to all sorts of people in the districts where the Doctor had lived, asking for information. Among others he had heard of the old general who had been on a visit to Leadersfort, had seen him, and had been promised by him, "with chapter and verse," a minute account of that most unfortunate transaction in the Doctor's life; but this promise was attended with a reminder that the "Leaders had behaved to him in anything but a straightforward manner, and that it served 'em right; and the thing had best be left as it was." Leave it as it was, indeed! He'd root that scheming Doctor out of the place without mercy. By a sort of accident he had hit upon another muddy passage of the Doctor's life, which was likely to be more damaging still. A clergyman in Ireland told him of a maiden lady, one of his former parishioners, whom the Doctor had persuaded to place three hundred pounds in his hands for investment. This poor lady kept a school which the Doctor attended, and where he made himself most agreeable by his popular manners. But of this by-and-bye. The Doctor was to be informed sooner than he imagined of all that was against him.

When he reached home he found a letter on the table, which contained the following extraordinary communication:

Sir,—It is my duty to inform you, that for some time back a number of rumours highly unfavourable to your character and antecedents have been in circulation in the town. It was felt necessary that such should be duly investigated, as it would be highly improper that a person holding the office you do in a public institution, and besides in daily communication with the leading persons of the district, should be the subject of such discreditable reports. I have, therefore, simply to ask you whether you are willing to submit to a close investigation by a committee, which has been appointed, or whether you would be inclined to save such a painful inquiry by a prompt resignation, and withdrawing yourself from the town. It may help your decision to know that the committee is in possession of important evidence as to these matters, which you can hardly dispute.

I remain, sir, yours,

Ed. Ridley,

Chairman of the Committee.

The Doctor crushed the letter up in his fingers, and flung it on the floor. "Hunted, hunted; always to be hunted! They've got me this time. Oh, ye shabby English beggars!"

He was plunged a long time in reflection. Then addressed himself: "Ah, Peter, you must be a poor, soft lad if you're not a match for these wooden-skulled pipe-stoppers. You'll baulk 'em yet, I'll go bail."

The Doctor little knew how hard his enemies had worked, burrowing, as it were, under ground. Mr. Ridley was determined to root him out of the place. Hence those whisperings and appointed meetings of the committee, and that new-born anxiety "of what we owe to ourselves;" and, finally, Mr. Ridley's own departure on "private business," which was, indeed, to hunt up evidence. His success was beyond his hopes. Through assistance given by Mr. Hickey he had found out the old spinster whose earnings the Doctor was said to have disposed of so improperly, and had arranged matters with her. But a more effectual discovery still was made

at the ancestral seat of the Findlaters, near Macroom, County Cork, where, alas! the Banshee, that old patrimony of the Findlaters, was found never to have been in their hands—for centuries at least.

On the day that the letter was sent to Doctor Findlater, Mr. Ridley had laid some stirring news before the "Committee." For Miss Peck, the spinster, who had long since lost all sight of her deceiver, had written to say she was coming to Tilston in a couple of days, and was ready to confront the knave, and pursue him criminally, if need be. It was time, therefore, to apply the match to the mine; and accordingly the letter was at once sent. The only one who opposed this step was Lord Shipton, who nervously implored of them to take care. "He is such a ready, versatile scoundrel; depend upon it you will be no match for him. I declare you must be cautious."

Alternately very dejected and very furious, the Doctor took his way up to the castle, thinking what he should do. On his way he met his friend Colonel Bouchier, mounted on the strong dray horse that was necessary to carry his bulky figure. The honest colonel, the warmest admirer Fin ever had, at once reined up his horse, and heard the whole story.

"I know it all, my dear Fin," he said. "That mean Shipton, and the rest, have been at it this long time. But anything I can do for you, in any shape, command me. What's this about an old woman I hear they've hunted up—Peck, I think?"

The poor Doctor coloured, for a wonder. "They have found her, have they? Oh, then I may as well give up. My heart's broke, my dear colonel."

"Nothing of the kind; it shan't be. Tell me all about it."

The Doctor here opened his heart as to this unlucky deposit. He told the whole "out of the face." How, thinking to do the best for the poor old soul, he had put the shares into the Munster Railway, of which he was director for a time, and which had gone to smash, as every one knew; with infinite details, to which the honest colonel listened with deep sympathy.

"My dear fellow, is that all? I'll help you, any way. Surely after their getting the old woman over here——"

"O Lord!" cried the Doctor.

"Yes. But I'll go and tackle her myself; leave it to me. Only promise me that. You'll have no trouble with her, I engage to you, either about money or anything else." And the good-natured colonel set his horse in motion, and rode away. The Doctor invoked genuine blessings on him, turned about sharply, and strode home.

After his lunch he got his hat, and set out on a long walk to the next town, to see an advising friend. It was late in the evening when he returned, and a reply reached Mr. Ridley a little later.

FINDLATER v. RIDLEY.

SIR,—The matters affecting my client, Mr. Findlater, of Tilston, and alluded to in your letter of to-day's date, are of so serious a complexion that he has placed the whole affair in my hands. I have advised my client to take no cognisance of the proposal you have made to him until such time as he shall, on advice, find himself prepared to have the matter sifted to the bottom before a competent tribunal, in an action for libel. Such proceedings we intend taking against you personally, and we shall hold you, and your committee, jointly and severally accountable for every further step taken in this matter.

I remain, sir, yours,
THOMAS O'REARDON.

This bold challenge would, as the Doctor calculated, stagger them for a while, "gang of pipe-stoppers" that they were. Indeed, the conspiracy had been worked up to a serious pitch; and in the Leader Arms there were many conversations about what was impending over our hero. It was surprising how few ranged themselves on the side of the man at whose table they had sat again and again, over whose D.D. they had smacked their lips again and again, whose 'avannahs they had smoked, and whose welcome greeting, conversation, and merry jests they had accepted. Rather it was *not* surprising, and only quite after the usual course of things.

The Doctor himself had, indeed, once laid it down jocosely that he knew a man who always looked upon a dinner eaten as an affront. "You see," said the Doctor, "it puts you under a standing obligation, and you saw his three courses and dessert reproaching you in the man's face every time he met you." Those who really remained faithful were the officers and Colonel Bouchier, who pronounced that it was a shame.

"Yes, Mr. Ridley," said the colonel, in the Leader Arms. "I say it's childish work getting together these old women's stories about a man's past life. Which of us, I should like to know, would like to have a policeman's bull's-eye directed full

on. I tell you plainly I'll not help you one bit."

"But this is a very serious thing, Colonel Bouchier. Very serious for us all here. We could not associate longer with a man of that sort."

"*We!*" repeated the colonel, contemptuously. "You're not over particular in these parts, that I can see. Findlater is good enough company any day for the people he's likely to meet here. I know we think him good enough company for ourselves."

"My dear colonel that may be. At messes you take things rather roughly."

The colonel coloured. "I don't know about that. We have certainly had that old Shipton, and we were not over particular there. It's the shabbiest thing I've heard for many a day. I've seen him guzzling at Fin's table over and over again, and now he turns against him. You may all do your worst, but I will stand by Findlater."

It was refreshing to hear this honest warmth, and some faltering waiters on Providence were at once decided by it.

But this was before the receipt of the professional letter on the Doctor's part.

CHRISTMAS UNDER A CLOUD.

When obstinate misrule, combined with military mishaps, had brought the affairs of Charles the First to such a pass that parliament was master of the situation, the foes of festivity were masters of parliament, and did their worst to drive merry-making out of the land, as though mirth were a cardinal vice. Not content with forbidding the celebration of the ancient holidays, the Long Parliament actually ordered Christmas Day to be observed as a day of fasting and humiliation. It came about in this way. Unmindful of the countryman's argument:

> They need not bid a monthy vast,
> Vor if zoo be these times do last,
> 'Twool come to zeaven a week!

the Lords and Commons ordained that the last Wednesday in every month should be kept as a fast day. In 1644, Christmas Day happened to fall upon the last Wednesday in December, a circumstance of which the Assembly of Divines reminded parliament, so that the day might be kept "as it ought to be;" and in obedience to their demand, an ordinance was published commanding the keeping of a fast upon Christmas Day.

To prohibit holiday-making was one thing, to enforce the prohibition another. There were plenty of Englishmen who did not care a straw whether they were ruled by King or Commons, who cared very much indeed about being left to enjoy themselves in their own way, and who were ready enough to give forcible expression to their feelings. In 1647, as Christmas-tide drew near, certain London shopkeepers, who had paid dearly in previous years for attempting to ignore the festival, procured an order that the militia of London and Westminster should prevent such "inconveniences" happening again. The lord mayor also received instructions to prevent Episcopalian clergymen preaching upon Christmas Day, instructions which that official, who kept no Christmas himself, was delighted to carry out. The prentices and porters of Leadenhall, too, afforded him an opportunity for displaying his zeal. While Lord Mayor Warner was deep in militia business at the Guildhall, on Christmas morning, word was brought that the Cornhill conduit had been dressed with evergreens; and holly, ivy, rosemary, and bays set up on the top of a tall building in the middle of the thoroughfare. The city marshal and his man were at once despatched to pull down the green gauds, but that worthy pair found it was not to be done so easily. The marshal himself was very roughly handled, while his man had to run for his life, hotly pursued by the prentice lads of Leadenhall. Escaping them, he fled to the lord mayor to tell of his discomfiture; whereupon the scandalised magistrate mounted his horse, and with the sheriff and a party of halberdiers rode to the scene of action. As soon as the halberdiers began to remove the evergreens, "the boys of sixteen parishes, that came thither to be merry with their lord mayor," set up such a shout that the lord mayor's astonished steed took fright, and coursed through the street in such wild fashion as to upset his rider's dignity, besides putting his bones in jeopardy, while the delighted mob threw up their caps "to see my good lord mayor begin the Christmas play." Some of them were seized by the halberdiers, and sent to the Compter for a day; but Warner seems to have been defeated in his attempt to pull down the obnoxious branches, for we are told that, failing in that design, he fell upon another, and searched the city for superstitious pies and porridge, ransacking pots, robbing ovens, and stripping spits, to the great edification of the righteous, and the chastisement of the wicked—his

own cook included, she being found guilty of some Babylonish baked meats. For this Christmas performance one rhyming assailant of his lordship declared it would be pleasant to see him swinging in his scarlet robes upon the gallows tree, a fate another desired for all such holiday marrers, singing:

> Long be their legs, but short their lives,
> To pray it is most meet;
> And that by twos they may in gyves
> Dance "Trenchmore" in the street.
> That we may see their cunning pates
> Exalted yet on high,
> Above the bridge or city gates,
> Amen! amen! say I.

