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THE STAFF AT SIMSON'S

By the Same Author

A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

THE PAISLEY SHAWL

THE FLYING YEARS

THE THREE MARYS

THE RICH WIFE

THE S.S. GLORY

ELLEN ADAIR

OLD SOLDIER

MRS. BARRY

TRIUMPH

ETC.

THE STAFF AT SIMSON'S

A Novel

by

FREDERICK NIVEN

COLLINS

FORTY-EIGHT PALL MALL LONDON

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TO THE MEMORY OF

WILLIAM WATERSTON NIVEN

*for some time Librarian of the Public
Library of the City of this Novel*

*All the characters in this novel are imaginary, and
in no way intended as portraits of any persons alive
or dead.*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING THE STAFF

In the last decade of the XIXth Century the roll-call at Simson's was thus:

John Simson, son of the founder of the firm, more like a bearded farmer from the shires than a townsman, then in his fiftieth year, father of three—one girl, two boys—and devoted to his buxom, amiable wife in a manifest but nonuxorious fashion; Robert Simson, his bachelor brother, ten years his junior—as large of build as John, but with more urbanity. A pattern-designer of the city, skilful with his pencil in more than the applied art which provided him and his family with their daily bread, once drew a caricature of Robert for the menu-card of a Dinner of Soft-Goods Manufacturers in which that junior partner of the Simson house was represented as a big, smooth cupid with eyes of innocence.

In the warehouse, head of the Fancy Goods department, and sort of general manager or adviser for all the others, was Alexander Maxwell, close upon fifty then, but wearing his years well. He was a dapper man. His shock of silver hair and his bearing, his carriage, made him seem like a stage ambassador to young Laurie of the Dress Goods. Once or twice in his life he had been taken for a doctor, or medical specialist, perhaps because of his care of his hands, and by reason of the precise way he used them. His moustache was cropped, in a period when many men affected hirsute tusks. His wife, he often thought, was the most elegant lady he had ever seen. Both he and she admired Mrs. Maxwell tremendously. Woman (especially as exemplified in herself) and dress were her idolatries. Their family—in the order of its coming—was boy, girl, girl, boy. Mr. Maxwell had placed the elder boy, his school-days over, in a chartered accountant's office, loath to condemn him to what he called the dog's life of manufacturing.

Alexander Maxwell had two assistants in his department: Jack Corbett, discontented—not with the warehouse, but by reason of badgering at home—and always pondering, while travelling towards his suburb in the evenings, coloured pamphlets on South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Canada; and Johnny Leng, bandy-legged, of dark hue and Semitic cast of countenance, who strove to cheer the obviously sad Corbett with the latest bawdy story.

Head of the Shirts department was Tom Huntley, a widower, a few years older than the junior partner, a loose-jointed man, his gait that of one tolerant, uncensorious, jack-easy. He had often a little laugh of acceptance or dismissal when some others might question or reprove. His chief assistant was Dan Huntley, not related (Tom had no relatives anywhere to his knowledge), a youth fond of vivid checks, white Ascot ties held with a gold horse-shoe pin, whose home was a two-room and kitchen flat in the transpontine district of Gorbals, where father, mother, brother, sister and he crowded together in hilarious amity, all sharing the same delight in loud attire and music-hall songs and, when they could, in going to the races. Danny of the Shirts had a secret—an ambition that had nothing to do with the warehouse. He hoped, some day, to be on the music-hall stage. Clog-dancing was his speciality. Without loss of breath he could clog-dance and at the same time solemnly produce mirthful patter. On many a Saturday evening he gave exhibitions of his skill at the more obscure working-men's clubs. Others on the stages of the leading music-halls had begun so. Why not he? Tom Huntley's second assistant was Willie MacEwan, who always wore a hat of the latest style, shirts and ties of the moment's mode. He was as bandy-legged as Johnny Leng, his manner at one and the same time courteous and vulgar, and there was something, to most, engaging, charming about that squint, that cast, in his vivacious eyes.

Henry Braid, and he but thirty, was head of the Dress Goods, and he had just given an engagement ring to his girl. To his future father-in-law he had explained, "I am a pushing young man with the world before me," for in those days one asked the girl's father for her hand (as they used to say), and he—having already discussed the matter with the observant mother—had an "Aye" or a "Nay" ready. Braid had two assistants, Arthur Laurie and Alisdair Lennox, called Alice for short because of his niminy utterance and feminine fancies. Laurie, who lived in a village southward from the city, was a tenor singer at parties there, devoted to amateur productions of light opera and to a different girl annually. Lennox was a long, lean young man who walked with a waver as of a willow in a breeze, spoke with a cultivated lisp and was as ready to talk of the texture and shade of socks as his two sisters to discuss stockings and lingerie.

"They ought to ha' christened him Jenny Lennox," said Sandy Bain (head of the Flannelettes) one day—Sandy, "the card" of Simson's, who always seemed to be in need of a shave, perhaps because, liking to lie in bed late in the mornings, he shaved when he got hame frae the wareus at nicht. By the date of this narrative, he was a staunch teetotaler. When chided for that he would explain, jabbing the bibulous bigot who objected in the midriff, or grabbing hold of him by lapel or coat-button to gain full attention, that it was purely a matter of finance. "I hae four weans noo, twa lads and twa lassies. I

ken naething better than to be hauf-drunk a' the time. It's the ideal state in this disillusionin' world—but no' when ye hae weans. When the publican comes in at the door, poverty comes in at the windy. And noo ye ken—and to hell wi' ye!"

Sandy Bain of the Flannelettes was of the same age as Tom Huntley of the Shirtings. Little Watty Yule, one of his assistants, though also a teetotaler, was a tax upon Sandy's patience. Watty's heaven was in the church-hall at social gatherings, conversazione, soirée ("cookie-shine" in the warehouse word); and to lend a hand at these functions and convivial gatherings, assisting at the tea-urn or the coffee-urn, was all he asked. How often he had winsomely inquired, "May I press you to a jelly?" impossible to speculate. When any one forgot his name he would say, "Yule. Yule remember me." There was an extraordinary scene in the Flannelette department one day, Sandy Bain violently swearing at Watty and telling him that some morning he would kill him. The staff at Simson's gave ear, and then they heard: "Say *good-morning* to me, but dinna every morning say tae me, '*Good-morning, have you used Pears' Soap?*' If ye say it again, I'll kill ye, as sure as Daith! It's beyond human endurance."

Sandy's other assistant at that time was one William Mackay, a son of a one-time wealthy West Indies' sugar broker who had known of it in his purse when the governments of France and Germany and Austria gave bounties to their sugar producers and Continental beet-sugar strove against the West Indian cane variety. There was to be a revival of sugar-refining in Glasgow later, but too late for William's father. He was in his final seventies when that day came, and his youngest son would have turned forty had he been alive. There were four others, two girls and two boys and never, perhaps, was there a family composed of such disparate individuals—but their motto, to judge by the behaviour of each to other, might have been *Live and Let Live*. None took the part of censor. It is conceivable that William, the youngest, was somewhat the pet of the family, though unspoilt thereby. In his infancy the best he could make of his name was Wem, so Wem he was for good at home. Through somebody in the warehouse who knew one of his brothers, it was carried there. So Wem he was in Cochrane Street also.

Head of the Wincey department was Andrew Middleton—fifty-five—a tall, gnarled man of a hue suggestive of jaundice but spare and strong, who trod the Glasgow planestanes with a long, lithe stride. He was troubled at times, the market for winceys being in a declining state, lest he might be discharged, but hopeful (considering that he had been with the firm in the days of the founder) that instead of being dismissed he might be pensioned. He was another dweller in Gorbals where, in two rooms and a kitchen with Mrs. Middleton, he suffered—as she—uncomplaining, in fact encouraging, the violin-practice of their only issue, a lad, then, of twenty. *Vee-o-lon*, by the way, was what Andy always called the instrument of his son's devotion. In public, talking of the boy, he would say it was far better for him to be practising the "vee-o-lon" than kicking his heels in the close in the evenings. In private, he dreamt that some day he would see his son on the platform of St. Andrew's Halls, in evening dress, bowing after a last encore, to a wildly enthusiastic audience packed to the hot ceiling.

He had but one assistant, and at times it was difficult to find work for both apart from pulling down a stack of cloth and building it up again. Of that assistant, Norman Nairn, we shall hear anon how he was, with the best intention in the world, deplorably led astray by Danny Huntley of the Shirtings or (from another standpoint) restored to reason when it seemed he had *gone gite*.

George Laidlaw and Dick Robertson were, at that time, in the Production department, into which buyers never entered. There were the Loom Books, the Yarn Books, the P.C. (or Production Cost) Books. As for George Laidlaw: Here, as in most communities there was a tendency for the component parts to fall into categories. In office, warehouse, club, camp, regiment, where-not, there are generally the markedly jolly one, markedly silly one, comic one, sober one, king's fool, people's favourite, the one who listens to the troubles of others and wisely advises, the one who borrows, the one who outstandingly lends, the religious one who but gives example of holiness, and the religious one who is a missionary. George Laidlaw was the sullen one, the dour one, the bully all under the one hat. Tall, loutish, he went about with a twist to his nostrils, as though everywhere finding an objectionable odour, hectoring those whom he thought he could hector, twisting the office-boy's arm, if it seemed that youngster was not fittingly servile to him, and surly even to Maxwell, Middleton, and Sandy Bain, his seniors by many a year. His eyes had only two expressions—one might almost say two lacks of expression. When alone they were as those of a dulled cod; when any one spoke to him they seemed to be made of a hard blue stone.

Dick Robertson was the younger son of a leather merchant, known in the Glasgow of those days as Leather Robertson. To be in the leather business, Leather Robertson said, was a dog's life, and he would not condemn all his sons to it. The third boy, Richard, he indentured to the Simsons.

Also in the Production department was young Robert Simson ("Bob" to his family, and to the staff), second son of the senior partner. Ian, the elder boy (Christened John, but so called to distinguish him from his father), was at university, a faculty for winning scholarships and bursaries having decided the father to send him there. Even if, eventually, he was to be a manufacturer, a university education, it was decided, was all to the good. As for Bob, John Simson considered that it would be throwing good money after bad to send him to college from high-school.

The brothers were excellent friends. Ian did not vaunt his capacity for study over Bob, and in games they had a common interest. Bob had only just started to learn the business, his careless school-days over, with Laidlaw and Robertson in that other office to rear of the main warehouse. Ian found many an opportunity to look in at Cochrane Street. His mother's uncertain notion that he might become a professional man was not to his heart at all. The "wareus" for him! He liked it. He liked the feeling of the place on his visits. The pillars that supported the roof, the pillars of wincey and flannelette, the stacks of fancy goods, dress goods, the young men at work with suggestion of exuberant spirits: place and people appealed to him. Their world belonged to him. Thus it was, however, Bob, the younger, was put into the business when his high-school days were over and Ian, the elder, was at university.

Below stairs was the calender-man, "old Fenwick." Looking down the well, through which he got his daylight from the upper warehouse, one could see his bald head glinting over his machines (hydraulically driven then), that were like mangles de luxe. Of his private life, till the pathos and tragedy of it had an end, none knew in the warehouse. The men there only felt that he was odd. Of that he was aware, and sometimes made attempts to be normal with them by aid of a droll story. But his droll stories were not of the normal sort. He might just as well not have troubled to try to establish easy and close relations. An account of a physical peculiarity of Lord Byron (the poet, ye ken), a story about Nell Gwynn (King Charles the Second's mistress, ye ken), an account of how a certain *grande dame*, who had met the Duke of Wellington, gave her subaltern godson a letter of introduction to him in which she asked the duke, as an old soldier, to give the lad what advice he could to one on the threshold of a military career—and the advice, that might have shocked and affronted the old lady had her godson dared to report it to her: stories of that sort were not the normal droll story for them. The jokes which he sometimes cracked (out of Elizabethan and Restoration plays, had they only known), though nearer to giving him success in his object, were not entirely of the right *genre*. So he remained odd, even in these amiable efforts.

Duncan Ramsay, wrapped in a leathern apron, like a farrier's, was the packer and chief porter, with headquarters down in the basement where, between the red-painted iron pillars supporting the ceiling, a huge packing-press stood and from nails in the walls hung stencils. Duncan Ramsay was a man unhappy in his married life as he had been in his boyhood. He came from a family the members of which almost all showed but one eyebrow, a black line across a beetling forehead with no gap atop the nose; and he had married a woman whose eyes (as was the way with most of her people) were so close-set as to give the impression that she could look through a peep-hole with both eyes at once. Nature refused to give them children, try as they would. They had been trying for ten years. He had married at twenty-five, and was thus thirty-five at the commencement of this narrative. Each wanted to have a baby, and each blamed the other for lack of success in their endeavours. Their case was one that would have been of intense interest to Sigmund Freud, alive then, but not taken seriously so far by any save himself.

Two assistants he had, one Peter Pringle, and the other, Willie Scott. Pringle lived alone in these days in a meagre room, hard by the old Gallowgate, an attic in one of the "lands", torn down these years. His hollow cheeks made Andy Middleton suspect tuberculosis, but Peter could flip from the floor to his shoulder a bale of one hundred and fifty pounds, as if it were a feather. One of his social accomplishments was whispering-singing. Sometimes, down in the packing basement, one might see a circle of the staff round him, all silent, all more than gravely attentive, with heads close, bending towards him. They were listening to his whispered but charmingly modulated rendering of some song, perhaps——

"My wee dug's deid,
My puir wee thing,
My bow-wow...."

Dan Huntley was a great admirer of his gift and virtuosity in it, but had one definite adverse criticism; it would be of no use in the music-halls. Whispering-singing, he opined, like performing fleas, was only for a close circle. "You couldna entertain a whole audience at the Gaiety wi' it frae the stage." Other accomplishments Peter Pringle had, of which you shall hear in due course.

Willie Scott was stocky and heavy but, though seemingly more robust than Pringle, always required a helping hand to elevate loads to his shoulder. Duncan Ramsay thought he was lazy. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Bridgegate he lived in a room and kitchen "house" with a mother who occasionally added to income by going out, in bonnet and dolman, to do needlework, and a sister who was employed in a boot factory in which, by the way, Leather Robertson (Dick Robertson's father) had shares—though, of that frail link between the second porter in the basement and the young man in the Production department, neither was aware. Willie was a youth of magnificent phrases, such as "I wouldna allow even my faither to strike me," or "Yer mither is always yer mither." The perky office-boy (Tommy Bruce), whose duties—and sometimes pretended duties or needs—carried him through all the warehouse and down into the basement frequently on hearing such remarks would strike an attitude and declaim: "You can take from me me life, but you cannot take from me me Victoria Cross," and go off, hop, skip and jump, up the stairs, Willie glaring after him.

That office boy had two ways of balancing the petty-cash book, when it did not balance of its own accord. One of them was to pocket what was in the box beyond the amount expected by his calculations. The other, was to pay in the deficit when, after repeated calculations, it was miserably clear that deficit there was. He had been in the Simson counting-house some time before his quaint way of book-keeping was discovered by Maitland. Maitland was the clerk, son of a farmer whose farm was away out southward from the city, on the verge of the moors. (The elder Maitland was determined that all his sons would not be farmers—a dog's life he called farming.) When Maitland reported the matter of the office-boy's accountancy to John Gilmore, who was cashier, there was profound silence in the office for several tense seconds.

Mr. Gilmore seemed to be stunned, but suddenly he recovered, and was taken with a fit of laughter that nearly choked him, troubled as he was with chronic bronchial catarrh. He was a slender man, going bald even in those days, who had been clerk in the reign of John the First. He had bulbous, protruding eyeballs on which it seemed the retina had just been thinly painted in faint blue. The effect was as of constant amazement at the world; but he was skilled, even when actually instead of only apparently amazed, at keeping his own counsel.

One morning "Alice" Lennox came into the counting-house on warehouse business and, seeing the private-room door open—sign that the bosses were both out—delayed a while to tell Mr. Gilmore of a pair of socks he had seen, a pair of socks. He had been to a "dawnce", he began, a "vewy" swell affair.

"There was a guest there," said he, "wearing the most beautiful socks I evah saw."

"Do you tell me so?" inquired Mr. Gilmore, staring at him, eyes popping.

"Oh, vewy beautiful," Alisdair expatiated. "The textcha was perfect."

"God sakes! Do you tell me so?" Gilmore huskily and politely asked.

There came the sound of the opening of the outer door, and then the step of Robert Simson in the corridor. Arranging his tie and shooting his cuffs, Alisdair daintily departed. The cashier remained rigid, frigid, tranced, gazing at the door into the warehouse, as it swung back on Alice's exit, slowed, and gently shut with a faint sigh from the silencer affixed to it to prevent slamming.

"O Lord!" Mr. Gilmore pled to the ceiling. His head slowly turned toward Maitland. "We'll hae to examine him some day," he huskily declared, "and see what we'll see."

Maitland, for all reply, gave one little snort. The farmer's son who rose at six-thirty every morning—tramping six and a half miles to Thornliebank station that he might be in Cochrane Street by nine—and who reached home out among the pewits at eight every evening, had deep contempt for dudes.

The office door opened and Mr. Robert trod past the counter to his room with a "Morning!"

"Good-morning, sir," said Gilmore, Maitland, and the little ex-schoolboy hunched, worried, over the petty-cash book.

CHAPTER II

THE WAREHOUSE

The premises of John Simson were more or less of a common architectural standard. In that quarter were many kindred fronts, interiors, and rears. Facing the street was a row of wide, high windows, of opaque green glass half-way up and plain glass beyond. On the coloured portion of the most westerly window (which lit the bosses' private-room) was the name *John Simson*. On the next one (of the counting-house) was the word, *Manufacturer*. Then came the broad door that stood open, held so by a hook near the floor, when summer was over Scotland and even in Cochrane Street, through the smoke-canopy of that industrial city, the sun shone, laying gold-leaf on the chimney-pots, spreading radiance on the dark stone fronts, thrusting bright shafts into doorways and illuminating in pale yellow curves the arches under which lorry-men backed their horses over the cobbles. In winter, when the door was shut, flush to the street was the rubric painted across it:

JOHN SIMSON.
SHIRTINGS, WINCEYS,
FANCY GOODS, FLANNELETTES,
DRESS GOODS.

Eastward, beyond the entrance, were four more windows, three of these devoid of any lettering and then, on the last one, again JOHN SIMSON. These were of the Shirts department and behind the most easterly was the small office in which Tom Huntley wrote his letters to all the world, letters which the office-boy collected and carried away to copy in the old press, which was in direct descent, by its appearance, from the printing presses of Caxton and Gutenberg.

Entering Simson's one advanced along a corridor at end of which, to left, was a door labelled *Office*. Ahead was another, a swing door, reinforced at its base with a sheet of zinc, so that it could be kicked open by men carrying loads and with no free hand. Its upper part was of frosted glass, save for a disc left transparent in the centre, like a bull's eye, toward the avoidance of collisions there. Swinging that open, most of the warehouse was revealed in one comprehensive glance.

The Shirts department, of course, was not visible. You had to turn to right, and to right again, to enter it, but otherwise the main warehouse was clear to view between stacks of cloth of many sorts, columns of winceys, flannelette and the rest, that seemed flimsily to aid the red-painted iron columns in sustaining the roof. Upon that floor stood a long counter (of the Fancy Goods department) with a gap for further progress at either end. At that counter, Mr. Maxwell, Corbett, and Johnny Leng, over their pattern and order-books, would look up without raising their chins to see who came when the door was opened. Beyond them were more stacks of "soft-goods."

On each side of that columned interior was a gallery. Broad flights of steps on either side led up to these, with strong metal balusters on which porters, carrying great loads on their shoulders, could lay a hand to aid their balance. When Tommy Bruce first saw the galleries they reminded him of pictures he had seen of oriental bazaars. In the gallery-recesses to left and right (right: Wincey and Flannelettes—left: Dress Goods) were more columns of cloth among which one could see the warehousemen at work, and hear them, too—hear the voices antiphonally intoning words and numbers as in some strange rite.