The City shops remained closed, their owners fearing the mob more than the parliament. Most of the churches were closed, too; some ministers, however, were bold enough to mount their pulpits; one of these was served with a warrant before he had finished his sermon, and several were taken into custody next day. At St. Margaret's, Westminster, under the very nose of the Commons, not only was a sermon preached, but the church was decorated with evergreens, to answer which grave offences, churchwarden and clerk were brought before the committee whose duty it was to examine and punish such delinquencies. The churchwarden excused himself on the ground that he opened the church at the request of the parishioners, who, having met to consider how they should spend their Christmas, had come to the conclusion that as few would work and none open shop upon Christmas Day, they might draw people into church to hear a sermon, who would else misspend their time in taverns; as to the greenery, for that the sexton was responsible. The committee had still another grievance, and asked why a preacher who had always been against parliament was selected to hold forth on the occasion? To which Mr. Churchwarden replied, that the clergyman in question had, not long before, preached at Chelsea, before some of the members, and if he were permitted to preach at Chelsea, he could not see why he might not do the same at Westminster. The committee, struck by this argument, let the argumentative churchwarden off with an admonition.

In the country, folks were so determined to have their Christmas sermon, that in many places the church doors were guarded by armed gentlemen, until the minister descended from the pulpit. In Ipswich, the few who paid no honour to the day were violently attacked, and the mayor suffered much indignity. Some of the disturbers of the peace were arrested and sent to prison, which only increased the tumult, and, by a singular fatality, a man named Christmas was killed; or, in the words of the reporter—who might have held his own with any modern penny-a-liner—poor Christmas "had a period put to his natural life." A still more serious hubbub was raised at Canterbury, where the crier had proclaimed that a market would be held upon Christmas Day. So little regard was paid to the announcement that not more than a dozen tradesmen took down their shutters, and they, upon refusing to put them up again, had their wares scattered right and left, and their shops closed for them. In vain the mayor and his officers tried to quell the riot; one man, being struck with a cudgel by the mayor himself, knocked his worship down, tearing his cloak and damaging him generally. As soon as he recovered his feet and his breath, the mayor read the Riot Act (or the equivalent of the period) amid the derisive hooting of the mob. The people then moved off to the High-street and started a couple of foot-balls, while the authorities endeavoured to take their prisoners to jail; the populace, however, followed in their wake, broke the head of the governor of the prison, rescued their friends, hunted the mayor and aldermen into their houses, and then amused themselves by smashing the windows of every one opposed to Christmas keeping. Next day, being Sunday, all remained quiet, but at noon on Monday the riot broke out afresh. One White, a barber, had been appointed captain of the guard set to watch the city gates; he bade a man stand, upon which the latter called him a Roundhead; then White drew a pistol, fired, and the man fell. Through the city ran the news that a man had been killed, and forth rushed the people armed with clubs. The gates were pulled down, and raising the cry, "For God, King Charles, and Kent," the men of the county flocked in to aid the malcontents. The mayor and aldermen disappeared; the bellicose barber was dragged out of a hayloft and severely mauled, and, in attempting to save him, the sheriff got his head broken in two places; "it was God's mercy his brains were not beaten out, but it should seem he had a clung pate of his own." All the prisoners in the jail were set free, the magazine at the town-hall robbed of its arms, and all that night the rioters were lords of Canterbury. Next morning some of the leading citizens intervened, and upon their guarantee that no man should be troubled about the matter,

the arms were given up, and order was restored. Parliament, however, set the agreement at naught, and determined to make an example of the offenders. A commission was sent down to try the leaders of the Christmas party, but the grand jurymen would not find a true bill; nevertheless, the commissioners were instructed to persevere, but before long the Kentish men rose in arms and gave such trouble to the parliamentary forces, that, fearing the infection might spread Londonwards, a general indemnity was granted, and the too enthusiastic lovers of old customs escaped scot-free.

Year after year the parliament continued to set an example to the nation by sitting upon Christmas Day, but the example did not prove contagious, at least as far as the Londoners were concerned. "The malignant citizens were not filled with grace, but with meat, and were drunk with wine, but not filled with the spirit." Whether their rulers liked it or no, the people would make merry at Christmas-tide somehow or another. The prentices of London, never famed for patience, did not quietly acquiesce in the loss of their time-honoured holidays, but so badgered parliament with remonstrances and petitions, that at last an ordinance appeared, declaring the necessity of apprentices, scholars, and servants having time for recreation, and ordering that they should have reasonable recreation in the second Tuesday in every month, as they were used to have on their old festivals; any difference on that score between master and man to be settled by the nearest justice of the peace.

Christmas, despite the efforts of its foes, was only scotched, not killed, for in 1652, while the House of Commons was sitting upon Christmas Eve, a terrible remonstrance was presented, praying it to abolish Christmas Day altogether. Parliament replied by resolving that the markets should be kept the following day, that no solemnity should be observed in churches, and that shopkeepers should be protected in carrying on their business. These resolutions seem to have been limited to London, and were effectual in one respect, for Evelyn records, in his diary, "Christmas Day. No sermon anywhere, no church being permitted to be opened; so observed it at home;" but, according to the Weekly Intelligencer of the same date, an open shop was as rare as a phœnix or bird of paradise, while taverns and ale-houses were crowded with customers. A very different story is told, however, by Taylor, the water poet, who put forth an energetic protest on behalf of the old festival, in the shape of The Complaint of Christmas, printed at the charge of the author, who frankly owns "he will refuse no gratuities of words or deeds from anybody." Despite this confession of neediness, Taylor speaks out as though he was not afraid of offending the hot, jealous brethren who, with a "superbian predominance," sought to keep Christmas out of old England, where he had hitherto received the warmest of welcomes. The poet puts his complaint into the mouth of the jovial merrymaker, and mournful is the tale he tells. Coming fresh from the kingdom of Christendom, in which he had been received with mirth and merry cheer, Christmas landed in England on the 25th of December, expecting his wonted entertainment at English hands. But, alas! the case was altered. He found the whole frame of the kingdom turned topsy-turvy. He gazed about him, and saw churches with steeples, and houses with chimneys, but heard no jocund bells, and saw no smoke to assure him that there was such a thing as a fire in the land. No sign, no token of holiday-making; the shops were all open, the markets full, the watermen rowing, the carmen loading and unloading, the porters staggering under big burdens, and all the tradesmen busy at their callings. After walking through streets, lanes, and alleys, till benumbed with the cold weather and colder entertainment, Christmas went up to a cobbler, hammering away in his stall, and asked him what Old Christmas had done to deserve such treatment? The cobbler replied it was a pity Christmas had ever been born, being, as he was, a papist, an idolatrous brat of the beast, an old reveller sent from Rome, but now "he praised the Lord and the godly parliament that their eyes were opened to see their anti-Christian error, and that now the clear sunshine of the Word had, by the operation of the Spirit, illuminated their understandings, and enlightened them out of Egyptian darkness." In vain the astonished wayfarer reasoned with the son of Crispin, who bade him cease prattling, as he hindered his repairing an alderman's shoes. Disgusted and dismayed, he turned his steps countrywards, meeting, on his way, a disestablished parson, who poured into his ears a melancholy story, only interrupted by the sudden appearance of a tumultuous multitude, "more clamorous for the redress of real grievances than fifteen parliaments could satisfy." Grocers lamenting they sold no

fruit and spices for plum pottage, mince-pies, and other cookery kickshaws; while mercers, drapers, silkmen, tailors, shoemakers, cooks, and traders of all sorts and conditions, cried out they were undone by the banishment of their old friend and benefactor. Apprentices, kitchen-maids, butlers, bakers, and brewers' draymen, came cursing, crying, and stamping because they were cheated out of their Christmas-boxes. Plough-swains and labourers cried out against being deprived of the harmless sports, merry gambols, and dances wherewith they had recreated themselves once a year—all extinct since the merry lords of misrule had been suppressed by the mad lords of bad rule at Westminster. Nay, their madness had extended to the very vegetables. Holly, ivy, mistletoe, bay, and rosemary were accounted branches of superstition. To roast a sirloin of beef, to touch a collar of brawn, to bake a pie, to put a plum in a pottage-pot, to burn a big candle, or to lay one log the more upon the fire for Christmas' sake, was enough to make a man be suspected and taken for a Christian, and punished accordingly; till poor Christmas was fain to cry in despair: "Can any Christian or Colchester man tell Old Christmas where he is? Is this England or Turkey that I am in?"

Cromwell vetoed church preaching altogether, but when Christmas came round there were always found some ministers prepared to set the great Protector's orders at defiance. In 1657, it was thought necessary to issue an order in council to the effect that, whereas by several ordinances of parliament the festivals of Christmas, Easter, and other feasts commonly called holidays, had been taken away; it was specially recommended to the lord mayor and aldermen of the City of London, and the justices of Westminster and Southwark, to take care the said ordinances were duly observed, and the forbidden solemnities prevented. Evelyn, like many others, thought to celebrate his Christmas Day in orthodox fashion, all ordinances to the contrary notwithstanding, and came up to London to hear Mr. Gunning preach at Exeter Chapel. "The sermon over," says the diarist, "the chapel was surrounded with soldiers, and all the communicants and assembly surprised and kept prisoners by them, some in the house, others carried away. It fell to my share to be confined to a room in the house, where I was permitted to dine with the master of it. In the afternoon came Colonels Whalley, Goffe, and others from Whitehall to examine us one by one; some they committed to the marshal, some to prison. When I came before them they examined me why, contrary to the ordinance made that none should any longer observe the superstitious time of the Nativity, I durst offend, and particularly be at common prayers, which were but the mass in English?" Evelyn condescended to argue the matter with the Whitehall colonels, his eloquence so far availing him that the saintly soldiers dismissed him in pity of his ignorance. "These," says he, "were men of high flight and above ordinances, and spake spiteful things of our Lord's Nativity."

Christmas was not to be much longer under ban. When, three years afterwards, Mr. Pepys went to church on Christmas morning, he found his pew covered with rosemary and bays, and had the pleasure of hearing a good sermon. After dining off a good shoulder of mutton and a chicken, he went to church again with his wife, to be sent to sleep by a dull discourse from a strange parson; for which he made amends a day or two afterwards by making himself ill with too much eating and drinking. The following year he and Mrs. Pepys indulged themselves with cakes and ale at a tavern in Moorfields, where his ears were regaled by the singing of wenches with their wassail bowls; a tolerable proof that Christmas once more asserted its sway, and that its devotees were justified in singing

> The vicar is glad,
> The clerk is not sad,
> And the parish cannot refrain
> To leap and rejoice,
> And lift up their voice,
> That the king enjoys his own again;

for not only did King Charles enjoy his own again, but King Christmas, after nearly twenty years' exile, again made merry with his loyal subjects.

IN THE FIELD WITH THE PRUSSIANS.

A BATTLE-FIELD.

It was a bright October day, no cloud obscured the clear blue sky, and Versailles looked her best, as she basked in the sun. To be sure, the black and white flag of Germany floated overhead, and a park of Prussian field artillery filled the Place d'Armes; but the good people of Versailles had long been accustomed to such sights, and although many a mournful look was cast at the sombre flag, and many a sigh was given for the time when the gay tri-

colour should once more take its proper place, the good townspeople knew their interests too well to show any signs of hostility to the foreigners. It was past noon, and the grandees of the German army, after lunching at the Hôtel des Reservoirs, were tranquilly enjoying their cigars. Prince Hohenzollern had mounted his black charger; the Prince of Wurtemberg stood beside his spotless snow-white Arab, buttoning his glove preparatory to a start; the very wind seemed to pause and listen.

The frightful roar of a heavy gun broke the spell. At the first discharge I held my breath. The little butcher-boy with his basket stood suddenly still, and, with head forward, in an attitude of the utmost attention, listened. Young ladies, starting for a walk in the palace gardens, stood irresolute as to whether they should proceed. Their minds were soon made up, however, as the heavy "boom, boom" broke the tranquillity again and again, while little white clouds, marking the descent of bursting shells, floated away over the trees. Hark! what is that distant trumpet note? It comes nearer, the bugler stops exactly opposite me, and putting the brass trumpet to his lips, blows the warning note of danger. A minute's pause, then his message seemed to work like electricity. The grandees threw away their choice cigars, buckled their long swords tightly round their waists; some returned to the Reservoirs, to drink a last stirrup-cup; others mounted their steeds, and darted off to head their regiments; a few stood still, to listen to the heavy thuds of the great guns from Fort Valerien, or to grasp some friend's hand preparatory to a parting which, perhaps, would be for ever.

The Place d'Armes was instantly alive with a swarming mass. Soldiers poured into it from all sides. Each man knew where his division, his regiment, his company stood; there was no noise, no confusion. Each man was in his place, not one seemed missing. "Fix bayonets!" "March!" and the serried ranks of mighty Prussia, with their helmets, bayonets, and shining accoutrements glistening in the sun's rays, their standards unrolled and their drums beating the advance, marched with firm step, to meet, in many cases, an agonising death. There was no flinching, no bravado; each seemed impressed with the sort of work he had to do, and seemed to have made up his mind to do it; the tightened lip and the fixed eye were all that told their resolution. The townspeople shuddered as they passed; and many a fair French girl turned pale as she, no doubt, thought of François, who had only left her side three months ago, and would now have to meet these dreaded "Prussiens." Then came the field artillery. Each gun followed by its eight artillerymen, six sturdy horses trotted the cannon along; then rode by the cavalry, the dreaded Uhlans in the van, and, following in their wake, the dashing dragoons and the ponderous cuirassiers. One splendid-looking Landwehr officer caught my eye as he passed. I had often noticed him before; he had a face on which calm courage was indelibly stamped, and his form was herculean. To-day his bright glance was, for some reason, dimmed by sorrow. I know not what emotion brought it there. I felt drawn to him irresistibly. I followed him with my eyes till his black helmet had faded in the distance.

The town cleared rapidly of troops; only a guard was left at the palace, and a few pickets piled their long needle-guns before the gates of the town. There was a buzz in the crowd which lines the St. Germain road, which hushed suddenly at the sight of a small cavalcade of Uhlans. On they came, with lances erect, their little black and white pennons fluttering in the breeze; then appeared a large open chaise drawn by four horses. The king and General Moltke were inside, grave and engaged in earnest conversation; they scarcely noticed passing salutes. Following the carriage came the king's staff, composed of officers dressed in all the varied costumes of the great army. Next rode the grooms, each leading an extra horse, and a squadron of Uhlans brought up the rear. Again the crowd became excited, and as the sound of battle seemed approaching, cries of "Vive la France," and "à bas les Prussiens," echoed through the streets and avenues, but again the storm lulled, as another body of horsemen appeared over the brow of the hill. It was the Crown Prince and his staff. They rode quickly by. I followed, as two of the officers were friends of mine, and beckoned me to accompany them. We galloped to a spot from whence we could see the battle spread out like a map. Massed on the slope of Mont Valerien stood a large body of about twelve thousand French. They stood immediately under the guns of the fort, and were flanked on their left by two or three compact, but smaller, clumps of troops. In front of these, at the bottom of the green slope, in a south-westerly direction, the French attacked with great spirit the line regiments of the ninth and tenth Prussian divisions. The Prussian outposts and advance-posts were driven in on the

main body, and the French tactics seemed directed against the village of Bougival, which lies close to the Seine. Between this and Garches, which is situated on the other side of this tongue of land, and also near the river, the sloping plain is dotted by woods, which extend for a considerable distance back towards Vaucresson; in these woods the Prussians stood to meet the French onset. The onset was made in a curious but plucky way down the slope: before the skirmishers came two field-pieces and a mitrailleuse; these dashed at a gallop, bump, bump over every obstacle; then with a quickness that did their drill great credit, the horses turned the muzzle of the guns towards the enemy, and the gunners pounded away into the woods to their heart's content. It was hard work, however, for the Prussians stand like walls even when without cover, and are particularly stubborn when under protection of woods or houses. The rattle of musketry was incessant; it was like a continuous volley, the smoke of which seemed to emerge from everything around. The French troops posted on the hill, under the Valerien guns, never moved an inch the whole day, but kept firing incessant volleys at the Prussians posted to the right of Bougival. The artillery seemed also to be doing its work, for ever and anon the rattle of the volleys was drowned by the awful boom of the heavy fort guns; while throughout the infernal music ran the newest battle sound—I mean the horrible rat-ta-tat-tat-tat of the mitrailleuse. Simple as the sound may look on paper, there is something horrible about it; something quite distinct from the noise made by any other weapon.

At about half-past three the French seemed vigorously to be pushing on; they were making for a ridge which was the stand-point of the Prussians. Where was the deadly Prussian artillery? Presently the French seemed to catch sight of a new enemy on their flank, for they stopped, and with a crab-like motion appeared to be drawing slowly backwards. The hidden enemy at last emerged; it was the Landwehr of the Guard. Shoulder to shoulder they pressed on. The French retreated in disorder; a whole body of them threw away their arms and fled. There was a dash of cavalry into the smoke, and out again, up a hill. Two or three horsemen fell, but the two cannons and the mitrailleuse were taken. The Germans, having repulsed the sortie, now made a retrograde movement. It was about half-past four. The dispirited French turned round once more, and seemed inclined to renew the contest, some of the reserves coming to their aid; but General Kirchbach was too wise to allow his Prussians to be cut to pieces by Mont Valerien projectiles, in following up their advantages. The French sullenly fired a few shells after the enemy, which illumined the gathering gloom, and returned to their capital, their forts, and their ramparts, to tell the excited Parisians of their individual deeds of prowess, or to mourn over the strength of the iron girdle which encircled the city.

The last volley had been fired, and the night set in cold and dismal enough. I followed some ambulances to the battlefield, procured a lantern, and started alone to tend the wounded and dying. Slung at my waist was one of my large saddle-bags, which contained charpie, bandages, instruments, &c., a bottle of brandy at each side, and a large flask of water, completed my equipment. I shall never forget the chill that crept over me as I came nearer and nearer to the field of slaughter. I made my way through the woods. Hearing somebody groaning heavily, I screwed up my courage, and walked towards him. When I approached I found it was a poor wounded Prussian, who took little or no notice of me. He was beside himself with pain. I asked him where his wound was. He said it was through the stomach. I took out of my bag a bottle of laudanum, poured out fifteen drops, and mixed it with a little water in the cup of my flask. It was taken thankfully, and without a question. I then wrote on a card, in German—"wound through abdomen, tinctura opii xv." This I put on the top button of his great-coat. Then I applied some charpie, moistened with water, to the wounds; told him to remember his card, should he be taken to another doctor, and wrapping him up as warmly as I could, I left him to attend to others. They were easily to be found—to the right, to the left, and in front, the German cry of "Herr Jesus!" was intermingled with the distressing French groan of "Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!" Some were sitting, some leaning against the trees; some called for water, others for help. I almost wished that I had been wounded too; it was so dreadful not to be able to help them all at once. One poor fellow, shot through the breast, could not speak; but while I was attending to his wounded comrade beside him he kept pulling my coat-tails, and whenever I turned

round he, in a beseeching manner, pointed to his wound. There was something so sad in this mute distress, that it powerfully affected me. Near him sat a Frenchman who had been making such an awful howl, that it made me doubt the severity of his wound. I found he had only received a ball in the calf of his leg. It was easily extracted, but had I been taking the man's leg off without chloroform he could not have made more noise. He stood pain very badly, and the contrast to his poor German neighbour, who was fast sinking, was very great.