The whole place was roofed with glass. In centre was what at first sight seemed like an enormous vat of polished wood but, on advancing towards it, it revealed itself as what, in warehouse parlance, was "the well." Looking down there, one had a glimpse of the calender-man's bald head in a haze of fluff rising from some bolt of cloth quaking through his mangle-like machine. To left was a door leading into the receiving and despatching chamber where was a hoist that rose and fell by hydraulic power between that floor and the basement. A flight of stairs, there, also gave access to the basement—the packers' quarters and old Fenwick's. At the far end of that chamber heavy broad doors opened into the cobbled court, where the lorry horses tossed their nosebags and pigeons fluttered and pattered, pecking at the scattered dole, while loading or unloading was in progress.

In that rear court, into which the lorries backed with a great clash of iron-shod hoofs, when the bosses were out, employees "dying for a smoke" would sometimes stand for five minutes having a whiff of tobacco—for the head-packer would permit no one to come to his basement for that. He was king down there, and in direct Doric, or in what Dunbar

called "our ancient Ingliss", if he smelt tobacco-smoke coming from the little room in the far corner, he would hammer on the door and tell whoever was inside what that place was for, and that it was "nae" smoking-room. In the packing basement were often little gatherings of the staff, especially of the juniors. Not by any means were these gatherings always in utter truancy; but when two or three happened to meet there while employed upon some rightful labour for which they were on the salary-list of John Simson, they might take a breathing-spell.

Such a breathing-spell was being taken on the day of this chapter by Dan Huntley, Bob Simson, and Arthur Laurie, to watch Duncan Ramsay at work. Over the base of the great press he had spread a length of sacking, and with Pringle and Scott handing him the bolts, or pieces, he had built a neat stack. All watched while he slipped the sacking-ends over the pile, drew it down, smoothed it with an occasional helping hand from his two assistants.

"That's fine. Now! An easy press!" he ordered.

Peter stepped to one side and began to turn the wheel, while all looked on anxiously or admiringly to see how the pile responded.

"Fine—not a sag anywhere," Duncan announced, and plunged to his desk for the big needles and twine.

It was at that stage that a sudden emotion of levity possessed the watching juniors. They began to jiggle this way and that, joggle one against another, each shooting out a hip as though in practice for the scrums of a football match. Ramsay stitched on, heedless of them, but anon, aware of their play, felt the grudge of a labourer against idlers—or they just fussed him, bothered him.

"It's a pity some of you lads have nae work to do," he growled.

Willie Scott, either in deference to his boss's mood, or to suggest that he was no idler, interjected an inquiry.

"What stencils do ye want?" he asked.

The young men became more ebullient, and plunged into one of the hilarious games of the "wareus," each making passes at the waistcoat of another in attempts to flip it open, or inserting quick crooked finger under a necktie, and twitching it out.

"Look out! I had a tie-clip! You've sent it flying somewhere!"

The fun grew wilder. To keep one's own waistcoat buttoned while yanking open others was the object of the hurly-burly. Footsteps on the stairs caused a lull, but they were only of the office-boy, bringing his brush-container (part of the outfit, now obsolete or antique, for copying letters) to fill it with water. The lull was but momentary. Whoops of renewed laughter sounded and echoed dully from the ceiling of that packing basement in Cochrane Street.

"Hie, you young devils," Duncan yelled, "dinna get in my way or I'll gie ye a slap with my stencilling brush."

Just then down came Maitland with quick clatter on the brass-edged steps.

"Hurry up, young fellow-my-lad," he called to the office-boy, "you're to go out. Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Gilmore both want you. It's urgent."

Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Gilmore—both! The young warehousemen let their play go. They, too, might be wanted upstairs. Dan Huntley, Bob Simson, and Arthur Laurie, buttoning their waistcoats, fled to their departments by different routes, for there were two other stairways besides the one from the chamber directly above. There was a flight of steps that came down from the Shirting department and another from the far corner of the warehouse under the Flannelette gallery, both of these to the calendering basement, which was connected by a doorway with the packing-room.

Tommy Bruce, spashing water from the filled container, hurried across the cemented basement, upstairs, and smartly into the office where were Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Gilmore in close talk.

"See here, Tommy," said the cashier, "Mr. Maxwell wants you to dash along to the Exchange and go in and ask for Mr. Simson, and see him, himself. Tell him from Mr. Maxwell that Mr. Sinclair, the Canadian buyer, is coming along in a few minutes. Give me that—give me that brush and water-contraption—I'll hang it up for you."

Only a day or two later that outing of Tommy's would not have been necessary. There were men then at work in the office installing that new-fangled thing, the telephone, their activities there making each member of the staff feel that he lived in progressive days of invention and discovery.

Tommy leapt for his cap. Just as he was going out into Cochrane Street, Wem Mackay was coming in. There seemed to be hilarity in the air that day. As they passed, Wem made a flick with right hand for Tommy's waistcoat, but Tommy, chuckling, held an arm across his breast and thus prevented the disturbance of his attire—unaware that that flick of the right hand had been just a feint to deflect his eyes from the flip of the other hand. The pinnacle of that fun had been achieved. His trousers had been snapped open in one deft movement, and away he went, unaware, to George Square and down Ingram Street, sartorially shocking, or amusing, according to the minds of those who observed. He wondered why two passing gamins yodelled at him. He wondered what a very old man meant by halting and pivoting to wave a stick at him and gibber some words.

"The old goat's mad," he surmised.

It was a fine day in Glasgow. The pavements were dry. A little wind stirred the dropped packing-straw at warehouse entrances. The harness of passing dray-horses shone. From Miss Cranston's tea-rooms came odours of tea and coffee, crumpets and buttered scones. The plate-glass windows shone like upright slabs of glare ice and reflected, as in a quick shadow-show, the people going past—there and gone. Preparations were being made for an imminent royal visit to the city, a royal procession. Lintels were being decked with bunting, flagpoles were being affixed to doorways. Municipal carts went heavily by laden with gravel to be strewn on some of the streets toward prevention of the downfall of caracoling horses.

Running across Queen Street towards the Royal Exchange, Tommy raised a group of grain-pecking pigeons. They swept over his head with their little "Ohs!" of alarm and flurry of wings, and flew, a pennant of blue, over the head of Marochetti's Wellington, dropping unconscious contempt on that warrior. Slowing abruptly from a run to a young man's business walk, as though subdued by the Corinthian dignity of the Royal Exchange, he entered its portals. Within a commissioner with medalled breast challenged him.

"Yes, young fellow?"

"I want to see Mr. Simson—personally."

"Mr. Simson. You'll find him in there—in the second room, I believe. Knock before you go in. He may be in conference with other gentlemen. And here, wait a minute. Button up your trousers before ye gang in."

"O Lord!" gasped Tommy, and then, "Thank you," he said, and adjusted his dress, wondering how long he had been like that, and who was the culprit. Had it happened down in the basement? No, Mr. Maxwell or Mr. Gilmore would have noticed it in the office. Wem—that's who it was: Wem Mackay, when they met in the corridor.

There was something almost awe-inspiring about that interior. There was a cloistral quiet, a definite dignity. His footsteps, as he thrust open a door and passed into a tiled passageway, rang loud and he felt he should tiptoe. But he was in haste, for Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Gilmore had impressed upon him the need for haste. He came to the second door, knocked, and entered.

In the middle of a large and almost palatial room was a group of men—very old men they seemed to that stripling. They were city fathers. They were a yarn merchant (business acquaintance of his boss), a wine merchant (friend of his boss), a saltpetre merchant (another friend of his boss), men who came staidly and dignified into the counting-house to inquire, "Mr. Simson in?" and who, after conference in the private room, went out as though with high seriousness to make Glasgow flourish.

They did not hear Tommy enter. John Simson was there too, but he did not hear. They were milling and whirling and whooping with merriment, each trying to protect his waistcoat while he assaulted other waistcoats. A hat was knocked off in the scrimmage—his boss's, John Simson's. Tommy saw Mr. Mackenzie, the yarn merchant, flip at the necktie of Mr. Renfield, the very venerable saltpetre merchant.

"Excuse me, sir," he began, advancing on the *mêlée*.

They desisted. They looked at him in amazement, wondering where he came from, how he had sprung to life there. They

buttoned their waistcoats, frowning severely at him. Mr. Simson retrieved his hat from the floor.

"What?" he rumbled, just that: "What?" violently.

"Excuse me, sir, but Mr. Sinclair, the Canadian buyer, will be at the wareus in a few minutes, and Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Gilmore think you ought—should—I mean, would like to be there when he arrives."

"All right," growled John Simson, looking as if he hated his office-boy.

Tommy wheeled to the door and held it open—and lo, just as his great boss turned from the group to follow, one of the old gentlemen made a pass at Mr. Simson's chest with one hand, a pass which was deflected with a hint of annoyance—the game being apparently finished—and with the other hand furtively achieved the pinnacle of that sport.

What was Tommy to do? Holding the door open, he wondered. No, he could not say, "Sir, you are undone." That, he felt, would be as much as his job would be worth, even though he was indentured for three years. The papers would be cancelled.

John Simson strode violently along the corridor and Tommy hurried alongside to open the next door for him, but the boss, forging ahead, opened it for himself, let it swing back against the boy and strode violently, like a colonel of foot leading a charge, past the commissionaire who came to attention and saluted, then looked at Tom in the rear and winked. That had been a curious and riotous conference!

Away along Ingram Street went John Simson on one side, and on the other his office-boy. Gamins yodelled at the great man, as he branged along, but he did not appear to observe them nor to hear them. He was annoyed that the office-boy had found out that the Royal Exchange was not always as serious a haunt as it looked. He hoped the confounded infant would not tell the news to the staff. Should he advise the boy not to say a word? No, let it go.

He was several laps ahead of Tommy at the door of the warehouse. Within, Mr. Maxwell, shaking hands with Mr. Sinclair, heard the masterful tread.

"Here's Mr. Simson now," he said. "I know his walk. He'll be delighted to see you."

The tread went into the office and halted there.

"Mr. Sinclair arrived?" John Simson asked.

"In the wareus, sir, in the wareus," replied Gilmore.

Into the warehouse, with a wide sweep of the door, went Mr. Simson and advanced on Mr. Sinclair, breezy, bonhomous, holding out his hand.

"How do you do?" he bellowed. "Delighted to see you again."

"Look at your pants," Mr. Sinclair commanded, with a pointing finger.

While that quaint meeting was in progress, Tommy Bruce, as though upon important business, dived swiftly behind some columns of cloth in search of Wem Mackay to give him, if he had a chance, one smite between the ribs for what he had done.

CHAPTER III

IF THESE STONES COULD SPEAK

Of the distant connection between Willie Scott (porter) and Dick Robertson (of the Production Department) we have already heard. Between Peter Pringle (porter) and Henry Braid (head of the Dress-Goods Department) there was a closer one. Its likeness to that other is only by reason of the fact that they were equally unaware of theirs.

We have to go back a little way in Peter's life to tell of it and may do so while John Simson, at ease again, Mr. Sinclair the Canadian buyer, and Mr. Alexander Maxwell are chatting between the pillars of iron and the columns of cloth. Before they begin their peregrination of the departments for Sinclair to shake hands with the heads and say, "Well, here we are again," there is time for that backward glance to the days when Peter Pringle, aged six, lived in Argyle Court with his mother—father unknown to him and uncertain to her.

There was something wrong with her that day. She trod to and fro in the room. She opened the window, looked out, and seemed to be measuring the depth of the drop, or leap, to the court below. Then she screamed, and shut the window, but kept her hand upon it, adread it might spring up, open again of its own accord. If it did—such was her disordered emotion—she would have to leap out. Wringing her hands, she dashed away. Suddenly her gaze rested on a present given her by one of her sailor friends.

It stood on the mantelpiece by way of souvenir and decoration—a bottle, though not the sort of bottle she craved and lacked the price to buy. It contained a long lizard from Central America. She stared at it, and with a look as of reprieve from agony lifted it, feverishly clawed off the oil-silk wrapping over the top, prized the cork out, and drank. The lizard in the preserving spirit seemed, to young Peter looking on, abruptly to come alive. It drifted down in pursuit of the rushing air-bubbles, swam as though to kiss his mother.

The boy was terrified. He wheeled and ran, gibbering, on to the landing and down the stairs into Argyle Court. A small girl there, a year younger than he, came to him, full of her own fancies.

"Come and collect tramcar-tickets," she suggested.

"A'richt," Peter replied—and never a word said he about the horror of the resuscitated lizard sliding its snout into the neck of the tilted bottle.

Bare-footed, they pattered together along Argyle Street to the corner of Glassford Street where was a car terminus. The trams came trundling south, and the passengers alighted, tossing their tickets away. To become possessor of these in fine pristine state was desirable. Those retrieved from the gutter were too often mud-stained. Some people had a way of folding and unfolding their tickets as they travelled, pondering their affairs. These were of no use to collectors.

A car having reached that terminus, the conductor went ahead to help the driver in carrying the whiffle-like bar of iron with its hook in the middle to the rear which, the horses in place there, became the front for the return journey. It was an interesting proceeding to watch but seldom did these children watch it, intent on the alighting passengers—and in adding to Jean's collection.

"Please, will ye gie me yer car-ticket? Aw, wife, aw, mister, please, will ye gie me yer car-ticket?"

Thus went their chant at the corner with each tram that arrived, and between whiles they stood on the grating before a baker's window to dry and warm their feet. After an hour or two, Jean had a sheaf to arrange by colours, hold in her hands fan-wise, dote upon as out in the west-end of the city the young of the merchants might dote upon the changing colours in a kaleidoscope.

It was in one of these interludes of collecting, as they stood on the baker's *stank*, that Peter observed a commotion at the corner. A disturbed-looking man, accompanied by two disturbed-looking lads, all "weel pitten on" (well-dressed), were walking hurriedly—in flight, in fact—away from a pursuer Peter knew well by sight and reputation, a gaunt, bearded man, dubbed in the Court the Mad Reformer. As he ran after these three with shambling legs and flying beard he screamed, "So ye hae sons of yer ain! And ye come doon among us for to debauch oor daughters."

The tram started. The pursued man, thrusting the lads before him—twins they seemed to be—leapt aboard and hurriedly

passed inside. The Mad Reformer ran level with the car.

"Ye come doon for to debauch oor daughters," he shouted, "you that has a wife o' yer ain!"

"See ye later, Jean," said Peter, and pattered in pursuit.

The Reformer, being old, despite the fire of righteous or fanatical fury in his eyes, could not keep abreast of the car. It outdistanced him; but at the corner of Ingram Street it had to slow down to make a large "S" turn before passing on towards George Square. Peter was beside it and the Mad Reformer, because of that slackening of speed, was gaining astern.

"... for to debauch oor daughters ..." the boy heard him screaming to rear.

On the last lap up towards George Square, the Reformer's legs failed him. Little Peter, however, panting and puffing, was sufficiently far in advance to see the man and the lads alight at the post office and hurriedly pass up the steps into the portico. When he, following, dashed up the steps, they were not there. They must have passed through one of the doors—to right or left. Only office-boys were visible in that portico, taking letters from baskets or satchels, reading their addresses and popping them selectively into boxes along the rear wall.

Peter ran to one door to pry in, a-tiptoe, through its upper glass. No, not there. He ran to the other door.

"Dae ye think this post office was built for you to jink through?" a man in a red coat demanded of him.

"Ah'm looking for ma faither," lied Peter.

"Wad ye ken him when ye saw him?" asked the man.

Peter looked up in his face, showing very markedly the whites of his eyes beneath the iris. A pathetic panting child he suddenly seemed to the red-coated one.

"Ye canna jink through the post-office, ma lad," he announced in a gentler voice.

Peter turned and went slapping down the steps. There was the Mad Reformer, shambling towards him.

"Ah think he's gone in the end place," Peter shouted "and maybe awa' oot the door at the faur end," and so saying he rushed along the pavement westwards.

"I'll get the hoormonger!" the Reformer cried out.

A policeman, crossing from the north pavement, deliberately, unhurried, desired a word with him.

"What's the trouble wi' you?" he inquired.

The boy did not delay to observe the turn of events there but sped, instead, on to the next corner. There they were, the "weel pitten on" one and the lads. They had slipped out of the door to west and were round the corner into Ingram Street! By the time Peter reached there they were level with the British Linen Company Bank building.

A string of vans and lorries in Queen Street delayed him, but at last, dodging in front of horses' heads, sworn at by drivers, he made the crossing. There they were again. One of the lads looked over his shoulder and said something to the man. They slowed down. Peter made up on them. He was but a few steps to rear when they turned into Buchanan Street.

There something unexpected happened to the urchin. Florists' shops, restaurants from which came distracting odours, grand shops with furs in their gleaming windows, scented ladies going by with a rustle, toffs (all weel pitten on), treading the pavement as though they owned it, carriages at the kerb, and belled hansoms jingling past: he was beyond his country. He was nothing there, nothing at all. He felt sick. Perhaps he had run too fast.

He let the pursued ones pass away to be lost in the crowds of Buchanan Street, shook the hair out of his eyes and turned back, went slapping along to George Square again and the post office. The policeman was strolling along there. At any rate, the Mad Reformer had not been arrested.

Peter walked towards home and on the way made up on the Reformer, padded beside him and——

"Yon hoormonger and debaucher of oor lassies has gone awa' up Buchanan Street," he said.

The Reformer stared down upon him with dulled eyes. He appeared not to understand. He was hopeless. He had given in.

"To hell wi' everybody!" he ejaculated so vehemently that Peter moved on quickly and then, sudden as a pup that has been playing and with a whimper remembers home, ran on down Glassford Street—the incident closed.

Only when he drew near to the Court again he halted. Close to home he wondered what he was going home for. There was a crowd before the entry. It parted, and he saw two policemen, one pushing a barrow into the fairway of the street, the other quick-stepping beside it. It was a barrow of a type he had often seen, as long as a *wilk* or *banany*, or *ceevil-orange* barrow, but had a tarpaulin hood over it, and it was generally used for taking drunken women to the police-station. Men were yanked there on their feet between two constables if they would not go with one; clawing women were put in the barrow, strapped down, and the hood hid their shame. From under that hood usually came screamed views and opinions of the police, couched in language that filled some with delight and others with horror.

But there seemed to be no one under that hood that day. Yes, there was. Peter could tell by the way the policeman bent as he pushed it. His mother (as soon he was to be informed) was there, or all that was mortal of her. Ever since that morning, whenever he was ill, he would see her again whipping the dreadful bottle from the mantelshelf, see the lizard come alive in the spirits with swimming feet and elongating tail.

And Henry Braid of the Dress Goods Department at Simson's, a man grown, would often, in these streets, be clouded by memories of his clouded youth. For he it was who, fleeing with his brother and his dissolute father from a man like Aaron gone mad, had miserably looked over his shoulder to see if they were still pursued and reported that only the barefoot little keelie was following them.

CHAPTER IV

PROCESSION

A buyer from Australia, a buyer from New Zealand arrived the day after Mr. Sinclair of Montreal, and in the matter of entertaining these visitors fortune was with the house of Simson. Was there not the Royal Visit, preparations for which the office-boy had seen when on his way to warn John Simson at the Royal Exchange of the Canadian's imminent advent?

For his family and himself, John had already secured a window near Charing Cross. He could have invited these three from overseas to share it, but Robert, in the end, was their host. They would be happier—such was the decision of the brothers—lunching with a bachelor at his club, and in a stag-party viewing the procession from its windows, than in a family gathering.