I now came to a little clearing in the wood. Just as I stepped into the open a gust of wind blew out my lantern. I had no matches. I crept cautiously along, but it was pitch dark, and I could not see an inch before me. I had not gone many yards when I stumbled over a body; I spoke, there was no answer; I put my hand over the face, it was cold; I got up, and again I stumbled over a second body. I felt for matches in a dead man's pocket; to my delight I found a pipe, and of course matches. I lighted my candle in the lantern, and then holding it above my head I surveyed the scene before me. To my dying day I shall never forget it; stretched out like a fan, with their feet towards a common-centre, lay eight men near the middle of the clearing; between them and the side of the wood I had just emerged from, were the two corpses I had stumbled over, and in this little space five others lay dead also. I was horrified; fifteen dead men, and I the only living person near them; oh! how dreadful was that silence! I shivered from head to foot. Just as I was lowering my lantern, after viewing this ghastly spectacle, one of the supposed dead in the centre moved; it brought my scattered senses back again. I went to the wounded man; he had received a frightful scalp wound, and looked, from his face being covered with blood, almost unearthly; his eyes rolled in their sockets. I felt for a fracture, but could find none. I spoke to him; he answered. I asked him why he did not go away; he pointed to his knee; I ripped the trouser open, his knee-cap had been completely blown away. I dressed his wounds, took the great-coat from the knapsack of a dead man lying near and wrapped him in it, for he was shivering with the cold. As I was leaving he said, "Ah, that was a fearful bad shell; we are only half of what it hurt, the rest have crawled away." Of the seven others, six were stone dead. The Mont Valerien shell had indeed done its work; the other still lived, but how? I will not harrow your feelings by answering the question; his lips were blue; he murmured "Wasser, wasser;" I handed him my flask. I knew nothing could be done for him. At that moment I saw the gleam of a light coming towards me through the trees. Two krankenträgers, or sick-carriers, stopped in the wood to pick up a wounded man. I went to them and told them of the men in the clearing, and they promised to return at once. I now thought my work was done, and making my way towards the road leading to Garches, I came to what seemed to be a field; many lights were flitting about, and wounded men were being carried to the village. I saw a light stationary at a spot not far distant, and could hear the thud, thud of a pickaxe. I knew what that meant, and turned away; helmets and knapsacks were lying about in all directions. I then passed some vineyards, where there had been some heavy fighting. From the amount of débris all the wounded seemed to have been taken away, but many dead lay about. I had now almost got into the road, when out of the darkness I heard a low call for water; I hastened to the spot, and in a ditch I found a man lying on his back, breathing heavily. I gave him water, then set about finding out where his wound was; his shirt was hot, wet, and red; I tore it open; in doing so I knocked my lantern over. As I relighted it I saw the man's face; it was ghastly pale, and death was there, but I knew it, and uttered a cry of horror. It was the Landwehr officer I had seen that morning in all the vigour of manly health, and now, only ten hours afterwards, I was to find him dying. I plugged the great hole in his chest lightly with charpie moistened with water, took a Frenchman's great-coat and wrapped him in it, and left him there to seek a couple of krankenträgers. I was away about twenty or twenty-five minutes; to my horror when I returned with the men, the handsome lieutenant was dead, and his coat and waistcoat were gone. I looked round, then ran down the road for five minutes towards Garches to catch the robber who, if he had done nothing worse, had robbed the dead, but could see no one. I returned; the two krankenträgers were standing by the corpse. I examined the neck; there were no marks of violence, so I hoped the bright spirit had fled before those vultures of the battle-field had rifled the poor corpse.

Yes, such is war. Can anything justify the causes of such a scene as I have tried

to portray? Yet, what I can tell is scarcely one-twentieth part as horrible as the awful reality; the scenes haunt me even now like an ugly nightmare, and are ever before me. If this is enough to cause sadness in one, who has only tried to alleviate such sufferings, what ought to be the feelings of monarchs who wilfully or thoughtlessly inflict the horrors and unspeakable miseries of war on their fellow-men?

A SLEEPING HOMESTEAD.

The meadows slumber fair beneath the moon,
While wakes the watchful river at their feet,
And all the air is filled with odours sweet,
The breath of flowers that shall unfold full soon.

In mazy mystery the forest hides,
And straggling trees have caught a sylvan grace;
The sleeping farm-house shows its placid face
Between the shadows where the grove divides

Still are the sparrows nested in the thatch,
And still the callow larks beneath the brake;
The startled doves with tender coo awake
As bays the moon-struck mastiff on his watch.

Now warmer light upon the welkin lies,
And deeper night intensifies the peace;
Only the river moves and will not cease
Its swift, up-searching glances to the skies.

By blooming white-thorn and by climbing rose,
I know the nook where dreams the maiden sweet;
Honest her heart as sheaves of goodly wheat,
Fairer her face than any flower that blows.

I know the chamber where the old folks rest,
With hearts at peace and all their labour done;
Where ruddy children sleep till shines the sun,
Where breathes the baby, warm in mother's breast.

I know the barn where safe from midnight chill
The weary beggar snores amid the hay,
Waiting the first red warning of the day
To grasp his staff and cross the distant hill.

God hath the simple homestead in his eye,
And sometimes in a solemn hour like this
He sheds about it dreams of promised bliss,
With mellow moonlight from the summer sky.

NEW YEAR'S DAY IN SCOTLAND.

A STRANGER arriving in some Scottish town towards the close of December could not fail to be impressed by the fact that something quite unusual was disturbing the canny folks of that said town, which, let us say, is the "grey old metropolis of the North." And if he made further inquiries regarding it, he would soon learn that the festive appearance of things was due to the near approach of the New Year.

On the greasy pavements is an unusual amount of orange-peel, and through the hazy fog you can see an unusual amount of dainty cakes in the confectioners' windows. Buns of all shapes, sizes, and qualities; and endless cakes of short-bread, ornamented with thistles and mottoes in candied orange-peel, such as Here's a gude New Year, or Hoo's a' wi' ye? Fra a friend, Fra ye ken wha, and so on, are everywhere prominent, and customers are not wanting to purchase these good things, considered by every family — unless the very poorest — quite indispensable to a proper "keepin' the New Year." At the greengrocers' doors are hanging the bunches of laurel, holly, and mistletoe, and in the butchers' and poulterers' shops the festive beef, geese, and turkeys with which we are all familiar, as the sine quâ nons of Christmas cheer. The never frantically-busy streets of Edinburgh are more than ordinarily alive with an easy, sauntering, gravely-festive throng of idlers. Most of the younger holiday-seekers are indulging in comestibles, and in and over all prevails an undoubted odour of whisky and oranges. Altogether there seems more than enough of whisky drinking, and somewhat more than the run of drunken men do penance at the police-court in the morning. In the evening, especially if you live in the suburbs, or in the country, within easy reach of a town, you will be alarmed by a noise and singing outside the door, the explanation of which is afforded in the announcement of the housemaid: "Please, sir, the guizards hev come; shall I give them anything?"

The guizards, or gisers, are the Scottish representatives of the old English mummers, who are again lineal descendants of the masqueraders of the Roman saturnalia. For some weeks before, the village boys have been carefully rehearsing some favourite Scottish ballad, and now that the New Year time is drawing near, they gather in bands of twos and threes, and go round the better class of houses in improvised masks, singing these ballads, with many quaint antics. They are generally accompanied by an attendant, armed with a broom, who is called "Bessie." Bessie's duty is to sweep the floor, and to make herself as amusing as possible, in return for an equal share in the proceeds of the entertainment. The reward for this performance is generally a halfpenny, or if it be very near the New Year, perhaps a piece of cake.

Christmas Day is a festival not much observed in Scotland, though within late years, among the better class of people, especially in the towns where an imitation of everything English is rapidly gaining ground, it is beginning to be observed as a feast day, and "the Christmas holidays" is now the common term applied to what, in former times, were called "the New Year Play Days." Boxing Day is quite unknown in Scotland, though the "boxes" are much

too valuable an institution to be always passed over by those whom they concern, and under the name of handsels they are duly inquired after a few days later. Hogmanay is the 31st of December, and then children are from time immemorial informed that if they go to the corner they will see a man with as many eyes as days in the year. Whether the word was derived from the Greek άγια μηνη (the holy moon) or from the Scandinavian Hoggu-nott, or from the French, au gui mener (to lead to the mistletoe), it will hardly do to inquire too closely in this place. However, without attaching either a philological or a theological significance to the day, housewives in country places in Scotland are occupied for a day or two previously in preparing for Hogmanay. Then the children of the poorer people go about from door to door either with a large pocket fastened to their dress, or with a sheet-shawl, or plaid, so folded about them as to leave a large fold in front. Each child gets an oat-cake, or a piece of cheese, or sometimes, if the donor be very liberal or the children especial favourites, a sweet cake, and so from door to door they go until in the evening they have a plentiful supply of homely New Year cheer to carry home to their family. This is the original custom, but now-a-days, like many other customs, it is dying away, children going for their Hogmanay to the houses of their friends more as a custom than from any desire for the gifts then distributed. At no time, however, were these Hogmanay cakes ever looked upon as eleemosynary. They were rather looked upon as a right, established by time-honoured custom. When the children come to the door they troll out some old rhyme, which would afford plenty material for antiquarian research. Thus one of them is:

Hogmanay
Trollolay.

This may seem a mere senseles rhyme without meaning, unless we adopt the suggestion of some antiquaries that it is a corruption of the French—Homme est né—Trois Rois lá—(a man is born; three kings are here)—in allusion to the birth of Christ and the visit of the Wise Men from the East, who were known in mediæval times as the three kings. Another rhyme very commonly used is:

Get up, gude wife, and shak' yer feathers,
And dinna think that woo* are beggars;
For woo are bairns† come oot to play,
Get up and gie's oor hogmanay.

* We. † Children.

Another is suggestive of the dry humour, but, at the same time, pious vein of the nation:

Get up, gude wife, and be nae sweir,*
And dale† yer breed‡ to them that's here;
For the time will come when ye'll be deed,
And then ye'll neither need ale nor breed.

It is not always, however, that the impatient troubadour can stay so long as is required for the recitation of the above verses, and a much more frequent couplet is this:

My feet's could, my shoon's§ thin,
Gie's my cakes, and let me rin!

On Hogmanay night in the town, as on Christmas Eve in England, the streets and shops are crowded with festively-inclined people a-marketing against the morrow's dinner. Family men give a supper-party to a select lot of friends, warranted as of the right sort. The express object of the invitation is to sit (which means also to eat and drink) the Old Year out and the New Year in. And this is done with all honour, being, if there are many young folks in the party, as often danced in as not. Then, as the clock "chaps" twelve, friend congratulates friend, and wish each other "a gude New Year, and mony o' them."

Then with great formality the door is unbarred to let the Old Year out and the New Year in. By this time the het (hot) pint is produced, a hot spiced compound of which, it is needless to say, the national beverage is the chief component. Of this all the guests partake, and it used to be the custom in Edinburgh for parties armed with this instrument of hospitality to sally forth into the streets, which were then more crowded than at mid-day, to first-foot their acquaintances, or treat to a glass of this any acquaintance whom they met, by whom they were in turn asked to taste. This led to much joviality as well as—it must be confessed—to much drunkenness; but New Year, like Christmas "comes but once a year," and though paterfamilias and others mentally and audibly vowed, when they woke up early on the forenoon of the 1st of January, that this should be their last bout of first-footing, regularly as the year came round they forgot their vows, and were as jovial at it as ever. Now-a-days this—in towns at least—is almost entirely gone out of fashion, except among the lower classes, or with some wild young men. The wassail bowl, of which the het pint was the Scottish equivalent, has also to a great extent gone out of fashion—at least as an element of first-footing—the cruder bottle of whiskey supplying its place. Let

* Be not unwilling. † Deal. ‡ Bread. § Shoes.

us issue forth a few minutes before twelve, and walk down the South Bridge until we come to where the old Tron kirk stands at the intersection of the North and South Bridge, and the High-street and Lawnmarket in Edinburgh. There are a goodly number of people in the streets, many of whom have obviously been spending the last day of the year in the method in which, to all appearance, they will spend the first. As we approach Hunter-square, there is a large increase in the number of jovial mortals, who are bent on offering us spirituous hospitality backed with the irrefragable logic of that being "Noo Yeer time, mon!" and round the church is assembled a crowd of from five hundred to a thousand persons, waiting until the clock —which the town authorities have kindly left illuminated up to this time—shall proclaim that a New Year has commenced. All eyes are now on the clock—the hands approaching the mystic hour of midnight. The noise is hushed when one stroke is heard, and until the twelve sound out. Then friends shake hands with friends, and everybody who has had the self-denial to keep it concealed until now, pulls forth his bottle, and presses one and all to partake. It may be remarked that owing to the Forbes M'Kenzie Act all the public-houses have been closed an hour ago. When they were open to all hours, the assemblage at the Tron kirk was even more popular than now. In a very few minutes the crowd separates in a very orderly manner; decent family men of the working classes compare notes with each other as they go home to wish the wife and bairns a happy New Year, regarding the crowd at the Tron in this and former years.