They had, already, memorable acquaintance with Robert's club, its cuisine and cellars. They liked the solid comfort of its rooms. They liked its servants, these waiters who spoke with a native burr, markedly neither Swiss nor Italian, who by reason of the heavy shoes they wore might be mistaken for comfortable farmers in evening dress, but never for dancing-masters. Mr. Heriot, the buyer from New Zealand, who was a reader, they always reminded of the servitors in the works of Scott, those servitors who, by their sterling character, sometimes for a whole chapter were more mighty than those behind whose old family chairs they stood.

The luncheon party was definitely successful. Mr. Robert had no occasion to recall the phrases he had prepared, the topics he had pondered in advance toward launching it. That was a way of his to combat a sort of stage-fright that sometimes assailed him in preliminaries of playing host. It was the Canadian who saved him the need to open proceedings.

"Do you realise," said Mr. Sinclair, spreading the napkin on his knees, bending forward, and looking from one to the other in a friendly and inclusive glance, "that we bring the Empire together?"

By nods and smiles they acknowledged realisation and he plunged on, neatly spearing hors-d'oeuvres the while, into statistics.

"D'ye realise the area we represent, sitting here at this table?" he asked. "Australia, three million square miles; New Zealand, a hundred and five thousand square miles; Canada, three millions, five forty-seven, two hundred AND thirty."

Robert Simson gazed in amazement. How was it done? Had this man prepared it beforehand? Did he also plan his table-talk in advance? The New Zealander stared at Sinclair in somewhat similar fashion, amused as well as awed. The Australian was, by his twinkle, as one going into joyous action—he, too, a statistician. He sat erect. He drew a deep breath, and when the Canadian inquired, "Did you gentlemen from the Antipodes come on the same boat?" he replied not only that they had not but, as well as giving the name of his steamer, added, "fifteen thousand tons."

Heriot decided the question had been sufficiently answered. No need for him to give the name of his boat. Had he known the tonnage he would no doubt have affably and proudly given both. Australia and Canada, however, warmed each to other over their gift in common, and the wine-waiter recharged their glasses at a nod from Mr. Robert while from outside through the open window came hum of the populace, like the sound of surf on a distant beach.

Sinclair of Montreal and Thomson from Sydney were climbing the genealogical trees of the Royal houses of Europe, swopping their knowledge of the ages of kings, queens, and emperors, and the New Zealander was beginning to feel fuddled—whether with the statistics or the wine, he could not say—when Mr. Robert, somewhat diffidently, for the talk of these two was going well, asked if they would like to have coffee there or in the smoking-room. Heriot, by reason of his feeling of being in a daze, self-consciously wondered if the coffee was suggested chiefly for his sake, for it was upon him that the host's gaze rested. He plumped promptly for the smoking-room.

On the way across the hall he suddenly remembered that in his breast-pocket he had the passenger list of the steamer on which he had come from New Zealand, and that on its forefront, under a picture of the vessel, its tonnage was noted. Furtively he drew it out sufficiently far to read the figures and when they sat down in the great saddlebags in the smoking-room, circling to a low, circular table, and coffee and liqueurs were before them, he began:

"By the way, the tonnage of the boat I came on was——"

Robert gazed at him with astonishment. Was he too, then, a statistician? Had he been lying low, just eating and drinking and biding his time?

"Damn it, I forget!" said the New Zealander.

Dominion and Commonwealth stared at him. At that moment the head-waiter came to Robert's side and bending there, spoke quietly almost paternally.

"Oh, that so? Thank you. Well, gentlemen, we'd better be getting to our window."

Australia and Canada gulped coffee and liqueur, but New Zealand, warned by having forgotten his ship's tonnage two minutes after, as he thought, he had memorised it, quaffed down his tot of coffee, but left the liqueur.

There was music without, distant, of pipe and drum as they crossed the quiet and void dining-room again to take their places on the flag-draped balcony before its windows. The sound as of surf on distant beaches was louder there and clearly realised as the hum of voices. On either side of the street the pavements were thronged from kerb to wall. In front of the barricades were soldiers, standing at ease, but even as they took their seats the rasp of an order to "Attention" rang out. High banners, slung from one side to the other of that thoroughfare, folded and unfolded, snapping in the passing breezes. In the middle of the street below a flock of pigeons pattered, pecking happily at the gravel as though it had been strewn there specially for them to use as roughage for their crops. Suddenly came mounted policemen at the gallop, and the pigeons rose, flying under the flags—a long streaming line of blue wings.

Heriot sat upon Robert's left. On his right sat Sinclair and next to him Thompson, with a corner to lean back comfortably. The Canadian bent forward, and raising his hands brought one down upon his host's knee, and one upon the Australian's.

"D'you realise, gentlemen," he inquired, "that we bring the Empire together?"

In another quarter of the city, Peter Pringle was busy, with marked proficiency, in a profession other than that of carrying loads. What that was, and how he had become a skilled practitioner, requires at least brief explanation. After that day on which, homing from the collecting of tramcar-tickets with (and for) Jean Morrison—the day of the lizard in the bottle, and the Mad Reformer—he found himself an orphan, he had been adopted, more or less, by a rogue with redeeming qualities in Argyle Court. This foster-father (he had been, ever and again, a close friend of Peter's mother, and may, indeed, have been his true father) was a great stravaiger to horse-races, whippet-races, country fairs, agricultural shows, staunch attender at all royal processions within reasonable distance of his base. A board, small enough to slip under his waistcoat at sight of a policeman, three thimbles and a pea: these were his chief means of support; and out of the fulness of his heart he had let the small boy sleep in his room at Argyle Court, share his food when he was at home, with no other return than occasional assistance (taking him along when pursuing his profession in the city) in watching for the police and clapping his hands together at sight of one drawing near. The sound of one brisk clap, he explained to young Peter, could penetrate through the clamour of even a large crowd. Renfrewshire and Ayrshire he had wandered through, also the border shires and northward into Perth, sometimes in summer accompanied by the boy who helped with that clap of the hands. He knew the Cowgate and the Grassmarket of Edinburgh as intimately as the Gallowgate and the Saltmarket of Glasgow, and had once lodged for a day or two in the Scouringburn of Dundee. A little, lean wiry man he was, a merry adventurer.

Many conjuring tricks he taught Peter, but chief of all was the pea and thimbles one. Since those days young Pringle had been boot-black, newsboy, billiard-marker, and here he was—porter at Simson's; but always he had kept in practice with thimbles and pea. A royal procession through the city gave excellent opportunity, if one were proficient in the handling of these, for making a little honest if illegal money. The necessity to have many police along the route of a procession left other quarters meagrely patrolled, and always a considerable percentage of those who had come to see processions were bored with the waiting and with having their toes trodden on. Disgruntled, they backed out and in the adjacent streets were ready for the excitement and consolation offered by betting on the problem of which thimble hid the elusive pea. "Help, gentlemen! Help, gents, to find the pea. Where has the little jigger gone? Only a penny a guess, gentlemen. Even money and no deception. Where, O where, has the little jigger gone?" Long since had the tall "land" at

Argyle Court been demolished, long since had Peter's self-appointed foster-father—for other sleight of hand, beyond the secretion of a pea under a thimble—been taken off for a sojourn in prison; but Peter had all these years kept up his practice and ever and again he added to income by aid of that spare-time employment.

By streets parallel to the beflagged ones he took his way, while the Empire was being brought together in Robert Simson's Club. The voices of that festive day had come up to Mr. Robert and his guests indistinctly, like the sound of surf on a distant beach. To Peter Pringle they were distinct though coming to him only in detached fragments as he threaded his way through the moving throng looking for a pitch.

"You're no' all here!"

"No. Mauggie's at hame and I begin to wish I was there. It's a wonder we ever won this far."

"What a crowd! And sojers—sojers everywhere, wi' their braw uniforms and their shining boots. What a trudge we've had! There seems nae end to this road, or we get a place for tae slip in and see't."

"If only that husband o' mine hadna the notion to live away out in the country. For the children's health, he says, to save them breathing the soot."

"Aw, weel, it's worth seeing, nae doot. When the weans are auld they'll be able to tell o' seein't. That's a bonny frock ye have for the occasion. Fine stuff. If it's fair to ask—how much was ye taxed for it?"

"Goad, what a crowd! We'll never get through. It's like sardines in a tin."

"Oh, here they come. It's the Greys! It's the Scots Greys, the detachment frae Maryhill. They're going to have cavalry as well as infantry lining the route. Here, man, that's my toes ye're tramping on. It's granted.... Oh, look at that mounted policeman's horse rearin' up. Come in here, lassie, come in here. Give us hold of your hand. Have ye gone gyte, slipping out there on the causey?"

"They're awfu' brats, some of them. Well, we're a' richt here, I'm thinking."

"Aye, and I feel better. I felt dwamy in that crush, and I'm that feart of ramping horses...."

"See here, you tak' Jimmy's hand, and I'll tak' Mary's, and dinna you louse't or she'll be lost in the crowd. Did ye hear that rend the noo? Look! Somebody steppit on my dress. They're a nuisance these long dresses, gathering a' the glaur and stoor—and the hems getting tramped on!"

"Aw, haw! Did ye hear the would-be's go by, talking like they had been eating London buns? What's wrang wi' oor ain speech?"

"Here you are, ladies, you can get through here."

"Thank you, sir, thank you kindly. Come on, come on. Weel, now we'll get somewhere, now we shan't be long as the saying goes."

By streets parallel to those of the procession, Peter travelled along with a spate of others. At every side street they looked hopefully to see if there was room for them at the other end where the procession was to pass. But at every side street were people coming out with the cry of, "Farther on, there's nae room here!" Soon, by the signs, Peter would find the perfect place to begin, and at last he was at it. A group of men, with neither wife nor children to look after, had apparently decided that sufficient people were packed along the sides of the main thoroughfares to huzzah and wave. Perhaps they had even set out only half-heartedly, and were easily discouraged and deflected.

Here was Peter's opportunity. He whipped out from under his waistcoat (that action itself was like a conjuring trick) the little board, slipped its string round his neck, set the three thimbles in place, elevated the pea between curved thumb and forefinger in the true manner, and——

"Gents, oh, gents!" he pled in a waggish, wheedling, cajoling voice that brought friendly laughter, "where has the little jigger gone? Can no one find the little fellow? Here you are, sir. A penny a time and even money. Can you see the little jigger? Under this one? Well, well, who could believe it? Not there! I thought myself I saw it slip under that one, sir. In your place, I'd have bet on it. Why, here it is—under this other one. Thank you, sir. Penny a throw and even money."

Where, O where, is the little jigger? No deception. Keep your eye on him. Here he is—and now he's gone! Penny a throw. Under this one? Well, well, it is not there! Why, under this one! Now, you little jigger, how did you get there?"

At the end of that street the heralding police rode past, and there was a throbbing in the air of fife and drum.

"Another try, sir? Where, oh, where...."

The bands blared and the crowds cheered while Peter pocketed the pennies.

CHAPTER V

FENWICK'S PROCESSION

Not only those at the club, viewing the procession, and Peter in the streets, letting it go by, but old Fenwick, the calender-man, has his place here. The voices of that gala day that had come up to Mr. Robert and his guests, indistinctly, as the sound of surf on a distant beach, and to Pringle were heard distinct, if fragmentary, Fenwick heard also in a sense. They were heard by him as inverted echo—if such a thing could be, heard across two thousand years, and in another land.

The warehouse closed that day at one, as though it were a Saturday, and not all the members of staff had been at work even in the forenoon. Wem Mackay, he being a Rifle Volunteer, and the Volunteers having to take part in the pageant, was let off for the entire day by Sandy Bain, his department head.

"You'll have a guid view o't," remarked Sandy, "standing at attention maist of the time. I dinna envy you. Oh, them sojers' buttons!"

Maitland, when asked by Mr. Gilmore what he intended to do on the great day, replied that he would "push off home," when the office closed. So the cashier had told him he might just as well not come in at all, seeing he lived so far out. Corbett had arrived that morning wearing knickerbockers, had come in the back way and taken a bicycle down to the basement in the lift. The office-boy, for some reason, had to ring the bell every time he went down there, to the annoyance of Duncan Ramsay, who had had an altercation with his wife over breakfast regarding where they were to meet to see the procession. Corbett was going to take advantage of the closure of the warehouse for half-a-day to cycle out to Loch Lomond. Mr. Maxwell dashed off at twelve to meet his elegant wife and have lunch with her at F. & F's. Lunch over, they would stroll uphill and take their places on two gilt chairs reserved for them in a window of Sauchiehall Street. Tom Huntley planned to take the air in Queen's Park—which he would have, belike, practically all to himself, apart from the thrushes and the park-keepers. Some were all agog with plans to view the procession. Some had other plans.

Old Fenwick, with the closing of the warehouse, hurried eastward. Doubtful, indeed, if any one, seeing him on his way, would have hazarded that there went one who led a sacrificial life. He was a man hardly of medium height, but very powerfully built. There was something simian in his gait. The calendering with its accompaniment of dust and fluff rising before him from the whirling cloth, to tickle his nostrils, had caused his nose to give false accusation against him; but should any one who took him at first glance for a tippler halt him, let us say, to ask for a direction, closer scrutiny might well cancel the inference of his nose. Immediate would be the impression that he was by no means as ogreish or as bibulous as he seemed at casual glance. The childlike candour in the eyes looking up into the inquirer's, and he obviously anxious to do what he could to assist, would negative that first superficial opinion of him.

His father he but dimly remembered and in early years he had been the support of an infirm mother. After her death he was the support of a sister suffering from what in those days was spoken of as a lingering and incurable disease. There had been occasions when the pain she suffered seemed to him, looking on, beyond mortal endurance. There had been an occasion on which, damp with the sweat of agony, she moaned through clenched teeth, "Walter, Walter, can't you——" and no more.

"Can't I do what, Janet?"

"Can't you help me somehow, Walter? It would be so easy. You are not kind to let me live, you are not kind. God is not kind. Oh, God forgive me for saying that to you, Walter."

He reported that spasm to the doctor, and the reply had been that it was to be expected. To be expected! Then could not something be done to ease the pain? "Not yet," the doctor had told him.

Always, even on ordinary days, Fenwick hurried home, knowing well that from half-past eight till half-past six is a long time to an invalid. On this day of celebration he almost ran as though to make the comparative brevity of his absence from that invalid still more brief for her. It was in a dismal section of the city that, by financial necessity, he lived, and it was typical of the man that he had made of the room and kitchen there something of a sanctuary. The effect was achieved to a considerable extent in the usual way for those who, in such neighbourhoods, do not accept the greyness as normal,

achieved by aid of geraniums in pots along the window-sills, and by fern-filled bowls hanging in the window recesses.

There was that in the man which made him squirm often—and then laugh away his disgust—when, turning into the close, he was confronted by a notice which read, *Commit no Nuisance*. Terrible, terrible world! Tut, tut, terrible world that folks should need to be told to commit nae nuisance! And these women with folded arms, aye gossiping at their doorways—they gied him a scunner. Always he offered a little bow to them in passing and raised a hand to his shabby bowler in salute. To lift it from his head would be either to embarrass them or to make them think he was deriding them; so he gave his small bow and touched his hat and scurried up the stairs.

It was on record by the gossips at their doors that he had been seen sometimes to come home with flowers, a bunch of violets tucked away among their own leaves held in one of his great hands, crooked at his side, as though in an endeavour to hide it from them. Even carrying a sheaf of daffodils, less easy to smuggle past, he had been seen on a Saturday afternoon of Spring, ascending the stairs. And books, too—often books—they had seen him bearing home. Well, he minded his ain business, and he didna put on airs, and he had a sister rale poorly in his hoose, and he paid a woman to go and redd it up and sit with her while he was at work, and he saw to it that the stairs were washed when it was his turn.

As for his more private life, unknown to the gossips on the landings: What might have been called his sacrifice had, after all, recompense for him. Its true name, its fair name, was devotion. And that devotion was not only dutiful. In his boyhood, when his widowed mother was alive, all had been scrimp-scrimp, to make ends meet. No viewing of football matches for him on Saturday afternoons. He had spent them in the Free Library, a gnomish customer there. When, reading a book, he had come on reference to another in it which he did not know, he would rise and scuttle to the counter and fill in a slip for it. He became a pleasing curiosity to the librarians in Miller Street, odd, even to them.

By the time we dropped in at Simson's to see who was who there, he had created a world of his own. He had availed himself of more than public libraries. With more pence to spend he had collected a small private library. There was an extraordinary questing eagerness in the man. References to foreign literature had moved him to the acquiring, with grammar and dictionaries, of at least a reading, if not a speaking French, Spanish, Italian. Sometimes his sister would beg of him to go out more and not, as she said, to *mind* her, but he was fixed in his ways by then. He was less lonely when alone with his books than when in the midst of a group of men at the warehouse—not that he took pride in that. There are those, no doubt, who desire to have proof of their difference from and superiority to their fellows, but old Fenwick was not of that company. He had no sense of superiority to any. He regretted rather than gloried in that feeling of distance from others when it pounced upon him.

As for what is called sex-life—what is there to tell of Fenwick? It is possible that his libido (a word not in the currency in his days) was vicariously satisfied or placated in books. One may recall, in this connection, his stories of Byron's physical unwontedness, of Nell Gwynn, of what the Duke of Wellington said to the young subaltern—stories not precisely of the normal genre of bawdy story as understood by those of the staff at Simson's, who relished such. It may be that eventually sexual stir did not bother him. The faces of lassies going by in the streets or seen on the stairs could not match the imagined one of Penthesilea, nor compare with Queen Nefertiti's, a cheap print of whose sculptured head was among his possessions.

By fifty-five (he was that age, and looked older, in the year of this Royal visit) he had made his own world of the mind.

On the day of the procession his sister was none too bad. The woman—Mrs. Hamilton—who came to sit with her in his absences, at the cost of five shillings a week, assured him of that, with a happy nod as she rose on his entrance and by a whispered "A guid day," as she stepped out on to the stairhead and he gave that odd little bobbing bow of his, closing the door on her.

"Do you not want to go to the procession?" his sister inquired suddenly. "Call the woman back," she ordered, "and go and see it."

Procession! No, no, not he. He had brought home some macaroons for afternoon tea. There was a reference in Laurence Sterne to macaroons that made them one of his favourite accompaniments to the afternoon tea they had together on Saturdays and Sundays.

In the evening, after supper, he took from his shelves (that were a perennial source of amazement to the factor when he came to collect the rent) an appropriate book for that day. The voices of two women of Syracuse, visiting Alexandria to

see the Adonis festival, chattered in that room in Glasgow, across two thousand years. Outside in the street was considerable hubbub, as though those who had been cheering lustily during the afternoon were loath to make an end of uproar. Of these outer sounds, of the singing—bibulous singing, often—he was hardly aware. He was lost in his book, with Gorgo and Praxinoë. As they got ready to go out to see the sights, Praxinoë reviled her husband for his choice of a domicile, and Gorgo warned her that the wean was listening. Gorgo ejaculated admiration for her friend's attire, inquiring of her, "How much did the stuff cost you just off the loom?" Then out they went into the surging streets of Alexandria, where at first Praxinoë compared the crowd with ants and, later, heated and tashed, on the endless road, with swine. "Here come the king's war-horses!" She had her toes trodden upon, snatched Eunoë away from a rearing horse, exclaiming that of all things she dreaded, horses and snakes came first. There was a rending sound—her muslin veil was torn, and her fine shawl was in jeopardy because of the jostling mob. When a rude stranger commented on these chatterboxes who spoke with the broad vowels, she grew heated at the criticism, and responded that Dorian women might surely lawfully speak Doric. Another stranger helped them to a place of vantage where they might gaze their fill at the four-in-hands and the uniforms of the cavalrymen.

Some one violently opened a window of a room in the lower storey (Fenwick and his sister lived in the top flat to escape at least the sound of feet tramping overhead) and shouted to a friend in the street. That, for a moment, deflected him. It was a vulgarity to his mind. It announced the same thoughtlessness of others as did the ceaseless mounting and descending on the stairs with loud temulent amity or loud dispute.