The old folk go off to bed, but many of the young ones will not be there for hours yet. Each girl is expecting the first-foot from her sweetheart, and anxious to be the first to open the door to him, and much quiet stratagem is sometimes spent in the endeavour to outwit her, and get the old grandmother, or some dooce serving-lass to be the first to meet the kiss-expecting lover. Quieter folks will put off their first footing until morning, but in nearly all Scottish families the first-foot is looked upon as a matter of no little importance, and notes will be compared among neighbours in country villages as to who was their first-foot-luck or ill-luck, according to the character of the visitor. It is very unlucky to come empty-handed; accordingly all such visitors are provided with a bottle, which it is expected that all those who are up shall taste, while he in his turn is regaled with similar New Year cheer. A red-haired person, or a splay-footed one, is also an exceedingly unlucky first-foot: these are carefully guarded against. Often it happens in remote country houses that for days there are no visitors, and that the first-foot is not unfrequently the wandering "gaberlunzie," or beggar, who is, however, invariably informed of the fact, and treated to a drain and other good cheer, in accordance with time-honoured usage. Until within the last few years a curious first-footing on a wholesale scale was the custom in the remote and somewhat primitive parish of Deerness, in the Orkney Islands. Large parties of old and young, of the commoner class of people, would assemble in a band on the last night of the year, and go on a round of visits throughout the district. At each house they would stop and sing a long song, apparently the work of pre-Reformation times, and so full of allusions to the Virgin, that had the strictly orthodox Protestants who sung it understood the allusions, they would have been shocked. After this, they made a rush into the house on the door being opened, and were plentifully treated to such cheer as the house afforded. This was repeated from house to house, until the singers must have made a tolerably (or intolerably) large supper! Any farmer who was passed by in this New Year's serenade, looked upon it as the greatest slight that could be offered to him. The verses were sung to a tune of their own, and may be found not incorrectly given in that curious repertory of Old World stories—Chambers's Book of Days.

New Year's Day itself in Edinburgh is one of boisterous eating and drinking. Crowds perambulate the streets from early morning to night. A universal holiday is observed. People who are not drinking are assuredly eating oranges. All the fish-barrows are carefully cleaned out, and the proprietors dressed very sprucely, for the sale of oranges. One of these hawkers, whom I had the curiosity to question on the subject, assured me that he will often sell on a New Year's Day from five to six large crates of oranges. The Scottish people do not visit each other much on New Year's Day, in this respect differing widely from the Americans, among whom that is the great day for exchanging visits. These visits in Scotland are confined to members of the family, as is also the New Year's dinner.

It is, however, a jovial time, and many old family feuds are healed up that day over the roast goose (the invariable dish) and the whisky-toddy, which must of necessity follow. A dancing-party generally winds up the day, and the members retire to bed at a much earlier hour than they did the night before. New Year has now tolerably well ended, but still it would be looked upon, in old-fashioned families, as a great breach of courtesy if a piece of cake or wine was not offered to visitors for some weeks after the New Year's Day, and intimate friends or neighbours will invite each other in to partake of their cakes. The first Monday of the New Year is called Handsel Monday, and on this day the "boxes," so well known to English householders, are called for. It is rarely, if ever, that any one would think of asking for them before that date. It is also often observed as a holiday, and the rural marksmen have frequently a shooting match, or "wapen-shaw," on that day. In some part of the country New Year, old style (12th of January), is still observed, and to this year the common holiday among the rural population is Auld Handsel Monday, that is, the first Monday after the 12th of January. On that day Scottish farmers used to treat their servants to a good breakfast, with copious libations of whisky and ale, the rest of the day being a holiday, usually spent in visiting friends. At Burghead, on the southern shore of the Moray Firth, about nine miles from Elgin, a strange Druidical custom called Burning the Clavie, a sort of image composed of combustible materials, is observed among the fishing population on New Year's Eve (old style), a description of which ceremony may be found in the work already mentioned. Nearly every trade has its traditional number of days which they observe as New Year's holidays, these holidays being nearly always spent in a right royal debauch, the tailors being popularly supposed to carry off the palm both in the intensity and duration of their New Year's spree. Such a saturnalia is this, that in Scotland they are commonly called the daft, or foolish days; but even the daft days come to an end, and the people resume their quiet sober characteristics. A popular rhyme, composed before the Reformation, has reference to this:

> Yule's come and yule's gane,
> And we hae feasted weel;
> Sae Jock maun to his flail again
> And Jenny to her wheel.

Unless, indeed, it be prolonged as far as that of a gentleman whom the writer observed, one warm July day, making his most unsteady way down one of the steep streets of the New Town of Edinburgh. He had obviously dined, and the salmon had had the usual effect upon his memory, for as the old gentleman wiped his perspiring brow, I overheard him continually ejaculating to himself, in a reproachful tone of voice, "It's been an awfu' New Year! It's been an awfu' New Year!"

THE JERICHO THEATRE.

Daringly ambitious, undeterred by failures, and feeling acutely the humiliation of being a new district without historical associations, yet in wealth and substance vastly superior to older quarters, with all their pretension, Jericho lately determined to have a theatre of its own. There was a fine feeling of elasticity in this resolve, for the failure of the Jericho Rooms * was still recent. Not that we could go so far as to say that the "municipality" contracted a loan, or that the "town" built a theatre, as they do in foreign countries. No. It was all private enterprise that built the Theatre Royal, Jericho. When we say private enterprise, a nicer accuracy might require it to be stated that it was a well-known public builder of the district; and when we say built, the phrase should be rather "conversion." He converted an existing building. A simple methodist chapel had been as much a failure in its own line as our Jericho Rooms; and it was a curious compensation that while the Jericho Rooms were eagerly offered as eligibly convertible into a chapel, the chapel should be as eagerly proposed as eligible for conversion into a theatre.

It was curious to pass by and see the alterations going on, so gradually and silently. All the work was from within. The place bore its air of sanctity to the last. The Voltaireians of the district said, pleasantly, that little or nothing would be required to make the alteration;—that already there were players, boxes, pit, histrionics of all sorts, taking money at the doors, and, above all, very bad acting. But the building itself seemed to offer protest; its gloomy porch, its peaked tympanum, rigid as a cocked-hat, its austere white walls, gaunt railings, and stiff flight of steps—these still asserted the old profession. When they

* See All the Year Round, New Series, vol. iv., p. 304.

came presently to break a door high up in the side wall, and run up a ladder-like stair outside, labelling it "Gallery," the incongruity was more glaring; the aspect of things was not improved when over the centre door they daubed, "Boxes," and over the right, "Pit." Grim Covenanters passing by shook their heads. Nothing would change the look of the building. A bright coat of paint all over, and a row of lamps flaring outside, only made the incompatibility complete.

The theatre was duly opened. Though absent at the time from Jericho, I felt deeply interested in the success of the experiment. As no accounts reached me of its success, I had some forebodings. After two months I returned, and went eagerly to see how the theatrical tree had taken root and flourished. The doors were open, with the old inviting look, as though a night service were about to commence. The bills, hung on the rails, were in their accustomed place, only with a Mr. Tinmouth substituted for Mr. Howlet. It was all lighted up as it had been before; but a row of flaring lamps on the crest of the portico imparted an air discordant with all sacred associations. A glance round made it plain that the architect had been unable to shake himself free from the influence of the genius loci. At every turn he must have felt the old associations obstructing, or, at least, diverting his almost sacrilegious enterprise. For the private boxes bulged out over the stage like circular pulpits, and when the manager appeared in one, and craned his neck out to have a good look at the state of the gallery, we almost felt as if we ought to make responses.

The decorations of the Jericho Theatre are rather of a homely cast, room paper garnished with bead mouldings, a ready style of ornament to be noticed even in more pretentious theatres. The house contained one gallery for boxes, another overhead for the unwashed; a row of hard benches below, by an almost Eastern shape of compliment, entitled the "Stalls." The number of private boxes was amazing, the flanks, as it were, of the house being set apart for the wealthy aristocracy, who preferred, at a moderate cost, to be secure of their haughty privacy. Disdaining the haughty privacy, and feeling secure of more entertainment in the open publicity of the box benches, I took my seat there and looked about me.

The audience was certainly limited, or, in theatrical phrase, the "kind patronage" was of the scantiest kind. Time was when the Reverend Mr. Howlet could fill every bench. Now there were about a dozen in the boxes, as many more in the pit, two in the stalls, and twenty in the gallery. Mr. Howlet would have smiled grimly, and talked of a judgment.

A careless eye, even, noted at once some proceedings which gave a family air to the personnel of the establishment. A little boy of six years old took the tickets, and sold play-bills and oranges. A portly woman came frequently from behind a mysterious curtain, which seemed to lead into a stage box, but in reality led by windings to the stage, and patted the urchin with a maternal air, while various young ladies, scattered over the seats, looked on with an obsequiously affectionate air, as though dependent on the matron in some way. Later on, in the private box, a vision of a nurse was apparent, with a baby, who was always being shown the stage and actors as a sort of lullaby, or dramatic Daffy's Elixir.

In the orchestra a harp and violin did all the work between them; with much energy, and with never flagging spirit. Without music, too! as to put to shame those pretentious and crowded enclosures which the greater theatres affect. It stopped just as we entered and secured a central seat, while the curtain rose on act the third of Leah, the Jewess, with Miss St. Lucy in "Miss Bateman's world-wide impersonation." Here were to be noted some novelties. Miss St. Lucy was respectable, and did her part accurately and inoffensively, but every one about her—the notorious villain, peasants, &c.—indulged in a sort of dramatic franc-tireurship, coming on and going off as it suited them, and exhibiting powers of extempore composition which would have excited the envy of many a public orator. The dressing of the characters showed fertile resources in the management, and a happy ingenuity in turning present advantages to account. Thus "a villain" of any county or degree had merely to tuck up his trousers inside his wellington boots, tie a shawl round his waist, bare his throat, and there he was! A governor (in a serious part, not in a farce, where he was dressed as "governors" of the present day are) got his frock-coat edged with a yard of tinsel, submitted his cap to the same treatment, tied a sash of blue calico round his waist, and there *he* was! In these days of "fashioning soldiers out of your raw material," with co-existing

difficulties as to uniforming Mobiles, a few moments' consultation between the stage-manager of the Jericho Theatre and the government at Tours would, I am convinced, have solved that most perplexing question. Our energetic official can mould an ordinary "Jerry" hat into any required shape in the twinkling of an eye. A few pins are all that is needed to produce a tricornered, or cocked-hat. An ordinary coat buttoned tight, with a cross-belt, does all the rest.

The scenery was scarcely more ambitious. But, after all, a little reflection shows us that every incident of human life must take place either inside or outside a house, either indoors or under the canopy of heaven. A shrewd manager will here seize on this principle, and skilfully apply it. Thus at the Jericho Theatre we are not bewildered with elaborate and tedious "set scenes," as I believe they are called. But we alternate between an interior, whose walls are so happily indefinite in their decoration, that the most critical builder or upholsterer might be defied to decide whether it was the cabin or the cot which was before him. It did equally for the dungeon wall, the drawing-room associated with bloated luxury, or the tyrant's chamber. The hues were undecided, being neither gay nor grey, but a kind of a deep "no-colour," as Mr. Carlyle would phrase it, which did happily for anything. So with the out-door presentment, which was neither street, nor trees, nor green fields, but something so general as to pass for any of the three according to choice. But we cannot give the same cordial approbation to the fashion of shifting the scenes, which did not roll upwards in a slow graceful fashion, as if wound up, but were raised slowly in sudden jerks, as though men were dragging them up in handfuls, as it were. And this, indeed, I believe *was* the literal arrangement, saving rollers, &c., though involving a certain crookedness of motion, as the hands on one side showed more alacrity than the other. This system was revealed one night through the excessive slowness and languor of the motion, when the gentlemen in the gallery called impatiently on the operators by name, bidding them "get on."

When the tragedy was over, a little proclamation had to be made which would have delighted the heart of the Reverend Mr. Howlet, had he been—highly improbable as it was—present on the occasion. A gentleman came forward, whose appearance it was no undue harshness to call seedy, and gave us unwelcome news about what he called "the ballot" (pronouncing it like secret voting). "A most hunfort'net hincident 'ad hockerred, Miss Maringle was unable to appear in the ballot that night. It was no fault in the management. She could not appear through indisposition. Fortunately," he added, looking nervously at the wing, "there was one present who could prove that he was speaking the truth." This extraordinary diffidence and distrust of public confidence in his own veracity, seemed highly curious, and suggested the idea that the speaker had found the audience scornfully incredulous on former occasions, or that he had at least been proved publicly utterly untrustworthy, or perhaps had been exposed before pit, boxes, and gallery. All these solutions appeared consistent with his strange manner. "Mr. Kino," he went on, edging towards the wing, "would vouch for him. Mr. Kino, whom they all knew, the enterprising proprietor of the ballot, knew well that Miss Maringle could not appear that night."

On this he drew forward a stout, horsey-looking gentleman, who seemed very reluctant indeed to make his appearance. "Now, ladies and gentlemen, you will hear what Mr. Kino says," and he fixed his gaze nervously on the platter-like face of that spirited gentleman, who was uneasily consulting the crown of his hat. A nice diagnosis showed the true state of the case—pecuniary difficulties as to what is called "the ghost walking." Kino had determined to expose the whole thing, but when appealed to thus publicly, the common honour of the profession forbade exposure. The manager knew human character better than Kino did, counted on that loyal feeling, and not unprofitably. For Mr. Kino was heard to say:

"I am wery sorry, ladies and gentlemen, about the disappointment, but Miss Maringle really cannot appear."

"You hear, gentlemen and ladies," said the much relieved manager. "I knew Mr. Kino would corroborate me. He says he is sorry, and—I am sorry, and we are all sorry. The ballot will now proceed without Miss Maringle, trusting to your indulgence." And he pushed off Mr. Kino, though I could see that the latter was doubtful as to whether he had made enough of the occasion, or had asserted himself with sufficient dignity.

I went very often after this to the Jericho Theatre, which, at every recurring visit, seemed to be staggering downwards on the

broad road of decay. The management seemed to change about once every week; the audience to diminish steadily, and the proportion of "orders" to increase. So that the presence of a paying visitor in the boxes seemed to cause a rush of such officials as there were, to make sure that the bonâ fide shilling was not intercepted or stolen before it reached the management. The strength of the orchestra was reduced, and the harper now had it all to himself. It is conceded that things do not go on long in this fashion, but it was amazing how long the Jericho Theatre lingered. Suddenly the end came. I lately passed through the congenial slums in which the theatre had its seat, and found it encompassed by a great hoarding; huge scaffoldings were being carried in on men's shoulders. At last the crisis had come, or was it prosperity? Were they levelling it to the ground, as Mr. Howlet would apply the text, leaving not a stone upon a stone? What did it mean?

Why, this. It was a company, limited. It was to be touched by an enchanter's wand, and in a few weeks to emerge from its lowliness and rags to be an exquisite lady of fashion! Here was the solution. It is to be the ROYAL BOUDOIR THEATRE; carriages of Mayfair and Belgravia are to crowd the approaches. What will the Reverend Mr. Howlet say to all this?

MADAM CROWL'S GHOST.

I'M an ald woman now; and I was but thirteen, my last birthday, the night I came to Applewale House. My aunt was the housekeeper there, and a sort o' one-horse carriage was down at Lexhoe to take me and my box up to Applewale.

I was a bit frightened by the time I got to Lexhoe, and when I saw the carriage and horse, I wished myself back again with my mother at Hazelden. I was crying when I got into the "shay"—that's what we used to call it—and old John Mulbery that drove it, and was a good-natured fellow, bought me a handful of apples at the Golden Lion, to cheer me up a bit; and he told me that there was a currant-cake, and tea, and pork-chops, waiting for me, all hot, in my aunt's room at the great house. It was a fine moonlight night, and I eat the apples, lookin' out o' the shay winda.

It is a shame for gentlemen to frighten a poor foolish child like I was. I sometimes think it might be tricks. There was two on 'em on the tap o' the coach beside me. And they began to question me after nightfall, when the moon rose, where I was going to. Well, I told them it was to wait on Dame Arabella Crowl, of Applewale House, near by Lexhoe.

"Ho, then," says one of them, "you'll not be long there!"

And I looked at him, as much as to say, "Why not?" for I had spoke out when I told them where I was goin', as if 'twas something clever I hed to say.

"Because," says he—"and don't you for your life tell no one, only watch her and see—she's possessed by the devil, and more an half a ghost. Have you got a Bible?"

"Yes, sir," says I. For my mother put my little Bible in my box, and I knew it was there: and by the same token, though the print's too small for my ald eyes, I have it in my press to this hour.

As I looked up at him, saying "Yes, sir," I thought I saw him winkin' at his friend; but I could not be sure.

"Well," says he, "be sure you put it under your bolster every night, it will keep the ald girl's claws aff ye."

And I got such a fright when he said that, you wouldn't fancy! And I'd a liked to ask him a lot about the ald lady, but I was too shy, and he and his friend began talkin' together about their own consarns, and dowly enough I got down, as I told ye, at Lexhoe. My heart sank as I drove into the dark avenue. The trees stands very thick and big, as ald as the ald house almost, and four people, with their arms out and finger-tips touchin', barely girds round some of them.

Well, my neck was stretched out o' the winda, looking for the first view o' the great house; and, all at once we pulled up in front of it.

A great white-and-black house it is, wi' great black beams across and right up it, and gables lookin' out, as white as a sheet, to the moon, and the shadows o' the trees, two or three up and down upon the front, you could count the leaves on them, and all the little diamond-shaped winda-panes, glimmering on the great hall winda, and great shutters, in the old fashion, hinged on the wall outside, boulted across all the rest o' the windas in front, for there was but three or four servants, and the old lady in the house, and most o' t'rooms was locked up.

My heart was in my mouth when I sid the journey was over, and this, the great house afoore me, and I sa near my aunt that I never sid till noo, and Dame Crowl,

that I was come to wait upon, and was afeard on already.

My aunt kissed me in the hall, and brought me to her room. She was tall and thin, wi' a pale face and black eyes, and long thin hands wi' black mittins on. She was past fifty, and her word was short; but her word was law. I hev no complaints to make of her; but she was a hard woman, and I think she would hev bin kinder to me if I had bin her sister's child in place of her brother's. But all that's o' no consequence noo.

The squire—his name was Mr. Chevenix Crowl, he was Dame Crowl's grandson—came down there, by way of seeing that the old lady was well treated, about twice or thrice in the year. I sid him but twice all the time I was at Applewale House.

I can't say but she was well taken care of, notwithstanding; but that was because my aunt and Meg Wyvern, that was her maid, had a conscience, and did their duty by her.

Mrs. Wyvern—Meg Wyvern my aunt called her to herself, and Mrs. Wyvern to me—was a fat, jolly lass of fifty, a good height and a good breadth, always good-humoured, and walked slow. She had fine wages, but she was a bit stingy, and kept all her fine clothes under lock and key, and wore, mostly, a twilled chocolate cotton, wi' red, and yellow, and green sprigs and balls on it, and it lasted wonderful.

She never gave me nout, not the vally o' a brass thimble, all the time I was there; but she was good-humoured, and always laughin', and she talked no end o' proas over her tea; and, seeing me sa sackless and dowly, she roused me up wi' her laughin' and stories; and I think I liked her better than my aunt—children is so taken wi' a bit o' fun or a story—though my aunt was very good to me, but a hard woman about some things, and silent always.

My aunt took me into her bed-chamber, that I might rest myself a bit while she was settin' the tea in her room. But first she patted me on the shouther, and said I was a tall lass o' my years, and had spired up well, and asked me if I could do plain work and stitchin'; and she looked in my face, and said I was like my father, her brother, that was dead and gone, and she hoped I was a better Christian, and wad na du a' that lids.

It was a hard sayin' the first time I set my foot in her room, I thought.

When I went into the next room, the housekeeper's room—very comfortable, yak all round—there was a fine fire blazin' away, wi' coal, and peat, and wood, all in a low together, and tea on the table, and hot cake, and smokin' meat; and there was Mrs. Wyvern, fat, jolly, and talkin' away, more in an hour than my aunt would in a year.

While I was still at my tea my aunt went up-stairs to see Madam Crowl.