He sighed an "Och, aye" of acceptance and glanced at Janet, but she seemed not to have been disturbed, propped on pillows, gazing before her, lost in some happy dream that a book which lay open in her hands had no doubt conjured up—though it was of another sort from the one in which he found solace.

He returned to Alexandria and the Psalm of Adonis—old Fenwick, calender-man at Simson's.

CHAPTER VI

BILLIARDS

The telephone was installed—and the telephone-bell rang. Mr. Gilmore, in the midst of adding up a column of figures, turned to glare at it, his eyes protruding. Its metallic summons put him off his stroke, as he (an ardent billiard player) would have said.

"That—confounded—innovation!" he hoarsely addressed it, and, stepping to the wall, took down the receiver. "Hallo?"

"...."

"Oh, yes, indeed," he bowed to the wall, "this is Simson's."

"...."

"Mr. Vannan! I am delighted to see you—I mean hear you," and he bowed again. "Have you just arrived?"

"...."

"Yes, yes, that is so. Just two days late for the great day. No, I didn't witness it myself, but, according to the papers and those who did see it, it was quite a procession, quite a pageant."

"...."

"They're not in at present, but I expect them both at any moment."

"...."

"Very good, Mr. Vannan, we shall look forward to seeing you. Good-bye."

Had Mr. Vannan, a buyer from South Africa, arrived only a few days earlier the Empire might have brought together more intensively at Robert's club on the day of festival. But it was of the past, all its huzzahing gone to join the shouting in Alexandria of two thousand years before. The barricades had been spirited away to whatever place of storage they were kept in. The bunting was unbent and stowed away in private or municipal lockers; the gravel that had been strewn on the more smoothly surfaced streets, as precaution against any hitch of slipping horses, had been swept up in the small hours of the day after the procession by the scavenging department, save for those few granules that the waddling pigeons would peck up or rain wash down the grated drains.

Into the warehouse Gilmore marched to advise Maxwell of the coming of the South African. Andy Middleton and Norman Nairn were at work building a stack of wincey that they had knocked down on purpose to put up again. Sandy Bain and Watty Yule, to judge by their chanting voices and the dull thump of pieces cast on to a counter up there, were filling an order. Henry Braid of the Dress Goods was bending over the well and talking down to Fenwick.

But where was Maxwell? No Maxwell, no Corbett, no Johnny Leng (his assistants) to be seen! The canister of twine, the stack of wrapping-paper, the file of pattern-books, the great shears that seemed kin with gardeners', had the long central counter to themselves.

"Mr. Maxwell there?" hailed Gilmore.

"Here!" came Maxwell's voice from his little office of brown-stained panels and frosted glass under the Dress Goods gallery.

Mr. Gilmore's eyes seemed to be popping from their sockets.

"Vannan from South Africa," he said hoarsely, "has just telephoned to advise he is coming along, and the bosses are both out. I can't call them up, because I don't know where they are."

"The devil he is! The devil they are!" Maxwell ejaculated. "Eh, gad, you'll have to lend me your office-boy."

"The office-boy!"

"Yes. Slack to-day here, and I've let my lads off for an hour. The boy must go and bring them back."

"Where are they?"

"I'll tell him."

"Oh, out playing billiards, I expect," said Gilmore. "Well, all the years I've been here I've never played a game in my employers' time, keen though I be on billiards, and——"

"Come off the perch! You don't get the same chance being in the counting-house all the time. They work hard when we're busy. They might as well be playing a game as pretending to be busy here to-day." He was going to say, "pretending to be busy like Andy Middleton," but left that unspoken.

"All right. I'll send the boy to you," the cashier agreed.

Back to the office he strode, thinking that things were indeed altogether too slack in the warehouse.

"Mr. Maxwell wants to see you," he told Tommy, "and take your bonnet with you. He wants you to go out for him somewhere."

The chief joy of being an office-boy was in unexpected outings, and Tommy, snatching his "bonnet" from the peg, went smartly and curiously into the warehouse, presenting himself with a "Yes, sir?" in the narrow doorway of Mr. Maxwell's narrow strip of office.

"Oh, yes, Tommy. You know Cameron's Billiard-Rooms?"

Tommy stared. What had billiard-rooms to do with soft goods?

"Cameron's Billiard-Rooms? No, sir."

"Well, you know the Argyle Billiard-Rooms, then?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! Then you don't know Rattray's Billiard-Rooms, I suppose?"

"No, sir." Tommy had the disheartening thought that he might as well be back at school being cross-examined by the headmaster over some misdemeanour. The feeling of being out in the world of men had a melancholy subsidence.

"Come off the perch," said Mr. Maxwell, which was not at all the way that headmasters talked to erring pupils.

"No, sir, I'm sorry I don't."

Probity showed in Tommy's eyes, and Mr. Maxwell believed him. He took a pencil from his pocket, and on a scrap of paper drew a rough plan. "They are all in Argyle Street," he explained, and indicated their positions with three crosses. "One of them you'll spot easily, for there's a pawnbroker's sign sticking out over the pavement close to it. I want you, my lad, to go down there and look in each of them till you find, in one or another, Johnny Leng and Jack Corbett. Dick Robertson of Production is ostensibly out at a yarn-agent's, but I think you'll find him there, too."

Tommy opened wide his eyes. He was not happy over this errand. Mr. Maxwell, it appeared, manager of all the warehouse, had discovered the truancy of three assistants, and where they were playing truant, and was ordering him to be an arresting policeman and bring them back. He was not aware, more free though he found the world of business than the world of school, that the young warehousemen, so businesslike in their comings and goings at the door, were ever let out to play.

"Tell them," said Mr. Maxwell, "to come back at once, because there's a buyer arriving at any moment. And tell them not to come in all together. They can use the front and back doors and come in singly."

Light of intelligence showed in Tommy's eyes. He realised that here was complicity. On the realisation he grinned at Mr. Maxwell.

"Go on, hurry! What are you grinning at? And if you chatter about this I'll—I'll have you run through the calenders! Wait a minute. I've a letter here you can take and copy—copy quick—and then deliver it on the way back. That's what you're going out for if anybody asks you. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Tommy, feeling honoured, fellow-conspirator with the head of the warehouse.

As he copied the letter in the office Mr. Gilmore looked aslant at him, emitting occasional grunts as of disdain, watched him open the letter-book, flip the wet brush over a page, drop a dry sheet of blotting-paper over it, twirl the handles (Huh!), watched him take it out, remove the blotting-paper, put the letter in place, close the book and, putting it back in the press, turn the handles again with full muscle play (Huh!), watched him take the letter out, put it in an envelope and address the envelope.

"Ab-surd!" grunted Mr. Gilmore.

As Tommy sped away the conscientious cashier turned to Maitland.

"Maxwell has given some of the lads leave to go out," he explained, "to play a game of billiards somewhere, I expect. Knows where they are to be found, anyhow. Cunning, eh? He gives Tommy a letter to deliver when he's out looking for them, in case the youngster runs into old John or Mr. Robert and is asked where he is going. Huh, they wouldn't trouble to stop him. Absurd! Puh!"

Tommy Bruce raced along Cochrane Street to the square, down to Ingram Street, coasting the Union Bank, hurried down Virginia Street. Odours of foreign commerce were there being wafted from draughty entries and exhaling through pavement gratings, as was fitting to a street with such a name—odours of Virginia and the Indies. He turned the corner into Argyle Street, found the Argyle Rooms first and marched smartly into them. No, nobody there from Simson's; but to his amazement there were many young men sending the ivory balls kissing, cannoning, pocketing, some of whom he knew by sight—two from Knox's in Ingram Street, two from Ebenezer Moir's in Glassford Street.

He hurried out and went on towards where, over the pavement, three enormous gilded globes gleamed. On the wall of the entry under these his eyes promptly caught the words *Cameron—Billiards*, and a somewhat crude representation of a hand with extended forefinger pointing upwards. He mounted the stairs at a leaping stride. On the first landing, facing him, were swing-doors. The upper part of each was of frosted glass, and on each pane was the same word, so that the effect, at least to Tommy's mind, was of a joyous shout:

BILLIARDS BILLIARDS

Pushing open one of the doors, he had a vague preliminary impression of a large chamber, almost a hall, in which were several tables for the game, green tables lit (though the day without was not dark) by gaslights under conical reflectors. Ribands of smoke undulated through the reflected light. Round the tables were young men, most of them in the ardent poses of the game, with out-thrust calculating chins and projecting elbows.

One at least of those for whom he sought saw him at the opening of the door before he saw them.

"Oh, see who's here!" Johnny Leng shouted. "Here's Oliver Twist!"

There was Johnny pointing a cue at him. Jack Corbett, leaning forward, was gauging a shot. He glanced round, then gave attention again to his stroke. *Click*—away spun the ivory ball, cannoned and pocketed.

At one side of the same table was Dick Robertson, at the other—to his astonishment—Bob Simson, cues in hand. At sight of Tommy they grinned affably.

Importantly he advanced and delivered his message.

"Mr. Maxwell says you're to come back at once. There's a buyer from South Africa coming to the wareus. You're not all to go in together, and some of you had better use the back way."

They hurried to the wall to replace their cues in the rack. The owner of the place rose from a settee that Tommy had not observed on entrance, a settee on a dais to one end of the chamber, and held his hand for some money that Johnny Leng was hurriedly offering him.

"All right, all right," said he to the others. "We can square up afterwards."

Out they went, and down they went clattering on the brass-edged stairs, young Tommy behind them. When he came into Argyle Street there they were, strung out. They had begun to part company on the moment of making exit. Two of them went east, two west, with urgent steps, fussy steps, altogether too businesslike, businesslike to the point of announcing truancy.

With a cherubic smile upon his face, Tommy went upon his authorised way, along Argyle Street and into the great retail house to which the letter he carried was addressed. In the vestibule he was observed and recognised—to his great content—by the lordly man who stood there, was granted a little nod from him. Chucking his chest, he continued past the hum and buzz where ladies sat upon high-backed chairs with right-hand gloves drawn off, feeling the quality of the ends of bolts of cloth spread loose before them. He pattered on up broad stairs, down which came other ladies, marched on upon the upper floor where were more counters and more ladies, these examining silks and satins, went on to a room of glass into which, on aerial wires, buzzed cash-containers like oranges, and there he handed his letter to a venerable gentleman within who, lowering his head, looked at him over the top of pince-nez, saying paternally the one word: "Simson's?"

"Yes, sir."

Tommy wheeled and went quickly downstairs again. By the time he got back to the office there was a hush there. Mr. Gilmore, leaning over his desk, was intent upon a ledger. Maitland was making out invoices, a sheaf of them beside him. Very sharply he spoke to Tommy.

"Get these enveloped, young fellow," he said. "And here"—he took from the rack an envelope that the boy had addressed earlier in the day—"write the addresses plain and don't at the bottom put a score, and then a couple of wee dots and another score. These are business communications. They are no' love-letters."

If young Bruce, because of his errand to the billiard-rooms that afternoon, had come back with a belief in the levity of the business life, Maitland was going to have him understand that business was, after all, and in spite of that errand, real and earnest. Tommy realised that the clerk was being stern with him, but the phrasing—the last words of the rebuff—amused him, and he grinned.

"It's naething to laugh at! Damn it, look at this one," and Maitland took another letter from the rack. "It's like a heron's wings flappin', and twa eyes in between them. If you must do something after you've finished the address, make a plain line—like that. See?"

"Yes, Mr. Maitland," replied the office-boy meekly.

Nevertheless it was a great world.

From the private room came laughter and the sound of jolly talk, Mr. Simson's voice, Mr. Robert's voice, and another—Mr. Vannan's, no doubt. Through the keyhole came the trickle of most excellent cigar smoke. Those were great days. Glasgow flourished.

CHAPTER VII

THE BOAT-RACE

Robert Simson was often left alone in the private room by his brother after the morning's letters had been issued to the heads of departments, or after lunch when the later letters had been disposed of. He had a way, at such times, of listening to discover if Cashier Gilmore was also alone in the office. When there was prolonged silence there, neither speech nor movement, he would open the door and glance casually out.

Mr. Gilmore, who had been long in the Simson service, knew every nuance of the place and its people. He never, merely because of the sound of the handle being turned, looked round. There might be a summons for himself, or for Maitland, or for the office-boy. Or Mr. Robert might merely be going to pass through the counting-house, either on a visit to the warehouse or on his way to the street; or he might be coming to stretch his legs, literally, to stand in the office, hands behind back, rising on his toes and subsiding in a mild sort of callisthenics.

The cashier often theorised to himself on the life and character of the junior boss. He knew, being accountant, book-keeper, what his income was from the business. He knew the rent of his town house and what he had paid for the small villa he owned at Cove (*doon the watter*), and for the yawl yacht that was anchored in the bay there. He knew that he had now and then bought a picture by one of the young Glasgow painters. Of the existence of virgin spinsters Gilmore had no doubt whatever, but as for bachelors—well, he wasna just so sure. He wondered why Mr. Robert had never married and, considering him to be a confirmed bachelor, if he had a mistress. But only occasionally did Mr. Gilmore conjecture about that; and it was nane o' his business.

The fact that he sometimes talked to himself—which does not mean in long demented harangues as of one mentally queer, but just in ejaculatory fashion—helped to keep Robert in doubt as to whether his cashier was alone or not. On the day of this chapter—the day after the last of the season's overseas buyers had gone—Mr. Gilmore had more than once uttered a word or two aloud, as the afternoon progressed.

There was reason. The newsboys in the street were shouting about the boat-race—depressing news. On the issue of one edition Thomas Lipton's boat had been neck and neck with the American. On the issue of the next the newsboys wailed that the *Shamrock* was three lengths astern.

"Damn it! Damn it!" Mr. Gilmore rapped out, solitary in the counting-house.

In his room Robert Simson rose, opened the door, stepped out—stepped largely out. There he stood facing the window, staring up over the opaque green strip at the offices and warehouses across the street, hands behind back. As though he had only made exit to go through his flexing exercises, he rose upon his toes, descended, rose and descended, stretching his shoulders. Mr. Gilmore's pen scraped on in the ledger.

"Looks as if we are going to lose again," remarked Robert.

"Yes, sir. Too bad."

"The papers seem to be rushing out a lot of extra editions," Robert said, and turned round with his back to the window—which was a sign to the cashier that he might turn sidewise from his desk. "I don't know," the junior partner continued slowly, "that I've decided international sport is conducive always to international amity."

"No, Mr. Robert. Yet that is the object of it, isn't it?"

"No doubt. But it does not always achieve that result. Even the Oxford and Cambridge boat-race—I doubt if that rivalry is productive of good feeling."

"Maybe no'," said Gilmore. "And the Australian crick——" He interrupted himself in the middle of a word in a way of his, letting the subject of cricket go. "Do you know what I was thinking just now, sir?"

"No. What were you thinking, Mr. Gilmore?"

Gilmore laid his pen in its rack, took three feline-seeming steps towards the junior boss, his shoulders slightly hunched

as though about to make assault upon him. Mr. Robert, rising a-tiptoe and settling again, looked down at his cashier with the faintest twinkle.

"Of course I know it wouldn't be cricket, as the saying goes, but I was just thinking that it would be wonderful if Thomas Lipton had a—had a——"

Gilmore's forefinger, which had been pointing before him, began to revolve in a tracing of circles in air.

The little light of amusement twinkled again in the centre of Robert Simson's eyes.

"Had a what, Mr. Gilmore?" he asked.

The cashier revolved his finger in air.

"A wheel," he brought out, "a wheel, screw, propeller—a secret propeller," he explained in a hushed voice, as though afraid lest some one might overhear, "a secret propeller in the hull of his boat!"

Having delivered himself of that merry and fraudulent notion, Gilmore stepped backward from his yachting boss, raised his head and crackled gaily. Then he was suddenly solemn. The dread took him that Mr. Robert might be considering seriously that here was an unscrupulously-minded employee, might be asking himself what manner of cashier the firm had been relying on these thirty years (thirty-two, to be precise), and considering that the fellow might cook the books, might at that moment be planning to abscond! Mr. Gilmore must have forgotten that his boss had a sense of humour, of fun, and a turn for nonsense.

"That," he added, "would not be fair."

On the declaration of the scheme the junior partner had only smiled—as much at the manner of its delivery as at the scheme itself—but at that addition he laughed outright. They were laughing together when the office-boy came in and on his heels the clerk, Maitland the farmer's son.

"You've nothing for me to sign?" asked Mr. Robert.

"Nothing more, sir," replied Gilmore.

As office-boy and clerk passed to their places, Robert Simson stepped largely back into his room and slammed the door. He sat down and, playing a light tattoo with his fingers, thought of the staff.

In a drawer of the table before him there was a small book with a label on it which read *Employees*. Formerly—or for some time, at any rate, since his father's reign—it had reposed in Gilmore's desk, but one day he had asked for it, having a private letter to write to a member of the staff who was ill, and wanting to know his address. Looking through it afterwards, he had noticed that in a column headed *Remarks* his father had entered a few, none of them impeachments, yet—as for some of them—somewhat personal. Gilmore was, to be sure, very much a confidential servant, but in his absence for lunch the clerk or even the office-boy might have to look into his desk for something and, seeing that book, might dip in it and come upon this or that which did not concern either of them. So he had put it in his drawer, and when the methodical cashier asked for it again had told him where it was.

There it had lain. John (John the Second) had never made in it any *Remark* regarding any member of staff. Neither had Robert. Perhaps some day he might. At the moment he required no reference to any book to help him in these idle meditations on his employees.

Of Maxwell he thought who, as he was well aware, was wont to slip out to the back court sometimes to whiff a cigarette—he who was like a stage ambassador behaving like a furtive errand boy; of Andy Middleton, who had been there in the lifetime of the John Simson whose name was on the windows and the door, Andy Middleton who used to tell his boss about the wee wean, the bairn, how he said, "Dad-da," one morning, how he was so clever that instead of rubbing an itching or sleepy eye by poking a finger in it, he rubbed it with the back of his small hand. And now Andy, when Robert stopped for a talk, passing through the warehouse, would tell him of how the callant, the young man, was progressing with the *veeolon*.

There was nothing of affectation, mused Robert, in Andy. He was as unaffected as a thistle. Robert wondered if perhaps that pronunciation was due to old French influence in Scotland. Many a Scots word was markedly as much Gallic as

Scots, he considered. The *Minch*, for example, and *fash* (dinna fash yersel'), and *ambry*, and *cramosie*. People of Andy's type, when some supposed they were merely mispronouncing a word, were often less doing that to the ears of a listening etymologist than speaking history, though themselves unaware of that. *Veelon*—was that just a crotchet of Andy's, or had it come down so in his family from the days when Mary was Queen or Prince Charles Edward afoot in the heather?

But Robert was only a dabbler in philology. He let the subject go, let Andy go and thought, with a chuckle, of Sandy Bain who, when young, used to be somewhat of a tippler—amusing thereby to Robert when first he came to the warehouse, but not to his father. "That young man," John the First once remarked, "will have to be less intimate with his friend John Barleycorn if he's to stay here." Of Henry Braid he thought—clearly a pushing young man—and of Tom Huntley's laugh, of the laugh before Huntley, it seemed, if that were possible. Another non-communicative man, apart from business, was Tom Huntley, but not in the same way as Braid. Braid's manner was that of one who would not mix humanity and commerce in talks with his bosses. He was there to transact their warehouse affairs for them faithfully and courteously, and that was all. Tom Huntley Robert greatly liked, though undemonstratively. They had been assistants together when Robert was learning the business through the departments.

Of that scowling head porter and packer he thought, Duncan Ramsay, who did his work well and with an air as of annoyance at it. Never did there come a bad report from any consignee of a load faultily baled. He had heard a rumour—old Andy Middleton was inclined to gossip at times, and from him it came—that Ramsay was maybe whiles kind of thrawn in his manner because his wife and him didna pull it off ower weel. "So I hae reason to believe," Andy had said, without entering into detail regarding his reason for that belief; and for detail Robert had not inquired.