"She's agone up to see that old Judith Squailes is awake," says Mrs. Wyvern. "Judith sits with Madam Crowl when me and Mrs. Shutters"—that was my aunt's name—"is away. She's a troublesome old lady. Ye'll hev to be sharp wi' her, or she'll be into the fire, or out o' t' winda. She goes on wires, she does, old though she be."

"How old, ma'am?" says I.

"Ninety-three her last birthday, and that's eight months gone," says she; and she laughed. "And don't be askin' questions about her before your aunt—mind, I tell ye; just take her as you find her, and that's all."

"And what's to be my business about her, please ma'am?" says I.

"About the old lady? Well," says she, "your aunt, Mrs. Shutters, will tell you that; but I suppose you'll hev to sit in the room with your work, and see she's at no mischief, and let her amuse herself with her things on the table, and get her her food or drink as she calls for it, and keep her out o' mischief, and ring the bell hard if she's troublesome."

"Is she deaf, ma'am?"

"No, nor blind," says she; "as sharp as a needle, but she's gone quite aupy, and can't remember nout rightly; and Jack the Giant Killer, or Goody Twoshoes will please her as well as the king's court, or the affairs of the nation."

"And what did the little girl go away for, ma'am, that went on Friday last? My aunt wrote to my mother she was to go."

"Yes; she's gone."

"What for?" says I again.

"She didn't answer Mrs. Shutters, I do suppose," says she. "I don't know. Don't be talkin'; your aunt can't abide a talkin' child."

"And please, ma'am, is the old lady well in health?" says I.

"It ain't no harm to ask that," says she. "She's torflin' a bit lately, but better this week past, and I dare say she'll last out her hundred years yet. Hish! Here's your aunt coming down the passage."

In comes my aunt, and begins talkin' to Mrs. Wyvern, and I, beginnin' to feel more comfortable and at home like, was walkin' about the room lookin' at this thing and at that. There was pretty old china things on the cupboard, and pictures again the wall; and there was a door open in the wainscot, and I sees a queer old leathern jacket, wi' straps and buckles to it, and sleeves as long as the bed-post hangin' up inside.

"What's that you're at, child?" says my aunt, sharp enough, turning about when I thought she least minded. "What's that in your hand?"

"This, ma'am?" says I, turning about with the leathern jacket. "I don't know what it is, ma'am."

Pale as she was, the red came up in her cheeks, and her eyes flashed wi' anger, and I think only she had half a dozen steps to take, between her and me, she'd a gov me a sizzup. But she did give me a shake by the shouther, and she plucked the thing out o' my hand, and says she, "While ever you stay here, don't ye meddle wi' nout that don't belong to ye," and she hung it up on the pin that was there, and shut the door wi' a bang and locked it fast.

Mrs. Wyvern was liftin' up her hands and laughin' all this time, quietly, in her chair, rolling herself a bit in it, as she used when she was kinkin'.

The tears was in my eyes, and she winked at my aunt, and says she, dryin' her own eyes that was wet wi' the laughin', "Tut, the child meant no harm — come here to me, child. It's only a pair o' crutches for lame ducks, and ask us no questions mind, and we'll tell ye no lies; and come here and sit down, and drink a mug o' beer before ye go to your bed."

My room, mind ye, was up-stairs, next to the old lady's, and Mrs. Wyvern's bed was near hers in her room, and I was to be ready at call, if need should be.

The old lady was in one of her tantrums that night and part of the day before. She used to take fits o' the sulks. Sometimes she would not let them dress her, and other times she would not let them take her clothes off. She was a great beauty, they said, in her day. But there was no one about Applewale that remembered her in her prime. And she was dreadful fond o' dress, and had thick silks, and stiff satins, and velvets, and laces, and all sorts, enough to set up seven shops at the least. All her dresses was old-fashioned and queer, but worth a fortune.

Well, I went to my bed. I lay for a while awake; for a' things was new to me; and I think the tea was in my nerves, too, for I wasn't used to it, except now and then on a holiday, or the like. And I heard Mrs. Wyvern talkin', and I listened with my hand to my ear; but I could not hear Mrs. Crowl, and I don't think she said a word.

There was great care took of her. The people at Applewale knew that when she died they would every one get the sack; and their situations was well paid and easy.

The doctor come twice a week to see the old lady, and you may be sure they all did as he bid them. One thing was the same every time; they were never to cross or frump her, any way, but to humour and please her in everything.

So she lay in her clothes all that night, and next day, not a word she said, and I was at my needlework all that day, in my own room, except when I went down to my dinner.

I would a liked to see the ald lady, and even to hear her speak. But she might as well a' bin in Lunnon a' the time for me.

When I had my dinner my aunt sent me out for a walk for an hour. I was glad when I came back, the trees was so big, and the place so dark and lonesome, and 'twas a cloudy day, and I cried a deal, thinkin' of home, while I was walkin' alone there. That evening, the candles bein' alight, I was sittin' in my room, and the door was open into Madam Crowl's chamber, where my aunt was. It was, then, for the first time I heard what I suppose was the ald lady talking.

It was a queer noise like, I couldn't well say which, a bird, or a beast, only it had a bleatin' sound in it, and was very small.

I pricked my ears to hear all I could. But I could not make out one word she said. And my aunt answered:

"The evil one can't hurt no one, ma'am, bout the Lord permits."

Then the same queer voice from the bed says something more that I couldn't make head nor tail on.

And my aunt med answer again: "Let them pull faces, ma'am, and say what they will; if the Lord be for us, who can be against us?"

I kept listenin' with my ear turned to the door, holdin' my breath, but not another word or sound came in from the room. In about twenty minutes, as I was sittin' by the table, lookin' at the pictures in the old Æsop's Fables, I was aware o'

something moving at the door, and lookin' up I sid my aunt's face lookin' in at the door, and her hand raised.

"Hish!" says she, very soft, and comes over to me on tiptoe, and she says in a whisper: "Thank God, she's asleep at last, and don't ye make no noise till I come back, for I'm goin' down to take my cup o' tea, and I'll be back i' noo—me and Mrs. Wyvern, and she'll be sleepin' in the room, and you can run down when we come up, and Judith will gie ye yaur supper in my room."

And with that away she goes.

I kep' looking at the picture-book, as before, listenin' every noo and then, but there was no sound, not a breath, that I could hear; an' I began whisperin' to the pictures and talkin' to myself to keep my heart up, for I was growin' feared in that big room.

And at last up I got, and began walkin' about the room, lookin' at this and peepin' at that, to amuse my mind, ye'll understand. And at last what sud I do but peeps into Madame Crowl's bed-chamber.

A grand chamber it was, wi' a great four-poster, wi' flowered silk curtains as tall as the ceilin', and foldin' down on the floor, and drawn close all round. There was a lookin'-glass, the biggest I ever sid before, and the room was a blaze o' light. I counted twenty-two wax-candles, all alight. Such was her fancy, and no one dared say her nay.

I listened at the door, and gaped and wondered all round. When I heard there was not a breath, and did not see so much as a stir in the curtains, I took heart, and I walked into the room on tiptoe, and looked round again. Then I takes a keek at myself in the big glass; and at last it came in my head, "Why couldn't I ha' a keek at the ald lady herself in the bed?"

Ye'd think me a fule if ye knew half how I longed to see Dame Crowl, and I thought to myself if I didn't peep now I might wait many a day beforo I got so gude a chance again.

Well, my dear, I came to the side o' the bed, the curtains bein' close, and my heart a'most failed me. But I took courage, and I slips my finger in between the thick curtains, and then my hand. So I waits a bit, but all was still as death. So, softly, softly I draws the curtain, and there, sure enough, I sid before me, stretched out like the painted lady on the tomb-stean in Lexhoe Church, the famous Dame Crowl, of Applewale House. There she was, dressed out. You never sid the like in they days. Satin and silk, and scarlet and green, and gold and pint lace; by Jen! 'twas a sight! A big powdered wig, half as high as herself, was a-top o' her head, and, wow!—was ever such wrinkles?—and her old baggy throat all powdered white, and her cheeks rouged, and mouse-skin eyebrows, that Mrs. Wyvern used to stick on, and there she lay grand and stark, wi' a pair o' clocked silk hose on, and heels to her shoon as tall as nine-pins. Lawk! But her nose was crooked and thin, and half the whites o' her eyes was open. She used to stand, dressed as she was, gigglin' and dribblin' before the lookin'-glass, wi' a fan in her hand, and a big nosegay in her bodice. Her wrinkled little hands was stretched down by her sides, and such long nails, all cut into points, I never sid in my days. Could it ever a bin the fashion for grit fowk to wear their finger-nails so?

Well, I think ye'd a-bin frightened yourself if ye'd a sid such a sight. I couldn't let go the curtain, nor move an inch, not take my eyes off her; my very heart stood still. And in an instant she opens her eyes, and up she sits, and spins herself round, and down wi' her, wi' a clack on her two tall heels on the floor, facin' me, ogglin' in my face wi' her two great glassy eyes, and a wicked simper wi' her old wrinkled lips, and lang fause teeth.

Well, a corpse is a natural thing; but this was the dreadfullest sight I ever sid. She had her fingers straight out pointin' at me, and her back was crooked, round again wi' age. Says she:

"Ye little limb! what for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff!"

If I'd a thought an instant, I'd a turned about and run. But I couldn't take my eyes off her, and I backed from her as soon as I could; and she came clatterin' after, like a thing on wires, with her fingers pointing to my throat, and she makin' all the time a sound with her tongue like zizz-zizz-zizz.

I kept backin' and backin' as quick as I could, and her fingers was only a few inches away from my throat, and I felt I'd lose my wits if she touched me.

I went back this way, right into the corner, and I gev a yellock, ye'd think saul and body was partin', and that minute my aunt, from the door, calls out wi' a blare, and the ald lady turns round on her, and I turns about, and ran through my room, and down the back stairs, as hard as my legs could carry me.

I cried hearty, I can tell you, when I got down to the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Wyvern laughed a deal when I told her what happened. But she changed her key when she heard the ald lady's words.

"Say them again," says she.

So I told her.

"Ye little limb! What for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff."

"And did ye say she killed a boy?" says she.

"Not I, ma'am," says I.

Judith was always up with me, after that, when the two elder women was away from her. I would a jumped out at winda, rather than stay alone in the same room wi' her.

It was about a week after, as well as I can remember, Mrs. Wyvern, one day when me and her was alone, told me a thing about Madam Crowl that I did not know before.

She being young, and a great beauty, full seventy year before, hed married Squire Crowl, of Applewale. But he was a widower, and had a son about nine year old.