He pondered on that old bald-headed man down in the well. Once, during the lunch hour, he had seen him bending over the outside dips of a second-hand bookshop away up near Buchanan Street Station, the very picture of a scholarly bibliophile to whom the food of the mind is more than raiment, and had to glance again to be sure it was he. The Simsons' private wash-room was reached by going down the stairs at the far end of the Fancy Goods department, under the Flannelette gallery, and sometimes when Robert had occasion to go down there he would not return the same way, but, passing through the calender department into the packing basement, come up by the stairway there.

After having seen the calender-man—what was his name? Yes, Fenwick—Walter Fenwick, rummaging, lost to all else in that book-dip, he had passed that way several times and stopped to watch him at work, hoping for a chance to draw him out. When the machine was revolving talk was not easy, what with the whirr and the flying fluff, but when Fenwick was folding pieces at his counter there was opportunity for it. Once and again Robert (balancing up and down on his toes beside the old man), watching how deftly with his strong hands he could fold a piece and smack it flat with no uneven edges, had made attempts at conversation—abortive attempts. "Yes, indeed, sir," and "So I have noticed, sir," were not encouraging.

He could not put a name on the man's manner. It was not servile. Timid was not the word. Was he shy? When he looked up once, Robert was amazed at the gentleness in his eyes—tenderness almost. That nose of his was but an occupational nose and no more, to judge by those clear eyes. An odd fellow, Fenwick!

Robert did not care to come up that way often. He was satisfied with the staff's attention to work. Frequent transits below stairs might give the appearance of watching them, spying, to see that they were not wasting time when their duties took them there. Having been through the departments himself, in his father's reign, as an assistant (and, by the boss's special request, with a fair field for all and no favours), he knew well enough that there were occasional halts below when vivacious young warehousemen met vivacious young warehousemen, but he was no slave-driver.

"Result of the Boat Race! Result of the Boat Race! Spaycial! Spaycial!"

He leant back in his chair and opened the door.

"Boy!"

"Yes, sir?" Tommy Bruce dashed into the private room and stood with heels together, making his quaint juvenile bow.

Robert handed him a halfpenny.

"Get me a copy of the paper."

"Yes, sir."

The office-boy hurried out, got it, and delayed on his return to the corridor to read the result. His face was of misery as he re-entered the room. His expression broke the news. Only for confirmation had Robert to look at the paper to know beyond doubt that Lipton lost. There it was in plain print for office-boys and bosses.

The afternoon was well advanced. The elusive glory of that day was above the cornices on the buildings opposite, slipping upward off the chimney-pots. There was no more to wait for. He brushed his hat and passed into the counting-house.

"Nothing else you want me for to-night?" he asked formally.

"No, sir," replied Mr. Gilmore.

"Well, good-day, good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Robert," replied the cashier.

"Good-night, sir," said Maitland and Tommy Bruce.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HEADS TAKE HOLIDAY

There was no need for Mr. Gilmore to worry on behalf of his employers regarding slackness in the warehouse. It was a very busy place most of the time, and during the next few weeks markedly so, even in the Wincey department—to Andy Middleton's great satisfaction. Those in the other departments had to work late some nights, all the gaslights aglow in their clear globes. With so much movement in the place, the hauling out of pieces from this stack and the other when that could be done without disheveling them, the picking down of stacks to get at bolts called for, the demolition of whole columns of soft-goods, the calender-man raising his fluff below, and humidity—a wet spell on the city—the odour of cloth (for those unaccustomed to it) was extreme. Passing in Cochrane Street you could whiff Simson's before you came to its door, and on opening the door you breathed the place, you inhaled Manufacturing.

Up in the Wincey gallery Andy Middleton halted ever and again at his work to look seriously across at the Dress Goods gallery on hearing a barking cough that Alisdair Lennox had developed. Andy was always alert for signs of threatened tuberculosis in young men, as his wife for evidence of anæmia in girls.

"I dinna like that hoast that Alice has got," he muttered to Nairn as he and his assistant bent one day over sample cuttings, each with a bottle of ink before him, dipped and dabbed, scratching a spot of ink on to each little undyed white fleck in warp or weft.

"Will we," asked Nairn, "have to dab the whole order—all the pieces—if these samples bring in an order?"

Andy's jaw dropped and he stared at the lad to discover, if he might, from his facial expression (the tone of voice in which the question had been made not sufficiently explanatory), if he was being consciously funny, or was really as ingenuous as he sounded. That was perhaps the only trick the Simsons played—*dabbing samples*. He must get hold of Alexander Maxwell, thought Andy, and of Tom Huntley, and tell them of his assistant's solemn question. It was almost too good to keep from Mr. Robert. It was hard, however, to get a free moment for such revelations, thrang with work as they all were.

Maxwell, according to his phrase, died for a smoke all day. Never was there a spare moment in which to slip into the court for a whiff. Even had the moment come he could not have done so, for out there was always a lorry, either loading bales to take down to the docks, or unloading pieces from the mills (Ramsay, Pringle, and Willie Scott helping the carters), and Maxwell had to set the staff a good example.

Tom Huntley, with his hat on the back of his head (he was seldom seen indoors or out without his hat on), worked as hard as Dan Huntley and Willie MacEwan, his two assistants. There was little time for any of the warehouse pranks, such as the envelope prank—which was to march into a department with a letter and, saying, "A note for you," proffer an envelope smeared secretly on its under-side with the thick and extremely adhesive mucilage used in Simson's for touching the tops of patterns before setting them in place in the pattern-books, or to affix them to the margins of letters.

Sandy Bain—old enough, one might think, to have left such frolics behind—feeling, one active day, that a little recreation would be pleasant, did so smarm an envelope and, marching businesslike across to the Dress Goods, handed it to Henry Braid.

"For you, Henry," said he.

Henry, with that characteristic little bow of his, that little inclination of his head, took it and then, feeling it adhere disgustingly to his fingers—his little bow hardly accomplished—he hit. Before he well knew what he was about he clenched a fist and dealt Sandy a blow upon the chest.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Sandy Bain—and went sadly back to work.

Across the space over the central Fancy Goods Department they looked one to the other from their galleries.

"I'm sorry, Sandy, very sorry," Henry called, "but——"

"All right, all right! Say naething about it. Ye are pardoned!" Sandy replied. "I'm busy."

A puzzling brief shouted colloquy, that! The only ones who could explain it, apart from the speakers, were Henry's assistants, Laurie and Lennox, and they were too greatly occupied to go round elucidating, even had they been moved to such explanatory gossip.

The thin, balmy zephyrs that fluttered out of George Square into Cochrane Street carried frail hints of places beyond the city where buds were bursting and the hedges were stippled green. Summer holidays had to be considered, and these had to be arranged so that the staff would not at any time be too greatly reduced, for business was still brisk.

Diverse were the members of that staff, though held together there in a common service. Robert Simson, had he been able to follow each of his employees on vacation, would have had some of his curiosity regarding their private lives allayed. Sandy Bain chose the period known as Fair Week. There was no Fair in Glasgow any longer. That was of the past, when it was a little place, but still there was Fair Week, when, in establishments different from such ones as Simson's, the operatives, the hands, the workers went on vacation *en masse*.

Both Sandy and Mrs. Bain loved crowds, felt happy, elated, pleasantly excited with a stir of folks round them. It would have delighted both the Simsons to have seen the Bain family setting off for their ten days at the watering-place of Rothesay. They went all the way by steamer from the Broomielaw, hard-by the old Jamaica Brig. From Jamaica Street to the Sailors' Home, and beyond, were the crowds they loved, fathers and mothers and children, off for the Fair Week—*doon the watter*. Loud talk, laughter, the weeping of babies, the excited yells of bairns, sounded and echoed. There went the holiday-makers with their hold-alls and string bags, their baskets from which protruded the baby's milk-bottle set upright among oranges and bananas.

"Which is oor boat? Aw, mither, aw, faither, which is oor boat?"

Paddle steamers lay out in the river's centre with steam up, deck-hands swabbing the decks, and by the wharfsides others lay. Like advancing ants the trippers crowded aboard. On the wharf were poles with hinged boards atop, semaphore fashion, boards with place-names painted on them. Attendants from the shipping companies rearranged these from time to time as the boats departed. Beside the paddle-boxes, or the bridges, were similar destination signs.

The young of these holiday-makers read them aloud, shouted aloud the place-names of Clyde: Dumbarton and the Garcloch, Kilcreggan, Cove, Blairmore, Strone, Hunter's Quay, Innellan, Dunoon, Rothesay—but they called it Ro'say.

"Oh, here we are, faither! Ro'say!"

"Ro'say! Wait or I get the tickets. Hold the bag. No, the *bag*, wumman! Where the hell did I put—oh, I've gotten it."

At last the Bain family were aboard. They were travelling steerage, so as to have more money to spend at Rothesay, and because they always travelled steerage.

"We're away, faither. Where's the limon—oh, you hae the limonade and the ginger beer!"

The river stunk in those days like an open sewer. But what cared any? They were off, churning away downstream past the grim barnacled wharfs, the city ferries, the shipyards, the entrances to docks, and the orchestra was playing. When the fiddlers fiddled there were none danced a blither step than Sandy and his wife. There they whirled and whooped. Sandy pulled off his hat, throwing it to one of the children to hold while his quiff waved in air. *Hooch, hooch!* First-class passengers, coming forward of the bridge, leant against the rail and laughed.

"That funny little fellow with the cockatoo is a marvel," they said one to the other.

Sandy, seeing himself observed, blew kisses to the fairest of them and, facing his wife, joyously jigged. She took the challenge. She kilted her coats and jigged to him. *Hooch, hooch!* Suddenly he wrapped an arm round her waist and away they spun (her new-shined shoes twinkling), and his other arm he held upright, rigid. Never did it deviate, in all his exquisitely-poised whirling, from the perfect perpendicular.

The other dancers fell out to watch. Those on the upper deck cheered. At that Sandy twirled his wife to a seat and there subsided with her. Taking then a bottle of ginger beer from the basket, he loosened the wire over its top, shook it violently till, with the gaseous disturbance within, out flew the cork with a report as of a revolver. Blowing away the froth, he handed the bottle to his wife for the first pull.

Mrs. Maxwell had rented a house at Ardrossan for a month and gone off there with the two daughters, the younger son, and the "cook-general." Maxwell and the elder son (he who, on leaving school the year before, had been put into an accountant's office by his father), with summer season tickets, joined them nightly. When Maxwell's ten days of vacation arrived, in tweeds and with an ash stick, he felt as though he had retired, as though he had never laboured, as though he was lord of all the laziness of Ayrshire. And Lord and Lady Ardrossan the Maxwells were called that year.

Braid went to Largs (there had been a summer, by the way, in which Maxwell of the Fancy Goods was Lord Largs) because his girl's folks had a house there for the season. Every day he hired a boat and fishing tackle (mussel-bait included in the charge) and pursued his courtship, fishing for flounders with her over the sandbanks offshore. Six hundred years before King Hakon of Norway came there with his galleys, thinking to extend the Norse dominion farther than the Isle of Man and the isles of the Hebrides (ruled by his race for centuries), to extend it to that mainland, but was routed, and in place of further conquest for his people and glory for his name, lost both Isle of Man and Hebrides. It was all peaceful enough as Henry Braid and his fiancée sat in the gently swaying boat, fishing for flounders.

Andy Middleton arranged to have his ten days at the same time as "the lad," who was, at that time, clerk in a yarn merchant's office and played his *veeolon* in the orchestra of an eager amateur operatic society. Andy and his wife and son made day-trips down the River, one to Rothesay, another to Loch Fyne, another to Arrochar, another, *via* Ardrossan, to Arran; and for the remaining time they contented themselves with visiting the public parks of the city—Queen's Park, Bellahouston, Victoria Park, Kelvinside Park, the Botanic Gardens. In the glasshouses there Mrs. Middleton made her annual comment: "Now ye can understand what the equatorial forests are like."

Tom Huntley, Shirtings boss, went to Rothesay, chuckling to himself, when people asked where he was going, over the old wheeze of Glaswegians, "Where are ye goin' tae Rothesay at the Fair?" But he did not go in Fair Week, and he did not go all the way by steamer from the Broomielaw. He took train to Gourock, and there went aboard a steamer for Rothesay. The spectacle of the upper reaches of the river he knew, the swing bridges—swinging to let deep-sea vessels in and out—the miles of wharfs, the dredgers, the Hoppers. The clamour of the ship-building yards he also knew, the miles reverberating to the sound of rivets being driven home. And he knew the odours of those upper reaches. He took a first-class ticket for train and boat. Travelling first class, one received more courteous attention towards oneself and one's suit-cases than when travelling third class. Second class (they had second-class carriages then) was neither fish nor fowl nor good red herrin', as he said—unthinkable to Tom Huntley. On holiday he desired attention, not servility, but attention.

He did not attire himself in holiday garb. He got off the boat at Rothesay just as though the pier there was a prolongation of Cochrane Street, and he had walked so far. His hat was a little backward on his head—no straw hat, just his business bowler. His left hand clutched his constant pipe, his right hand was on his right hip under his dustcoat, the tails of which oscillated behind as he walked. As always his trousers were neatly pressed, but did not seem to be sufficiently braced up or belted. There were the characteristic folds about his ankles, corkscrewing as he walked. In the pockets of the dustcoat were the papers he had selected at the news-stall at the station in Glasgow.

Arriving at Rothesay, he saw that his suit-cases were handed over to a shore-porter, and strolled leisurely a little way along the front, past shops with bathing-costumes hanging in the doorways, the windows full of presents from Rothesay—children's banks in the shape of castles, small spades and diminutive buckets, china pots with pictures of the Bay on them. He turned a corner and came to the inner town that clustered round the old castle (moat and drawbridge still there) and so to a cottage in a back street, where he knocked and received the usual, "There ye are, Mr. Huntley. And how are ye?"

There was a meal waiting for him in the sitting-room where Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, in fretwork frames, had been gazing down since last he was there, the summer before. For ten years after his first visit to Rothesay, Island of Bute (and that was fifteen years back) he had not revisited the island. During the last five he had gone there each summer and to the old lodgings, the lady who let them formerly still hale and, in fact, seeming but little changed.

The first two or three days he sat on the esplanade reading *Pick-Me-Up*. Goldsworthy's article on the drama made him chuckle by reason of its trim verbal felicities, and the pen-and-ink drawings (by a man called Raven-Hill) that accompanied the article Mr. Huntley greatly admired. Ballet girls and comedians were caught dancing and strutting with the footlight glare on the under side of their chins. Very clever, very clever. He would knock out his pipe, refill it, and watch the bathers coming out of the vividly-striped tents. After a few days, invigorated by the ozone, he went afield. With bowler hat and pressed but wiggling trousers, stick on arm, pipe in hand, he trudged many miles, aware of wind-

waves running in the ripening corn and of the sound of the sea and the wind together in quiet pine woods. In the high dusk of these cushat doves murmured.

The streets of Rothesay and those rural roads were haunted for him. To the Island of Bute he had come in his brief married days. Not morbidly but in a spirit of acceptance, achieved after a lapse of years, Huntley of the Shirtings walked through Bute with memories. Sometimes his old colleagues at Simson's would wonder why he did not marry again. His wife—though they did not know this—had, as a matter of fact, asked him to do so when she knew she was dying. The main reason why he had not was, perhaps, an ocular one. What he saw seemed to be photographed on some sensitive plate behind his eyes. When he meditated on the past he would recall even such slight details as how, at a passing spatter of summer rain on a dry road he had walked on years ago, the drops remained intact on the dusty way, small powdered spheres of water. Would recall? No, would visualise with no effort, would as it were see again.

Many pictures might be half forgotten—as photographic plates stored away in their racks; but, at any reminder of them, out came the old prints unfaded, so clear that sometimes he had a fancy, that he called to himself foolish, a fancy that Time stands still. How can it, when we wind the clocks nightly? How can it, when we bury our dead? They are no longer here who were here yesterday. Fifteen years she had been gone, but to think of her was to see again her every movement. She walked before him. She sat down. She poured tea. The sunlight through the window lit a bracelet on her lovely wrist. She looked across the table and he saw her eyes again, looked into them and smiled.

All this he did not ever express to himself consciously. It just was so with him: just happened to be that way. She had gone and she was not gone—because of what she had been and because of the eyes with which he had been endowed at birth. The landlady at Rothesay knew he was widowed, they having lodged with her in that summer that was gone a decade and a lustre. Strangers on a seat beside him—were they of the sort to amuse themselves by hazarding biographies of those they encounter on esplanades, or in trains, trams, or buses—would as like as not place him as a bachelor, confirmed.

He had come back again, these last five years, to Bute, and it was no melancholy-looking man that he seemed to three muffled "gangrel bodies" who stopped him one day as he was tramping southward through the island. They halted him to beg a match. He saw a rabbit's tail protruding from under the waistcoat of one, and as he produced his matches he looked at it and chuckled.

"Smoking out rabbits, are ye?" he asked.

They warmed to him. Their roguish eyes twinkled.

"Yes, sir. That's the game."

Such contacts on the road meant much to him, kept him just sufficiently in touch with humanity to prevent loneliness and not too much to disturb a certain serenity he felt by these shoresides and fieldsides and in these woods where the sound of the wind and the sea blent, accentuating rather than breaking an ancient quiet.

On one of his walks he came on a pond by the roadside that held him interested. What were these mounds of twigs and branches by its edges? Why, at its lower end, where a burn trickled out, was there a criss-crossing of branches as though some hedgers and ditchers had thrown their débris of loppings there? He was staring at the place, puzzled, when a cart came along, a heavy-laden cart, the driver trudging in the dust by its side. As though to rest his horse there, the man halted, and without any inquiry from Huntley gave explanation.

"That's a beaver's hoose," said he. "The marquess thought he might get them to live here, and imported some frae Canada. I doot they're all dead. I havena seen sign of them for a lang while."

"So that's what it is! I wondered."

"Aye, I kent."

"It's a fine day."

"A grand day. Gee-up."

Idly Huntley looked after the cart and saw it pass out of open sunlight into a shade-dappled stretch of road. Under it only

the hoofs of the horse were visible, rising and falling, enormous hoofs with great tufts of fetlock. Beside it the carter, leaning a little forward, his shoulders urging left and right in a motion reminiscent of a swimmer's, trudge-trudged in his heavy boots that made him seem kin with the great-hoofed draught horse. They appeared to be keeping step. His corduroy trousers were made to look bell-mouthed because of the straps he wore round his calves. Across his back the shadows of the overhanging branches rippled as he walked. They rounded a bend and Tom Huntley was alone once more, after that brief human contact, with the wind in grass and hedge, the feel of the summer, the odour of summer dust.

On the second Sunday morning he started out, after an early breakfast, on a tramp, left the main road about eight miles southward and on a track through a pine wood came to rolling hills with a view, from their summits, of Arran lying in the Firth, the bright coral hues of high cliffs riven by ragged indigo shadows. After a while of watching cloud and sea he rose from the heather in which he had been resting and, as he did so, heard distant singing. While he was trying to decide, as he would have said, from what *airt* it came, it ceased....

Turning round to find another way back, knowing his direction but not the paths, he came down from these heights that gave panoramas of cloud and sea to bosky hollows where surely not only his knowledge, slight knowledge, of the old occupancy of that island made the ruffling sound of the leaves there seem to be out of past centuries. He came on a path that, by its appearance, had been trodden for ages, and to crumbling mossy walls that held up no roof. He had never passed that way before, neither with his wife in the old days nor, later, when alone. He walked through a broken archway and stood stock still, amazed.

Among ancient grave-stones there he saw many people, some standing with eyes shut, some kneeling with eyes shut. A robed clergyman beside a table-gravestone (pock-marked with the rain of centuries, and lichen gilded) was praying. There Tom stood with his bowler on the back of his head, stick pendant from left forearm, pipe in the clutch of his left hand, stood and stared, framed for those who had their eyes open by the crumbling walls of the mossed archway.