There never was tale or tidings of this boy after one mornin'. No one could say where he went to. He was allowed too much liberty, and used to be off in the morning, one day, to the keeper's cottage, and breakfast wi' him, and away to the warren, and not home, mayhap, till evening, and another time down to the lake, and bathe there, and spend the day fishin' there, or paddlin' about in the boat. Well, no one could say what was gone wi' him; only this, that his hat was found by the lake, under a haathorn that grows thar to this day, and 'twas thought he was drowned bathin'. And the squire's son, by his second marriage, by this Madam Crowl that lived sa dreadful lang, came in for the estates. It was his son, the ald lady's grandson, Squire Chevenix Crowl, that owned the estates at the time I came to Applewale.

There was a deal o' talk lang before my aunt's time about it; and 'twas said the step-mother knew more than she was like to let out. And she managed her husband, the ald squire, wi' her whiteheft and flatteries. And as the boy was never seen more, in course of time the thing died out of fowks' minds.

I'm goin' to tell ye noo about what I sid wi' my own een.

I was not there six months, and it was winter time, when the ald lady took her last sickness.

The doctor was afeard she might a took a fit o' madness, as she did fifteen years befoore, and was buckled up, many a time, in a strait-waistcoat, which was the very leathern jerkin I sid in the closet, off my aunt's room.

Well, she didn't. She pined, and windered, and went off, torflin', torflin', quiet enough, till a day or two before her flittin', and then she took to rabblin', and sometimes skirlin' in the bed, ye'd think a robber had a knife to her throat, and she used to work out o' the bed, and not being strong enough, then, to walk or stand, she'd fall on the flure, wi' her ald wizened hands stretched before her face, and skirlin' still for mercy.

Ye may guess I didn't go into the room, and I used to be shiverin' in my bed wi' fear, at her skirlin' and scrafflin' on the flure, and blarin' out words that id make your skin turn blue.

My aunt, and Mrs. Wyvern, and Judith Squailes, and a woman from Lexhoe, was always about her. At last she took fits, and they wore her out.

T' sir was there, and prayed for her; but she was past praying with. I suppose it was right, but none could think there was much good in it, and sa at lang last she made her flittin', and a' was over, and old Dame Crowl was shrouded and coffined, and Squire Chevenix was wrote for. But he was away in France, and the delay was sa lang, that t' sir and doctor both agreed it would not du to keep her langer out o' her place, and no one cared but just them two, and my aunt and the rest o' us, from Applewale, to go to the buryin'. So the old lady of Applewale was laid in the vault under Lexhoe Church; and we lived up at the great house till such time as the squire should come to tell his will about us, and pay off such as he chose to discharge.

I was put into another room, two doors away from what was Dame Crowl's chamber, after her death, and this thing happened the night before Squire Chevenix came to Applewale.

The room I was in now was a large square chamber, covered wi' yak pannels, but unfurnished except for my bed, which had no curtains to it, and a chair and a table, or so, that looked nothing at all in such a big room. And the big looking-glass, that the old lady used to keek into and admire herself from head to heel, now that there was na mair o' that wark, was

put out of the way, and stood against the wall in my room, for there was shiftin' o' many things in her chambers ye may suppose, when she came to be coffined.

The news had come that day that the squire was to be down next morning at Applewale; and not sorry was I, for I thought I was sure to be sent home again to my mother. And right glad was I, and I was thinkin' of a' at hame, and my sister Janet, and the kitten and the pymag, and Trimmer the tike, and all the rest, and I got sa fidgetty, I couldn't sleep, and the clock struck twelve, and me wide awake, and the room as dark as pick. My back was turned to the door, and my eyes toward the wall opposite.

Well, it could na be a full quarter past twelve, when I sees a lightin' on the wall befoore me, as if something took fire behind, and the shadas o' the bed, and the chair, and my gown, that was hangin' from the wall, was dancin' up and down on the ceilin' beams and the yak pannels; and I turns my head ower my shouther quick, thinkin' something must a gone a' fire.

And what sud I see, by Jen! but the likeness o' the ald beldame, bedizened out in her satins and velvets, on her dead body, simperin', wi' her eyes as wide as saucers, and her face like the fiend himself. 'Twas a red light that rose about her in a fuffin low, as if her dress round her feet was blazin'. She was drivin' on right for me, wi' her ald shrivelled hands crooked as if she was goin' to claw me. I could not stir, but she passed me straight by, wi' a blast o' cald air, and I sid her, at the wall, in the alcove as my aunt used to call it, which was a recess where the state bed used to stand in ald times, wi' a door open wide, and her hands gropin' in at somethin' was there. I never sid that door befoore. And she turned round to me, like a thing on a pivot, flyrin', and all at once the room was dark, and I standin' at the far side o' the bed; I don't know how I got there, and I found my tongue at last, and if I did na blare a yellock, rennin' down the gallery and almost pulled Mrs. Wyvern's door off t' hooks, and frighted her half out o' her wits.

Ye may guess I did na sleep that night; and wi' the first light, down wi' me to my aunt, as fast as my two legs cud carry me.

Well, my aunt did na frump or flite me, as I thought she would, but she held me by the hand, and looked hard in my face all the time. And she telt me not to be feared; and says she:

"Hed the appearance a key in its hand?"

"Yes," says I, bringin' it to mind, "a big key in a queer brass handle."

"Stop a bit," says she, lettin' go ma hand, and openin' the cupboard-door. "Was it like this?" says she, takin' one out in her fingers, and showing it to me, with a dark look in my face.

"That was it," says I, quick enough.

"Are ye sure?" she says, turnin' it round.

"Sart," says I, and I felt like I was gain' to faint when I sid it.

"Well, that will do, child," says she, saftly thinkin', and she locked it up again.

"The squire himself will be here to-day, before twelve o'clock, and ye must tell him all about it," says she, thinkin', "and I suppose I'll be leavin' soon, and so the best thing for the present is, that ye should go home this afternoon, and I'll look out another place for you when I can."

Fain was I, ye may guess, at that word.

My aunt packed up my things for me, and the three pounds that was due to me, to bring home, and Squire Crowl himself came down to Applewale that day, a handsome man, about thirty years ald. It was the second time I sid him. But this was the first time he spoke to me.

My aunt talked wi' him in the housekeeper's room, and I don't know what they said. I was a bit feared on the squire, he bein' a great gentleman down in Lexhoe, and I darn't go near till I was called. And says he, smilin':

"What's a' this ye a sen, child? it mun be a dream, for ye know there na sic a thing as a bo or a freet in a' the world. But whatever it was, ma little maid, sit ye down and tell us all about it from first to last."

Well, so soon as I med an end, he thought a bit, and says he to my aunt:

"I mind the place well. In old Sir Olivur's time lame Wyndel told me there was a door in that recess, to the left, where the lassie dreamed she saw my grandmother open it. He was past eighty when he telt me that, and I but a boy. It's twenty year sen. The plate and jewels used to be kept there, long ago, before the iron closet was made in the arras chamber, and he told me the key had a brass handle, and this ye say was found in the bottom o' the kist where she kept her old fans. Now, would not it be a queer thing if we found some spoons or diamonds forgot there? Ye mun come up wi' us, lassie, and point to the very spot."

Loth was I, and my heart in my mouth, and fast I held by my aunt's hand as I stept into that awsome room, and showed them both how she came and passed me by, and the spot where she stood, and where the door seemed to open.

There was an ald empty press against the wall then, and shoving it aside, sure enough there was the tracing of a door in the wainscot, and a keyhole stopped with wood, and planed across as smooth as the rest, and the joining of the door all stopped wi' putty the colour o' yak, and, but for the hinges that showed a bit when the press was shoved aside, ye would not consayt there was a door there at all.

"Ha!" says he, wi' a queer smile, "this looks like it."

It took some minutes wi' a small chisel and hammer to pick the bit o' wood out o' the keyhole. The key fitted, sure enough, and, wi' a strang twist and a lang skreeak, the boult went back and he pulled the door open.

There was another door inside, stranger than the first, but the lacks was gone, and it opened easy. Inside was a narrow floor and walls and vault o' brick; we could not see what was in it, for 'twas dark as pick.

When my aunt had lighted the candle the squire held it up and stept in.

My aunt stood on tiptoe tryin' to look over his shouther, and I did na see nout.

"Ha! ha!" says the squire, steppin' backward. "What's that? Gi' ma the poker—quick!" says he to my aunt. And as she went to the hearth I peeps beside his arm, and I sid squat down in the far corner a monkey or a flayin' on the chest, or else the maist shrivelled up, wizzened ald wife that ever was sen on yearth.

"By Jen!" says my aunt, as, puttin' the poker in his hand, she keeked by his shouther, and sid the ill-favoured thing, "hae a care, sir, what ye're doin'. Back wi' ye, and shut to the door!"

But in place o' that he steps in saftly, wi' the poker pointed like a swoord, and he gies it a poke, and down it a' tumbles together, head and a', in a heap o' bayans and dust, little meyar an' a hatful.

'Twas the bayans o' a child; a' the rest went to dust at a touch. They said nout for a while, but he turns round the skull as it lay on the floor.

Young as I was I consayted I knew well enough what they was thinkin' on.

"A dead cat!" says he, pushin' back and blowin' out the can'le, and shuttin' to the door. "We'll come back, you and me, Mrs. Shutters, and look on the shelves by-and-bye. I've other matters first to speak to ye about; and this little girl's goin' hame, ye say. She has her wages, and I mun mak' her a present," says he, pattin' my shouther wi' his hand.

And he did gimma a goud pound, and I went aff to Lexhoe about an hour after, and sa hame by the stage-coach, and fain was I to be at hame again; and I niver saa lad Dame Crowl o' Applewale, God be thanked, either in appearance or in dream, at-efter. But when I was grown to be a woman my aunt spent a day and night wi' me at Littleham, and she telt me there was na doubt it was the poor little boy that was missing sa lang sen that was shut up to die thar in the dark by that wicked beldame, whar his skirls, or his prayers, or his thumpin' cud na be heard, and his hat was left by the water's edge, whoever did it, to mak' belief he was drowned. The clothes, at the first touch, a' ran into a snuff o' dust in the cell whar the bayans was found. But there was a handful o' jet buttons, and a knife with a green handle, together wi' a couple o' pennies the poor little fella had in his pocket, I suppose, when he was decoyed in thar, and sid his last o' the light. And there was, amang the squire's papers, a copy o' the notice that was prented after he was lost, when the ald squire thought he might 'a run away, or bin took by gipsies, and it said he had a green-hefted knife wi' him, and that his buttons were o' cut jet. Sa that is a' I hev to say consarnin' ald Dame Crowl, o' Applewale House.

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