They were real. These must have been the folks whose singing he had heard. They were not visiting ghosts attired, as a concession to the times, in the current fashion! He took off his hat—and backed slowly away under the ancient arch. He went on downhill, coasting a dark wood on a well-trodden path, cogitating on the antiquity of the world, the passing of time.

Then suddenly he chuckled as he walked, thinking how odd he must have looked to these worshippers, strolling unconcerned in at that archway, taking off his hat and backing out. The path went in the right direction and led him to a road he knew. Three hours later he was back in Rothesay, where his landlady, to whom for explanation of it he recounted the experience, told him he had been to St. Blane's Chapel, where in summertime services were held for the visitors to these parts.

"That's what it was," said he.

Gilmore and Mrs. Gilmore, their daughter and their son, went to Millport, on the Isle of Cumbrae, perhaps chiefly known as the village or small town on a small island where a parish minister prayed for those "on the Great and Little Cumbrae and the adjacent islands of Great Britain and Ireland." They went boating and swimming and sat on the sand, dreamily drifting it between their fingers as though holding and losing and holding the summer so, in granules. They visited the Ark, a museum of marine curiosities. When his ten days of vacation ended, Gilmore went back to Glasgow and the flat and the office, but on each Saturday afternoon, till the young people's school holidays were over, by boat-train and boat he returned to spend the week-ends with them.

As for old Fenwick, who may legitimately have his place here with the department heads and the counting-house chief: There was a calendering establishment, in those days, in Virginia Street, to which some of the Simson soft-goods had at all times to go for finishing beyond the scope of the plant in the Cochrane Street basement. In Fenwick's absence all the pieces to be calendered and finished went there.

For a week (Fenwick only took a week off), glancing down the well in passing, there was no gleam of a bald head to be seen below.

His plans for vacation when realised agitated the watchers on the stairs. They saw, one Monday, a carriage draw up before the close, a one-horse carriage, with front hood up and back hood down. The driver did not alight, just sat still on the dicky. What did that mean? Was this the conveyance of a new doctor? Then down the stairs came Fenwick and Mrs. Hamilton, his invalid sister between them—a frail creature, *unco pale and shilpit* they pronounced her appearance when

discussing all later. The carriage was for them. Miss Fenwick and the woman sat facing forward, side by side. The funny old man, having spread a rug over their knees, shambled in and sat with his back to the driver. Away they went.

The route had been carefully considered by the calender-man with a view to getting through the encompassing area of chemical works and ironworks, and past the slag-heaps of collieries as soon as possible. They saw thatched cottages standing back from the road behind hollyhocks and sweet-williams. They heard the high ecstatic trilling of a lark. Janet's senses seemed superlatively acute. She could whiff the smell of hawthorn hedges and flowers, of all the growing things and the earth itself. She heard the rhythmic regular beat of the horse's hoofs with emotion, the lowing of cows, the songs of birds. A lapwing rose in slow flight from a field and called twice to others that answered.

Fenwick noticed that his sister was quietly weeping. He hunched forward anxiously.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Are ye in pain?"

No answer—save a shake of the head.

"She's just happy," explained Mrs. Hamilton.

Then Janet found her voice.

"Yes, just happy," she said.

On the next day they stayed at home. In the evening, when he asked if she would care for another outing, her eyes answered yes.

"Can you afford just one more?" she inquired.

He assured her that they could afford more than just one. On the second drive there were no tears, nor on the three subsequent ones. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday the watchers on the stairs, at the close mouth, and at the windows saw a repetition of that amazing Monday's proceedings. They hardly hoped for a Sunday performance, so were not too greatly disappointed at the lack of it. When, on the look-out next day, they saw old Fenwick hurrying off afoot, they knew the calender-man had gone back to Cochrane Street.

Duncan Ramsay (packer, head-porter) went to visit an elder brother in Dundee and his wife to visit a sister in Peebles, but before the end of the ten days—before a week's end—Duncan had an altercation with his brother—two, in fact, the first political, the second on the relative merits, as illuminants, of gas and electricity. The elder Ramsay was exasperated at being called, in the white heat of debate, *antiquated*, and replied that he might be antiquated, but could do better than be a porter. The injustice of that, Duncan being packer and head-porter, was too much for that member of the staff at Simson's. He packed his Gladstone bag and returned home. He was hardly installed, had just boiled an egg and prepared a cup of tea for himself, when his wife came back with the view that the adage *Peebles for Pleasure* was absurd. She had fallen out with her prolific sister, who had asked her why she didna have some weans? Mrs. Ramsay had answered that she was not a rabbit; and as her sister disliked the implication in that reply, there was no more pleasure in Peebles. So there they were, both home again, and there was nothing for it but that they should walk dismally out to sit in the South Side Park and glump at the flowers.

CHAPTER IX

THE JUNIORS DISPORT

In totally different ways did Sandy Bain's two assistants spend their holidays. William Mackay—Wem at home, in the warehouse and in the Volunteers—was out under canvas on the links near Irvine in Ayrshire (some militia-men and regulars nearby), forming two-deep, forming fours, forming square, preparing—to—meet—cavalry!

Watty Yule (Yule remember him) chose the time of his ten days so that they might synchronise with certain church consociations. He was busy at first in correspondence with a hotel-keeper *doon the watter*, regarding High Tea for the united societies of his church, and pattering in and out of a shipping company's office, arranging for chartering a steamer. They had a whole boat to themselves—the Bible Class, the Literary and Debating Society, the Dorcas Society. Young, middle-aged, and elderly convened at the Broomielaw one sunny day, and Watty stood beside the purser atop a gangway to be sure that no stranger—as in these days the phrase would be—*crashed the outing*.

He was a tired little fellow by the time the day was done, for though the head-steward and purser were no doubt perfectly competent, it seemed to be part of his duty to see that all had seats at table in the dining-saloon for lunch and, ashore at last, to produce the rope for the tug-of-war, the cricket-bats, wickets, and ball, and other balls for rounders. Then, when the fun was at its height, the young people at a diversity of games, the Dorcas Society sitting in a gossiping circle, he had to potter off to the hotel to see that the long trestle-tables were properly prepared for the company, count the plates and the teacups. At the end of all, while the clergyman was making his speech at the central table, he had to slip away to pay the bill.

The hotel proprietor was waiting for him in the office. Watty had to apologise to him for what he called the ghastly mess in the bedrooms where the girls had gone to titivate, and with patience had to listen to the owner's coldly enunciated decision that never again would he cater for any united societies of any church, and didn't give tuppence what denomination it was.

After that expedition Watty had only a day's rest before he had to make arrangements for the Sunday School picnic, order brakes, order scones and buns, organise a buttering committee, and so forth. Not that he disliked these activities or was merely implicated in them. He took delight in helping on such occasions, viewed with cherubic smile the string of brakes along the pavement's edge on the appointed day, and not till all the teachers and scholars were seated climbed to his place in the first one. There he had to be, so as to direct the leading driver where to turn aside for the field of play.

Even after all the games were over in that field, and he had settled with the farmer for the use of it—the farmer, fortunately, perfectly genial about the mess there—his troubles were not past. On the last brake of the string he sat for the return journey, and suffered indignity from pedestrians (for homeward-bound the Sunday School pupils were rowdy) who had been targets for pea-shooters from those ahead. It was very depressing. On the way out no pea-shooters had been produced, and what singing there had been was not unmelodious. On the way back the young trippers were out of hand. They sang in different keys. Community singing gave place to community discord and cat-calls. Some of the pupils even made rude noises at those passersby who—stung by the peas—reviled them. All Watty could think of, by way of apology, was to reiterate pensively to those who protested that young people, you know, will be young people. Once indeed he even went the length, becoming riled and combative, of adding the question, "Were you never young yourself?" The abusive reply he received made him glad, for the sake of the children, that his—on the homeward way—was the last brake.

As for Mr. Maxwell's assistants: Jack Corbett went on a walking tour, knapsack on back—chiefly, regretfully, to get away from his folks. He was an only son, and his mother was a widow, and there were three sisters. Jack was spoken of as the baby of the family. It was a stereotyped expression: "Of course, the boy will be spoiled by the girls." Jack was, in a way, spoiled by the girls. He was the pet—with a difference. He was a sort of animate rag-doll for them to tear to pieces.

They were everlastingly loving and kissing and deriding each other, with more or less veiled aspersions. Eagerly, almost vindictively, they had vied with one another at school for possession of prizes. If one was praised, the others pouted. To Jack, looking on, it appeared that jealousy was one of their chief characteristics; but the mother, talking of her daughters, would explain sincerely and dotingly, "My girls love competition. They have the true sporting instinct."

And what squabbles they had! To what repartee did their brother listen!

"I'm taller than you! Yes, I am—I'm an inch taller!" "You're not! You've got higher heels." "I can do anything you can do!" "Isn't the Mackenzie girl pretty?" "Pretty! No, she's ugly!" "I think she's pretty." "I know she's ugly, and I am going to bed." "Oh, don't go to bed just because the Mackenzie girl is pretty." "You beast!"

If ever he tried to make peace between them they made it up instanter, only to assault him in a triple entente for daring to interfere. They watched their dear Jackie like private detectives, and vied to discover original sin in him that they might report it to the queen-mother. Dimly he recalled his father. Among his memories was one of his father solemnly informing him that no matter how much a woman might exasperate a man, he must never hit her; for he had raised his fists to Ethel and to Rachel once when they were hauling him home from play. The youngest sister, Ruth, as the years passed became less of an ally with them. She took to calling him Jack instead of Jackie. She sat out by the ringside, only an observer—and not always, he sometimes thought, a neutral observer. She was his favourite.

About the time this narrative opens Ethel and Rachel had a shock which Ruth, the neutral one, had neutrally observed: Suddenly it had seemed that there was no longer any fun for her sisters in teasing or deriding, censoring or criticising Jack. He had ceased to squirm or flush, to wilt or reply in any other way than with a smile. They had, in fact, lost their rag doll. There had been indications earlier that such a calamity might befall, but after temporary cessation of assault, when their Jackie had apparently recovered, the assaults had been renewed. He had opened the door to them again. Suddenly, however, the door was shut and locked, the key was thrown away. It was all too nagging, too paltry, too subtle and serpentine for him.

He disliked subtleness. He liked directness. That was why he liked almost all the warehousemen in Cochrane Street—and certainly the prevailing spirit there. When he informed his family that he was going on a walking tour, Ethel and Rachel declared him a selfish male for not thinking of them, not considering how they might need him on holiday to look after the luggage. At that Ruth had a voice.

"I don't see why," she said, "you should do your petticoat-government nonsense with Jack when he has only ten days of holiday. You make me sick."

When Ruth did show partisanship she did so without peradventure.

Petticoat government, petticoat government! As he trudged out of Glasgow, having taken a car to the tramway terminus at Maryhill, he chanted these words and laughed, feeling youthfully free. He was off. But, as he marched along, the rucksack grew heavier, the Kilpatrick Hills ahead were shadowed by clouds the colour of thunder. There were distant rumblings and flashings in the north. He saw lances of rain ahead.

Soon he was walking in a deluge. He ate some sandwiches about noon under a dripping tree, half miserable, half elated. It was a soaked young tramper who went squelching into an old inn by Loch Lomond that night. In the morning he found that his boots were still wet, though the mud had been taken from them, and his feet were swollen. Still—he was off and away. He hoped that Ethel and Rachel would not use Ruth as a substitute for himself at home and set upon her for that little outburst about petticoat-government. Ruth, he consoled himself, could take care of herself.

On the third day out the sun shone, and Scotland glittered like a wet cairngorm. Moisture dripped from the eaves of thatched and deep-walled cottages. In the washed and crumbling mire of the banks by the roadsides flakes of mica shone. The sun drew up sparkling veils from purple hillsides.

A burly tramp with a cudgel, one of those who used to hibernate in Glasgow and in summer tramp through the Highlands (sleeping in barns, begging from lone pedestrians, snaring a rabbit or stealing a turnip for dinner), halted him to beg—to beg too much in a manner like intimidation for Jack. He proved his manhood to himself by refusing a penny even when the tramp's brows beetled and his eyes glittered as he took a firmer hold of his shillalah.

"No," said Jack, "I don't like the way you ask for it. Don't imagine that because the road is lonely you can play the footpad on me. No, I tell you, no! I don't like the way you ask for it." And he strode on.

He had to admit to himself that he had been afraid for some moments, but he had not given in to fear. A little farther on, as he turned a bend of bracken and saw a long glen opening up ahead, the lonely white ribbon of the road twisting through it, he met a tinker woman with a little boy by her side. At a word from her the child skipped towards him with

cupped hand.

"Please could you spare a copper?" he chanted.

Lowering her head as though she had no connection with the child, the woman passed on without a glance.

Jack halted. He produced two pennies and tossed them into the boy's hand; then, looking back at the woman, who had seated herself and was watching the transaction, he called to her: "Would you like a smoke?"

The roguish twinkle of her eyes carried across the intervening space, and:

"Thank you kindly, sir," she shouted.

Handing a packet of cigarettes to the boy, he swung on upon the road, and when he had mounted a hundred yards or so, stopped to look back at these undulations of heather and bracken. The bank at the bend stood out sharply, and in that clear summer day—a crystal-blue day, all the rain over—he could see the woman sitting there, even see the puffs of smoke like gauze drifting away.

"Not only smoking," thought he, "but inhaling deeply, too, by the look of it."

In those days no women in his sphere smoked, only tinkers' wives and the wives of the potato-howkers who came over from Ireland, and perhaps a crofter's wife also, over the spinning wheel, for pardonable solace. To his womenfolk at home smoking was therefore looked upon as a selfish indulgence of man, disgusting to the point of being Sin. They would have been annoyed had they known that Jack, trying to make excuses for them, had evolved the explanation that there was no man in the house to leaven its silliness. He was but a young male—and what was he among so many?

Thoughts of home intruded as he saw the wisps of blue sifting away beside that tinker-wife at the road's bend. The small boy was turning cartwheels in the road before his mother. As Jack stood there it struck him, by the shape of that seated figure, that she was looking after him. He waved his stick. Her arm went up and she waved in response. The child in the roadway ceased to spin; he had a wave from him also. Then happily he turned and marched on.

He was just trudging into a small and gently rustling birchwood on that hillside when, on a tributary track that came downhill from a whitewashed house in the crease of the slopes, he heard the rasp of foot-spurned stones. He glanced up. There, obviously, was the man for whom the woman and the boy waited—the tinker-body, a big black-bearded man carrying a bundle in an immense blue kerchief by one hand and in the other holding a soldering iron. Their eyes met.

"Good-day," said Jack.

"Good-day to you, sir."

Beyond the birchwood, near the end of that glen, he came on a herd of Highland cattle—just as one sees them in the much derided (and much admired) calendars of Glasgow grocers. The bull stood stolid athwart the road, and as Jack advanced made bowing motions at him. He walked resolutely on while the great beast pivoted. Well, there was no tree to climb if it challenged his right to pass and decided to charge him. It decided to allow him passageway, moving a little to one side, and when he was past it followed him for a few yards. He glanced over his shoulder, and was gratified when, halting, it gave a dismissing puff through its nostrils. That sound reminded him whimsically of the door from the warehouse into the office at Cochrane Street.

Far was he there from Cochrane Street, far from any habitation. That night he had to sleep in a haystack, no inn within reach, a haystack that stood spectrally and strangely alone by the roadside, where no house was in sight in the trembling blue haze of twilight. Twice in the night he got up chilled, and filled his pipe, smoked and saw the stars moving about over the eerie crests (they were eerie to his unaccustomed eyes), heard passing rustlings and squeakings nearby, and the eternal drumming of a waterfall below.

After his third disturbed snooze he got up, limbered his muscles, and tramped on in great bodily discomfort and great mental and spiritual ecstasy, seeing what he had never rightly seen before—how the world rolls round, how the pools in twining burns retain fragments of night when the day is already on wet heather-tufts and bracken along the banks. He saw the dawn. The rugged Bens glittered, and as he stood in admiration, his gaze roving round the scene, he saw a great stag statuesque atop a knoll. Chilly, he sneezed—and it was gone.

Round the next bend of the road he came on a small cottage, not indicated on his map, that seemed to be deserted in that dawn. There was the odour of peat-smoke in the air but very faint, as though merely from a fire within that had been smouldering through the night, not blown up, nobody stirring. The cottage, some peat-stacks, and another small haystack like the one to lee of which he had tried to sleep seemed to watch him going by, albeit inanimate. Not till he was well past did the dogs waken up and give tongue, all indoors by the smouldering fire to judge by the muffled sound of their barks.

On the day before the one on which he would again walk along Cochrane Street and into the corridor of Simson's, and have his lungs filled with the odour of flannelettes and shirtings, fancy goods, dress goods, and winceys, he arrived at Oban. Marching manfully into a hotel there, with a measured ring of heels that informed the porters at the door that they had been sounding so for many a mile, he dropped his rucksack before the office and called for a room with no diffidence, no feeling that perhaps he was doing wrong, doing something that he should not do.

Johnny Leng, he of the bandy legs in Maxwell's department, jovial Johnny who made attempts to take the look of discontent and melancholy from Jack Corbett's eyes with the latest bawdy story, went, for his vacation, to Rothesay with a friend in another manufacturing house—Ebenezer Moir's in Glassford Street. There they listened to the pierrots, the buskers (were tremendously taken, especially, by a heavily-built but ever so agile-footed clog-dancer with blackened face), and rowed, and swam, drank beer and shandygaff, and—if the word may be correctly applied to one of her experience—seduced the landlady's daughter, or were seduced by her, and found the time simply fly.

Henry Braid's two assistants—Arthur Laurie and Alisdair Lennox—spent their holidays in very different ways. Arthur Lennox, living out of the city, but going into it daily to work, took holiday in his own village, mowing the lawn, trimming the hedges, fastening up flowers on their stakes, prying out ivy from the house walls where it had crept in too far and was threatening their stability, playing tennis, and standing at her garden gate with his latest fancy, holding her hand.

Alisdair Lennox, because of that cough of his that troubled Andy Middleton, went to a doctor for what he called a thorough overhauling, and had a bad report upon himself. He took the verdict well. He might be *Alice* for short, he might even be more devoted to the texture and tints of certain textiles than even a manly manufacturer ought to be, enamoured of socks, for instance; but he took the news well. It is generally said, of course, that there are some phthisis patients whose gaiety is but part of the disease. It may be so. Yet, when a doctor says, "I do not want to alarm you, but——" there may be some gaiety, surely, or some fortitude that is not merely symptom of the complaint itself, to make the patient respond merely with a little nod and a smile. Alice spent his summer holidays all out of doors—slept out of doors, and drank daily the prescribed quarts of milk. His cough, Andy noticed, when he came back to Cochrane Street, was not so bad. The indentations under his jaw-bones as though he had drawn his hands down his face on either side, pressing his cheeks in, were less marked.

Norman Nairn, Middleton's sole assistant, went with his father down to Brodick on the island of Arran. His mother and his two sisters had been there for some time, a month or so, living in a hotel, and the house in town was closed. Their cook and parlour-maid went to visit their own people. Only the policeman on the beat went in and out of the gateway occasionally, felt the front door and the back door, walking round the house. Boating, fishing, climbing Goatfell, the days sped with a poignant precipitancy. Nairn was still young enough almost—almost—to weep when boat and train brought him back, on the evening before the day he was to whiff again the odour of Simson's, to the loud streets and the calling of newsboys in an ochre twilight. Dark pools among the heather, bronzed with sunset, smell of peat-smoke and sound of hurrying burns, quiet of the peaks save for the whistling of the winds seemed very far away.

Danny Huntley of the Shirtings also went to Rothesay—at the same time as Johnny Leng of the Fancy Goods. Johnny saw him there, but did not recognise him. Danny, as we know, had—like Porter Pringle—another source of income besides his work as a soft-goods assistant. Not only of a Saturday evening in the working-men's clubs did he clog-dance and with an amazingly solemn and eager face crack the most astounding jokes, but *doon the watter* too, in summer time—disguised, with blackened face. That was his secret. Yet strong was the temptation he felt when the holidays were over to let his secret out in Cochrane Street; for it chanced that one day, down in the basement, when Peter Pringle happened to be whistling high and cheerily instead of giving an entertainment with his whispering singing, Danny's dancing feet tap-tapped on the concrete floor in time. When that exhibition was over there was applause from Willie Scott and Johnny Leng, from Wem and Laurie, who happened to be down there.

"I didna ken dancing was one of your accomplishments, Danny," said Leng, "but oh, man, if ye could dance like a black-faced comic I saw at Rothesay last month you would have something to brag of."

Had Danny looked at him much longer with the serious expression then on his face, Johnny might have recognised him, even with no burnt cork to aid, as that solemn comic of Rothesay sands.

Diversity again there was in the Shirtings department between Danny Huntley and MacEwan. Willie MacEwan was courting a girl who lived in a little village some miles south-eastward of the city, and he spent every day of his ten walking out there from the car-terminus at Pollokshaws and strolling with her in the byways, leaning on gates with her, gazing into the fields. Both would be silent sometimes for so long that when they moved on (one or the other saying with a sigh, "Well, I suppose we'll have to be going,") they found the shadows of oak and chestnut and poplar all lying out in a totally new direction, the scene changed, and had the feeling of having been away in some fourth-dimensional or other rare world. They were intensely happy, sharing an emotion that was at once of tranquillity and of ecstasy, very conscious of the ancient earth smells, the ruffle of leaves, moving in a happiness that was tinged with sadness, perhaps because of the frequent sudden shocks on discovering how the time had flown and night was in the fields.

Maitland, the farmer's son—like Sandy Bain—chose Fair Week, but for a different reason, chose Fair Week because at that time, which he spent at home, from the hill-crests above the farm there was an extended view—a view, he considered at times, almost of half of Scotland. There were establishments other than Simson's in the city, mills and factories, chemical-works and ironworks, the operatives in which, as we know, took holiday *en masse* in Fair Week. When they were gone, the fires were raked, the boilers cleaned. The tall chimney-stacks no longer raised their columns of smoke. And then—then from the tops of the knolls that wavered against the sky round Maitland's home he could see what the invading Romans saw, see as far as those Romans. Atop a hillock of Renfrewshire Maitland could look into the purple highlands, wave a hand to Ben Lomond and Ben Ledi, see the Grampians, and beyond. In the other direction, even at other times than Fair Week, he could see, on clear days, as far as Ailsa Craig and once or twice had observed, at great distance, a low dark loom that was doubtless, thought he, Ireland.

Though his father, looking upon a farmer's life as a dog's life, had decided that not all his sons must pursue it, and sent the one who was proficient at book-keeping to the city, Maitland loved these vistas, loved the land although he never said so.

Tommy Bruce, the office-boy went, in a sense, nowhere—like Andy Middleton. Yet, like Andy Middleton, he enjoyed himself, going, in another sense, to many places. He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow who eked out a small pension by letting two rooms in her flat, westward in the city, to boarders of quality. Tommy had a model yacht and sailed it on the pond at Victoria Park three days in succession without tiring of it. He played cricket also in a vacant plot of ground with other lads in the same pecuniary predicament (not too sorely felt) as himself. One day they made up a walking party and went out to Bearsden where they stole a turnip from a field—none knew why—and carried it back as well-hidden as a turnip may be till a rural policeman inquired, "What's that ye have there?" and the one who had charge of it at that moment threw it over a hedge and all ran. Another day they crossed the city, a chattering mob, marching excitedly through the main walk of Queen's Park and on past villas to Millbrae, and down to River Cart beyond which, then, were no more villas, only fields and woods loud with cawing rooks. They continued on to the old Giffnock quarries to adventure in the tunnels and search for fossils. So, back in the counting-house again, he was able to say, when Mr. Gilmore asked if he had had a good holiday:

"I had a great holiday, sir."

"Where did you go to?"

"Lots of places, sir."

Gilmore's eyes goggled at him.

"That's fine," he said.

Dick Robertson had to play golf with his father. The Robertson family was holidaying at a spa in the Highlands where golfing was all. His elder brother, who ran the business (the leather business) with their father, came out for long weekends and seemed to enjoy golf. His sister, Jess, also played. In those days gofff was less of a young man's and a young woman's game than later. But what else could be done? Leather Robertson decreed what was to be done.

"The old man has to win or it's misery for everybody," Dick murmured once to his sister.

She agreed in her heart, but filial piety prevented more than a little laugh and a non-committal, "Oh, well."

"Did you have a good holiday?" Gilmore asked him, when he came into the office one day on business, the production department and the office having various exchanges to make.

"A hell of a holiday," replied Dick, and in such a tone that he left the cashier grinning broadly after him till the door had closed with a final long puff of air from the slam-preventer.

Where George Laidlaw went no one greatly, no one even slightly, cared to know, though Mr. Gilmore did try to show polite interest in the matter.

"Did you have a good holiday?" he inquired.

"Yes."

The cashier was unaware that to some people it is bad form to ask any one where he intends to go on holidays, or where he has been holidaying, that to ask if the holiday was enjoyable is all that is decently permissible. It would have seemed to him as evidence of lack of interest not to present both questions, but that monosyllabic answer caused him to wonder if Laidlaw thought it was none of his business, looked upon him as merely curious and prying into private affairs. Gilmore eyed him solemnly.

"Doon the watter?" he ventured.

"No." A long pause. "I went to London, and Paris, and Switzerland—Cook's—ten day tour."

"Oh!" Mr. Gilmore bowed and stared. "Did you enjoy it?"

Laidlaw shrugged.

"Did you visit any of the museums?" asked Gilmore.

"No."

"Oh."

Laidlaw shambled away with the Loom Book under his arm, and Mr. Gilmore stared after him till the door shut with a long, thin exhaust of air. Then he turned to Maitland.

"Dour," he remarked.

"Aye," responded Maitland.

CHAPTER X

----AND THE PORTERS

Willie Scott, one of Duncan Ramsay's assistants, was another of those who took his holidays at Fair Week, because the factory in which his sister worked *skailed* for that week.

It was her custom to go to work wearing a shawl—not one of these little shawls that merely covered the head and were held close with folded arms over bosoms, but a long shawl, a Scots mantilla one might say. All Fair Week she wore a hat and high-heeled low shoes instead of high-heeled boots; and Mrs. Scott donned the bonnet and the beaded dolman that she wore when going out to help housewives with their sewing. Will bought a new cap. Always at the Fair Week he treated himself to a new cap and a new pair of boots. In place of his cravat (pronounced *gra-vat*) he wore a collar and tie.

At that time, on the upper reaches of the river, there was a fleet of swift little vessels, their smoke-stacks hinged so that they might slip under the city's bridges, the *Cluthas*, the penny boats. With a feeling of having a great outing the family descended the water-stairs to the jetty by the Victoria Bridge and, going aboard one of these, knew the delight of steamer voyaging. They had, in fact, at times to restrain excitement, dressed in their best and free, and seeing their city from a new angle than that of the streets, gliding under the bridges, looking into the heavily timbered dripping bases of the wharfs, looking up at the enormous bulks of steamers being drawn slowly downstream with a hauling tug ahead, and a steadying tug astern perhaps. For four-and-a-half miles they voyaged and went ashore at Whiteinch to visit Victoria Park, watch the small boys—and the grown men too (armed with boat-hooks) sailing model yachts in the pond, wander through the fossil-grove and stare at the petrified beasts of antiquity there, sit in the circular shelter eating sandwiches, and delight in the audacity of the sparrows that hopped over their feet for crumbs.

It was an outing happy enough to repeat but they gave variety to it on the second occasion by going aboard at the Jamaica Bridge. That boarding was not so successful because, close-by, while they awaited the arrival of their *Clutha*, people were passing up the gangways on to paddle-steamers that went much farther, much farther than the penny boats—to Garelochhead, to Arrochar at the head of Loch Long, to Lochgoilhead, to the Holy Loch, and beyond, to places that were only names to them or pictures on the shipping companies' posters. At the south end of the bridge other dismal comparisons were suggested to them, for there people were going on to the big screw steamers that went farther still, away down the estuary, down the firth, round the Cock of Arran into Kilbrennan Sound, and all the way to Campbeltown.

Seeing all these holiday-makers, they did, on that day, institute comparisons. Willie looked up at these vessels vindictively and there was a little pout on his sister's lips as she watched those more affluent embarkations, but once they were in Victoria Park again all was well. Her new shoes and her hat, Willie's collar and tie and his new cap, her mother's gloves, mollified her. She felt that her family was as *weel pitten on* as any they saw there; and they found a tea-room where they were not eyed askance, not made to feel out of place. Yet home again, that night, the same thought, it transpired, was in all their minds.

"Could we no' afford," suggested Lisbeth, "a wee sail doon the watter?"

"I was just thinking the same," said her mother.

"I'm sure we could," Willie very decisively spoke.

So they, too, had their trip to Rothesay at the Fair.

They took it with an extraordinary quiet, self-contained. The boat was crowded. It was hard to get a seat. Once they got seats it was wise to remain upon them. To take any little promenade upon the deck was, as Lisbeth said, "like playing a game of musical chairs." Very quietly and restful, Mrs. Scott watched the shipyards, the high gantries, slip past. She stared at the enormous booms of logs down by the timber-yards, admired the wooded hills of Bowling, looked up, somewhat awed, at the bulk of Dumbarton Rock. Willie produced a cigar that he had bought for the occasion, smoked it with a great air, but with no great enjoyment, got the end disgustingly moist and chewed.

"We'll hae a smoke now," he muttered to himself, as he tossed the stump overboard. "We'll hae the auld pipe."

The feeling of rebellion at the inequalities of social conditions in the world had, however, evaporated by the time they reached Rothesay. On the way home at night, up-river, they felt themselves indeed by no means of a low social stratum, felt themselves considerably better than some, and eyed askance little loud groups in which the bottle was being passed round. Mrs. Scott drew herself more erect and arranged her cape with a small clash of its black beads. She was glad that her son, on holiday, celebrated only with a cigar. She turned to him.

"I didna mind them having a dram," said she, "but when they start that horrible singing, drawling and drooling——" She left the rest in air.

The Scott family returned home reinstated in their own regard.

The cashier, passing into the basement holding one hand rigidly out before him on the day after Willie's return, perturbed that young man who jumped up from the packing press, the wheel of which he had been oiling.

"Have ye cut yourself, Mr. Gilmore?" he inquired.

"Ink," explained Gilmore, marching on.

With the ink removed from his hands, slowly drying them, he spoke again.

"Well, Willie," he remarked, "you look sunburned. Had good holidays?"

"I had a grand holiday, Mr. Gilmore."

"That's fine. Where did you go?"

"I went to Rothesay."

"Just yourself?"

"No, we all went, all the family."

"That was fine," said the cashier.

Peter Pringle, on the first day of his holidays, woke and lay still, meditating in the morning light. No need to get up at once that day. Of his early years, we already know, of that room at the top of a tenement in Argyle Court, a tenement demolished even by the time of these outings of the staff at Simson's.

Peter had no relatives that he knew of in all the world. His mother's friend, the light-fingered follower of agricultural shows, races, and royal processions, who had beneficently taught the boy conjuring tricks and thimble-rigging, had gone beyond thimble-rigging to other tricks that in the end earned him three years at the country's charge, guest in the prison of Peterhead. When these three years were over he had sought out Peter again, feeling that the lad, for all he knew, might be his own son—not that Peter had any idea that this was one of the reasons for the earlier tutelage and for that return. As he lay there dreaming it pleased him to remember that he had been able to make some return to old Jock for the kindness he had received from him in youth. Jock lodged for a while with him, as once he had lodged free and slept on a mattress on the floor in Jock's room. When his foster-father (or father, if it were so) fell ill, it was Peter who got him comfortably to hospital where he had died.

No, he had no relatives. But out of the past he had kept in touch with one human being. Long ago, it seemed to him, as he lay there that morning meditating, long ago, but all as clear as if it had happened yesterday instead of fifteen years before, was that ticket-collecting game to the chant of, "Please, mister, please, wife, can I hae yer tram-ticket?"

He had arranged to take his holidays at the same time as his Jean Morrison, who worked in that calendering house in Virginia Street, had hers. The girls employed there did not all go holidaying at one time. She was a jolly girl, not easily downcast. Much they had in common since the days of collecting tram-tickets.

"You micht say," she remarked to him one day, "that we're in the same line of business."

"The same line——" he began inquiringly, and then understood what she meant. "Aye, you in the calendering-house and me in the warehouse."

"Aye, we are both in the soft goods."

Pringle rose and looked out of the window. He lived in an attic room in one of the tributaries of the Gallowgate.

"A fine morning," he told himself, noting a faint lustre on the walls, the gleam of light on the chimney-pots and how the spires visible from there—he could count three or four—were bright on their eastern sides. He shaved with more than usual particularity, feeling his lean jaws carefully for any odd remaining stubble. He brushed his clothes till not a spot of dust showed. Like his partner in the packing basement, on holiday he donned collar and tie. He prepared his morning porridge, which he ate with syrup, and then set smartly off in the direction of Bridgeton.

There, climbing two flights of stairs, much like those on which the gossips watched old Fenwick, he halted on a landing upon which were three doors. He knocked upon one, and she was ready for him.

For them was the Glasgow Green, for them the Doulton fountain in its midst, for them the People's Palace, though they did not enter it to admire the palms or the pictures, or to consider the cases of regimental badges, or to study their city in the Old Glasgow room. They passed the Palace by and walked down to the riverside, stopping there to watch the slow fuliginous flow.

"I have a notion, Jean, that Duncan Ramsay is no' going to stay long at the wareus."

"Oh?"

They knew each other well. She surmised, she *jaloused*, his drift, as she might have said. That monosyllabic reply was enough and not of disinterest.

"He gets the *Herald* every morning now," Peter continued, "and the first thing he does is to look at the 'Situations Vacant'. He has a good job with the Simson's, but I've got an idea he has personal reasons for wanting a change."

"Do you think that you would——"

"I think I would. I think I would stand a good chance if he left. I don't think the Simsons would put in an older man over us from outside. And Willie Scott hasna been there as long as me."

"That would be fine, Peter."

"I'm fair determined it will no' be one room for us—no, nor a but-and-a-ben" (a room and a kitchen) "either."

"Well, we'll see what we'll see."

"Aye, you'll see what you'll see, Jean. It's two rooms and kitchen for us, and ye ken ye can get some two-room and kitchen houses in neighbourhoods where maist of them are three-room and kitchen—a nice locality."

"Do you no' think the three-room and kitchen folk," she asked, "might look down on the odd two-room and kitchen ones?"

"I wouldna think so," he said, "not if they're just new married."

At that word she slipped her hand into his and pressed it. They walked on a little way without speech, their heads turned towards the river, watching it slowly flow past.

For them also were the *Cluthas*. For them also the other city parks besides the Glasgow Green, although to the Kelvingrove Park, without giving a reason, they did not go. That was the toffs' park. Even in the South Side park—Queen's Park—they walked somewhat shyly. But in others they felt at ease; and for them, it seems, was one of the city cemeteries that the gardeners had beautified. They would stroll in at its gates and sit on a seat that had its back to the ranks of stones—nobody else there—sit near the dead lovers and dream, happy together, and talk over their plans for all the life that was before them.

Jean had only a week away from the calendering-house. Peter felt very much at a loose end for the remainder of his holidays. He wandered westward for a solitary survey of more affluent parts of the city, all the way along Sauchiehall Street, past the gleaming plate-glass as far as Charing Cross and on to western Argyle Street. Returning by that thoroughfare he went down a side street to lunch in a place the clientele of which was chiefly carters and coalmen. He came back to the city's centre at Jamaica Street, looked in at the shipping-office windows, pondered sheep-shearers in

New Zealand, harvesters in Canada, strolled on and found himself—that is about the best way to put it—found himself at the archway leading into the court to rear of John Simson's, Manufacturer, Cochrane Street.

He might as well go in. He went in, thrust open the heavy door, and clattered downstairs. Nobody there. Duncan Ramsay and Willie Scott were out, evidently. So he leant against the long counter under the barred and frosted windows, and putting the flat of his hands on it bobbed up to a sitting posture. There he hunched, swinging his legs, and looked round the place where he worked—looked at the cement floor, the strong red-painted pillars, the great packing press, the huge fireplace for wet winter days, and whistled gently through his teeth, rub-a-dubbing a muted drum accompaniment on the counter with his fingers.

There Nairn of the Winceys found him, coming to the wash-room.

"Hullo, Pringle, I thought you were on holiday!"

"Aye, so I am."

Bob Simson came dashing down then at great speed, pursued by Laurie of the Dress Goods. They had jammed together in the doorway up above and were making a race of it for the goal under the pavement. The door was closed, Nairn being there.

"I thought you were on holiday, Peter," said Laurie.

"He's married to the job," declared Bob.

Nairn, appearing then from the doorway in the corner, gave explanation.

"He's come back to whisper a song to us," said he.

So they demanded one, made an attentive triangle before him. There stood these three with heads inclined, aslant to listen, while Peter sang, thin as a bat's cry, yet finely modulated:

"Ma wee dug's deid,
Ma puir wee thing,
Ma bow-wow...."

"Well, we'll have to go," said Bob at last, and anon away they went towards the stairs, Peter following them.

They had a brief rough-and-tumble ahead of him at the top of the stairs and then, composing themselves, walked sedately into the warehouse. The door slammed.

Peter remained there a moment or two, lips pursed, whistling quietly, looking round the place again, looking at the great iron plate of the lift, and the lever beside it. Then, with an "Och, aye," he opened the back door, and stepped out into the court, raising a flight of sparrows—and so to the corner of Virginia Street to meet Jean Morrison and walk home with her.

Next day he examined another quarter of his city, passing in among wharfs and sheds and docks, watched the loading and unloading of ships, whiffed the odours of many foreign lands. At Princes Dock, of the triple basins, he found a way out to Govan Road and in a dockers' eating-house had a meal of fried fish and chip potatoes.

Moving eastward again, in a grocer's shop off Paisley Road, he bought a fat mealie pudding that would be his supper. Slowly he returned again to Clydeside and, coming to Jamaica Bridge, crossed it. Being then on the north side of the river, he thought he would go up to Howard Street to look at a fishmonger's window there, in which was always some speciality, not for sale, merely for show, on exhibition. He had once seen an octopus in that window. Somehow, it reminded him of a certain lizard in a bottle.

The speciality on that day was a shark. Having studied it awhile, he went into St. Enoch Square and thence to Argyle Street. It was only four o'clock, too early to go home or to meet his Jean. Inevitably he moved on towards Cochrane Street, the warehouse. He entered by the back court. He opened the door. All quiet. The incoming pieces had been cleared away long since, the outgoing bales of that day had gone. He crept quietly downstairs. There were his boss and Willie Scott working at the packing press.

The pieces, stacked on the canvas sheet that lay across the lower plate, were showing a tendency to sag. Duncan Ramsay glanced over his shoulder, hearing footsteps, to see who had come down and was watching him when, for once, he did not appear to be very adroit at his job.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he demanded, though not in unfriendly accent.

"I just came in to help wi' that," replied Peter.

"Well, seeing you're here, we'll not play lazy man and make shift. We'll take it down and do it all afresh. It hasna to go out till the morn's morn, anyhow. Many hands—licht labour!"

They lifted the pieces off. They spread the canvas anew, rebuilt the bale. Then Peter left Willie to help Ramsay in the pulling over and tautening of the sheet, retiring to the counter to sit there drumming with his heels, just looking on.

He was not seen that day by any of the men who worked upstairs in warehouse or office, but on the late afternoon of the next, when once again the holiday hours without Jean seemed long and he dropped in and dropped down at Simson's, there was the cashier coming towards the stairs.

"Good heavens, Pringle," he exclaimed, "I thought you were off, off to enjoy some holidays!"

"So I am—and enjoying them fine," replied Peter, "but I just thought I'd look in for a wee while on my way home at nicht and watch the others at work."

"I see—I see!"

CHAPTER XI

REVIVAL

The summer was not over before a change came in the staff at Simson's, as we first knew it. All the warehousemen had been away on vacation, but John Simson, though back in town from a month in the Highlands, was still taking long week-ends there, and Robert had not yet shut his house at Cove nor put the yawl into winter quarters. On Saturdays and Sundays he was still down the river.

That was the time when Alisdair Lennox left them. The doctor who had ordered him to live outside all summer, and drink these many quarts of milk a day, again did not want to alarm him, but ... The plain fact of the matter was that he was of opinion that Alisdair could not pull through another Glasgow winter.

"It's lucky for him that his folks have a little money," was the warehouse view.

They may have laughed at him, because of his interest in the quality and tints of textiles in excess of what even a textile manufacturer should manfully feel. Gilmore may have goggled his eyes over that dissertation upon beautiful socks; Sandy Bain may have made vulgar comment upon his seeming femininity, but their anxiety on hearing his news was sincere. His doctor knew of a better place, he said, than Switzerland for lung-healing, and Alisdair, lucky by reason of his folks having a little money, went off to Arizona, went off "like a man" too, they all remarked.

His place in the Dress Goods was taken by Norman Nairn after a conference in the private room between Andy Middleton and Mr. Robert. Winceys, there was no doubt, had slumped. Andy thoroughly agreed that he could easily get along without an assistant. He almost confessed—to the junior partner's sympathetic understanding, indeed, he did confess—that there had been times of late again, after the brief revival in winceys, when work had to be made in his department.

"So that will be all right," Mr. Robert ended the interview. "If any buyer comes in when you are out at lunch Nairn can pop across from the Dress Goods to attend to him."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Robert, or any of them. Most of them have been through the departments and know the winceys."

So Andy had been right about that cough, that "hoast" of Alisdair's. With Lennox gone he did not forget him. When he asked Henry Braid how he found young Nairn, he was somewhat amazed at the reply, not having found him as Braid described him—"A queer kind of a mooning kid." Had anything, he wondered, happened to the boy to change him?

It was of Alisdair he was thinking on the autumn day of this chapter, standing beside his desk at the end of the counter in the Wincey gallery.

"Henry!" he called across the warehouse.

Henry Braid came to the front of the Dress Goods gallery and gave that little bow of his, then raised his head, elevating his brows in inquiry.

"Have you had any word of Alice lately?"

"Funny you should ask," Braid called back to him, in his high, mellifluous voice. "I was going to tell you, but I've been too busy. I had a letter yesterday."

"Does he say anything about the hoast?"

"About what?" for Braid did not speak the Doric.

"The hoast, the horrid hoast he had."

"The coaf," interpreted Sandy Bain with a shout from the Flannelettes.

"Oh, yes, the cough, Of course, the hoast. Yes. No, very little. He writes more about the place than about himself, but he says he's improving. I'll try to remember to bring the letter in to-morrow."

The door from the office opened and Mr. Robert came marching largely through on his way to the private wash-room, bringing a terminus to that conversation. Just as he went down the stairs below the Flannelette gallery the dull thump of the heavy door at the despatching and receiving room sounded and Tom Huntley (who had been talking to Ramsay about some packing that had to be done) appeared in the warehouse. Instead of cutting across between the towers of cloth to the Shirtings department, he came directly to the flight of steps leading up to the Wincey gallery, hat on the back of his head.

"What's wrong with your old boy?" he asked, standing there and looking up at Andy.

"My boy!" exclaimed Andy, alarmed. Was there some news of his son that he had not heard? What was the matter? "My boy?" he inquired.

"Aye, that young fellow, Nairn."

"Oh, Nairn. Why, what way?"

"That boy," began Huntley, and then walked up the steps. "That boy," said he, "is going crazy. Two or three days ago, when I was in the basement, he was talking to Peter Pringle about his immortal soul, asking him if he was saved."

Andy did not laugh. He lowered his head, elevating his brows, and stared more at Tom's mouth than at his eyes.

"It's a fact," declared Huntley.

"And what did Peter Pringle say?"

"Oh, just *Aye*, and *Aye*. Humoured him."

Andy's eyebrows puckered. He wagged his head up and down slowly.

"It's the revivalists," he explained. "We get them in the city every five years or so. I remember the last. I went to one of their entertainments just to see what it was like. It was a grand performance. There was both a speaker and a singer, and the way they took the cue one from the other and kept that thing going—why, man, Tom, I'm telling you that was art."

"This is no art that young Nairn has got. It's sheer damned nonsense."

"Oh, these two men I'm talking about, they were exceptional. They were a 'tear,' they were. They were good. But now you mention it, I have noticed when I've been out for a dander with the wife in the evenings the old signs of revivalism—harmoniums at the corners and young folks singing round them."

Tom Huntley put chin on chest and gave his chuckling laugh.

"I suppose we should not laugh at it," said he. "But something will have to be done for young Nairn. It is a wonder his folks wouldna take him in hand at home. Perhaps he keeps his thumb on it there—or perhaps they all have it. He's down there again now, talking to Pringle, telling him he's sorry for all he said to him the other day, and advising him that he ought to be careful. The poor kid is saying he doots he has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. Oh, we shouldn't laugh, we shouldn't laugh. I was chatting to Ramsay and we could not but hear bits of what Nairn was saying to Peter in a corner."

"I haven't seen much of him," said Andy Middleton, "since Lennox left and he took his place over there with Braid. Aw, maybe time will heal it up. We might make things worse talking to him. I see now what Henry meant when he told me he thought he was a kind of moony lad."

"Aye, he's moony all right, loony all right. I just thought, as I came up the stairs there, that perhaps you could do something for him. He thinks a lot of you, I believe."

With that Mr. Robert came up again from below and——

"Oh, well," said Huntley, and went down the gallery steps.

At the long counter of the Fancy Goods, Robert Simson halted a few moments to watch Mr. Maxwell ranging some new samples there. Then, clapping his side-pockets and clapping his rump in a way he had when departing, he went back to

the office. Tom, returning to the Shirtings department, found Willie MacEwan gazing out over the lower green portions of the windows with a beatific smile on his face.

"You seem happy," he remarked.

MacEwan wheeled.

"Mr. Huntley," he replied solemnly, "I am happy."

From long acquaintance with that cast in his assistant's eyes (the cast that was by no means a blemish, but somehow charming), Tom realised that the young man was looking at him directly and seriously.

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," he said. "Is there any special occasion for it this day?"

"I put the ring on my girl's finger last night," MacEwan told him.

Mr. Huntley lifted his hat with his left hand and extended his right.

"Well! Congratulations!" he exclaimed. "I hope you have a long and happy life with her—a long and happy life, Willie."

He slammed his hat on again, slapped MacEwan on the shoulder and passed into his little office to attend to his correspondence, the day not standing still, the day flying. All this was on a Saturday, and on Saturday the warehouse closed at one o'clock. As he sat there on his tall stool writing, Dan—who had passed down to the basement while his department head was talking to Andy Middleton—returned with his busy swagger and overflow of animal spirits. He grabbed MacEwan by the throat.

"Willie," he asked fervently, "are you right with your Maker?"

"What the devil——?" began Willie. "Don't choke me!"

Tom Huntley, pen poised over letter (they had the telephone installed in the place, but still they wrote their letters with pen and ink and had them copied, as we know, in the old press)—Tom Huntley, then, with pen poised over letter, turned his head and looked out of his little sentry-box of an office.

Danny backed his colleague to the counter and, with out-thrust chin, peered into Willie's twinkling squint.

"Is your soul saved?" he inquired hoarsely.

"What's all this about?" demanded MacEwan, fending him off.

Danny stood back from him and explained.

"I have no objections at all," said he, "to Watty Yule being all mixed up with conversaziones and church socials, so long as he doesn't ask me to go and join them. He's no' a bad little fellow, Watty Yule. Maybe he thinks example is better than precept. Anyhow, he does not gitter that way. Imagine—imagine, I say, walking up to a carter in the back court there and asking him if his soul's saved! Something has got to be done for him."

"For whom?" besought Willie.

"For young Nairn, for Norman Nairn, before they take him away in a strait-jacket out to Gartnavel. And I'm the lad that's going to do it."

Tom Huntley's chuckling laugh came from his office.

"And how are ye going to do it, Danny boy?" he asked.

At that inquiry Dan closed one eye thoughtfully, head on side. He had been wanting a name for himself at the halls. He thought he had got it: Danny Boy. Danny Boy—it was worth thinking of. It would look well on the playbills. Danny Boy.

But that was an aside, a private aside. He left its consideration in abeyance, filed it for future reference and consideration.

"Aye," said he, "Peter was telling me that you must have heard Nairn when he had him pinned doon there and was gittering that nonsense at him."

"But how are you going to do it?" repeated Mr. Huntley.

"I've had a chat with him. I've invited him to come out with me the nicht to a meeting. He's promised, and he'll keep his promise."

"What kind of a meeting?" asked Mr. Huntley and MacEwan in duet.

"Oh, just a meeting, just a meeting. I'm going to show him the city. I'm going to convert him. But I must get on with this order now."

"And I must get on with my correspondence," said Tom.

CHAPTER XII

GOOD INTENTIONS

As for Nairn's folks at home of whom Tom Huntley had spoken, the father was a somewhat grandiose man, his deportment of importance retained by being evasive. He had a managerial post with an insurance company and was very formal in religious observance. Those who knew some of his business dealings might wonder if, when he laid a whole pound note in the offertory bowl on Sundays, he was as much squaring his conscience as helping in the upkeep of the church, or in foreign missions, or in whatever the collection of the day might be for.

His wife was a woman often troubled of heart, of mind, of spirit, who also turned to the formalities of religious observance as spells for succour. Norman had two sisters, one religious and strained in a highly emotional way, dreaming much of "the Moors and martyrdom," the other of the type called flighty, easily excited, especially in the company of young men. Norman, though in his last two years at school he had played centre-forward and been captain of the swimming club, and on leaving school had joined a cycling club—activities which in the common view should have made him a well-balanced stripling—was mercurial and emotional.

He kept the appointment that Danny had managed to make with him. The place of meeting was the corner of Eglinton Street and Paisley Road, which is of no consequence except to Glaswegians, and carries no occult significance. The meeting was to be, one might just as well say, at a certain corner, a junction of busy thoroughfares. The hour decided upon was seven-thirty.

Danny Huntley was there five minutes ahead of time, topped with his light-brown bowler, shod with his light-brown shoes, attired in loud checks, wearing a tie to match, a violent handkerchief showing at his breast. Nairn, in blue serge, alighted from a tramcar at the corner, alighted punctually.

"There you are," said Danny. "Here—we'll jump on this tram. We're going doon the Paisley Road."

He thrust Norman ahead of him as though adread that he might change his mind and run away. The car went trundling west, giving them glimpses, down side-streets, of shed-roofs, masts, steamers' smoke-stacks in the haze of street lights and dock lights. It gave them views of women at the lit windows of grocers' and butchers', employed upon their Saturday evening scrutinies and mental arithmetic and shopping.

When changing from that car to another at a gusset of streets, Danny for a moment feared he was going to lose his man.

"Where are we going to?" asked Norman. "You told me you wanted me to come with you to-night to a meeting for a surprise. What's the surprise?"

"It would not be a surprise if I told you," replied Danny. "Jump on."

Away they went on that other tram, one that was drawn by what seemed to be a miniature railway engine inside what might pass for a toolhouse with a roof of corrugated sheet iron. Nairn had never before been in these parts. He became greatly interested. They passed low-browed houses, the remains of some old village. They passed tenement blocks of more recent date, but that looked almost as aged by reason of the grime upon them revealed by the street lights. Public houses at the corners cast out their vaporous radiance into the night. Shopping women—more shopping women there—brought trails of sawdust some way on to the pavement making exit from more grocers', more butchers'. And ever and again was the amazing spectacle of great dark ships upheld, apparently by scaffolding, high, enormous, against the peeping stars.

"We get off here," said Danny at last.

They got off, and with a swaggering gait and much whirling of his whanghee cane, Dan Huntley, on a mission of mercy, led Nairn up a side street towards a close over which was a bright light in a bracket. Into that close, ahead of them, Nairn could see big brawny men disappearing, all smoking. They were not going to any revival meeting as he of late had understood the word revival.

Through that entrance Danny led him into a long, low hall, at the far end of which was a stage. Beside it stood a seedy-looking piano. Near the doorway a big man sat in an easy-chair, glancing at those who came in.

"Just brought a friend along, Billy," said Dan. "Let me introduce Mr. Nairn, Mr. Scott—Mr. Billy Scott."

"How do you do, Mr. Nairn. Doing anything yourself to-night, Danny?"

Dan shook his head quickly, frowning, and shepherded Norman into the hall. There were small tables in that hall, and at one of them they sat down. To Norman's consternation the men gathered there were all drinking beer. But he did not flee. It seemed that Dan had mesmerised him. It seemed that Dan was as compelling in his own way as the evangelist who had recently so greatly perturbed his spirit. There was a part of him that wished he had never gone into that other hall, the hall of revivalists and fervours. They told him that he was a brand plucked from the burning, and that he had been led there—led there. A part of him thought he had, instead, just daundered in, in an idle and curious mood. Perhaps there was in Norman Nairn too great a complaisance of spirit towards all exciting and curiosity-rousing invitations.

A large, flabby, greasy-looking man in shirt-sleeves and wearing a white apron caught Dan's eye—or Dan his. Dan held up two fingers, received a nod in return, and without delay, with a bustling but genial attentiveness, the potman arrived at their table bearing aloft on the tips of his spread fingers a tray on which were two foaming tankards. With a wide sweep of his arm he set these before them.

"Meet my friend Mr. Nairn," said Danny, dropping some money on the tray, and with a sidewise wag of his head completed the introduction by adding: "He's the chucker-out, if you don't behave yourself, Norman."

"Not doing anything yourself to-night, Danny?" asked the man.

"No!" snapped Dan, and the chucker-out—or the alleged chucker-out—departed.

Then it was that Nairn heard three commanding thuds somewhere in the room, and immediately there was silence. He looked in the direction in which all the others looked, and there, at a table to left of the small stage, he saw a venerable old gentleman rise.

"Allow me to introduce our first turn for this evening," he said—"or I should rightly say our turns, for it's two in one—the two Govan-famous, and syne to be world-famous, Tamson Brothers in their impersonation of Faither and Mither at Hame."

"This," Danny murmured to Nairn, bending forward to speak through the welcoming applause, "is funny without being vulgar."

Nairn found it funny, very funny, but wondered, as it proceeded, what Danny would call vulgar. He was, at any rate, whatever his soul searchings, no prig. Part of his enjoyment of the turn was in conjecturing what his own father and mother would think of it.

"You're not drinking your beer," Danny remarked, nodding to him over the top of his own elevated pot.

Nairn lifted his, and together they quaffed. That refined turn being over, and the brief encore that followed, there was a babble of talk. Glasses clinked, pewter-pots clashed, tobacco-smoke coiled, voices were raised in argument and with laughter, then again the gavel commanded silence.

Dan made a sign to the man in the apron at the close of the next turn, and two more tankards of beer were whirled adroitly to the table before them, and the empty ones whisked away. Those being emptied, Nairn thirsted somehow for more.

"Have one on me, Danny," he suggested in a manner of abandon.

"It canna be done!"

Nairn's face showed disappointment.

"You're my guest here," Danny explained.

Nairn's face brightened; and he it was who gave the signal.

At some advanced hour of the evening—what hour he knew not—the gavel had to be hammered several times before silence fell and two chairmen rose together in perfect unison. The cleverness of it set Nairn laughing. He could not stop.

Only a vague realisation that faces were turned to him, faces showing disapproval, caused him to restrain his merriment.

"Am I laughing too much?" he inquired of Dan.

"No, no. You're doing fine."

"Gentlemen," the two chairmen said, "gentlemen, the wee handbills regarding next Saturday night are at the door, but I doot if there's enough to gang roond all this crowd. So I'll have to make an announcement for next Saturday."

Because of that *I* instead of *we*, Norman blinked his eyes, examined the chairmen anew, and as he did so focused them into one—and had another fit of laughter, which he promptly quashed.

"Ye are going to have Jock Struthers. He's a fiddler and contortionist. I'm telt he's graund. He plays the fiddle, going across the stage on top of a ball, and ahint his back, and in between his legs. We'll be glad to have him with us."

Cheers and clapping and stamping of feet. The gavel again sounded, once.

"And then we're going to have Quick-Handed Jimmyson. He's a juggler. But he has been here before, and ye ken what to expect from him."

Roars of expectant laughter responded to that.

"And we're going to have Mary Bullock. She's——"

"She's a hoor," a voice interjected.

There was laughter. There were calls of, "Order!" Danny laughed, and stopped. Norman laughed, and continued till the gavel's peremptory clash seemed to be especially for him.

In the ensuing quiet the chairman looked in the direction whence that voice had come, and very gravely he made reply.

"I ken fine," said he, "that she may be a hoor, but I canna put that on the bills. She's a skirt-dancer."

Nairn laughed again, so unrestrainedly that Danny begged him to drink up.

Then they were out in the air. They were moving through a crowd. They were free of the crowd, and there was a tramcar (though that may have been the one on which they went, not one on which they came, so confused was he), for next moment, it seemed, he was weaving along beside Dan on a long, void pavement, flanked by street lamps that went away into infinity.

Dan had considerable trouble with him, not because he was combative, but because he was almost boneless. The chief difficulty was to keep him erect. He might have been entirely hinged all over. Only vaguely did Dan know where Norman lived. At the corner of Pollok Street he had to find out. He stopped and shook him gently.

"Where do you live, Norman?" he asked.

"Glasgow," Norman replied.

"Quite so. And what part? Let us get to the details."

"Resthaven."

"Well, what street is it in?"

"It's not a street. It's a drive."

At that he sagged so badly that Danny decided he must keep moving. So, with linked arms, away they went. Shields Road Norman identified because of the whistling of trains and a great puff of steam on each side of the road. By the time they reached the top of the hill where the flats of Pollokshields ended and the dotted houses began with names upon the gateposts, Dan was fairly tired. There it was that Nairn remembered his chief amusement of the evening. He leant against a garden well and hiccuped.

Dan was disgusted. He dreaded that his charge was to be of the crapulous kind. But no, this was hilarity, not sickness. Norman was convulsed with merriment.

"But I canna put that on the bills!" he whooped, and had to stand still to laugh.

"Come on, come on," said Dan. "Straighten up. Here's a polisman. Do you want to be run in? Excuse me, officer, do ye happen to ken a house called—Goad, what was it called again?"

He grabbed Nairn by the neck and shook him.

"What was the name——?" he began. Then he remembered. He turned to the policeman. "A house called Resthaven," he said.

The constable pointed.

"That's it over there with the gates," he said.

"Well, that's something to be grateful for," remarked Dan. "But I canna deliver him like this. I'd better walk him round and round, I suppose."

"Aye, ye could do that," agreed the policeman. "And keep him quiet. Tak' him along this drive here." He waved his hand in a circle. "You can tak' him roond and roond, but keep him quiet."

"I'll do that," Dan promised. "Good-night, officer."

After four rounds the good Samaritan was very weary and decided that the remainder of the recovery might be left to the patient's will.

"How are you feeling now?" he asked.

"Splendid!" replied Nairn.

"Well, now," said Dan, "you know where you are."

"This is my home here."

"Do you happen to have a latchkey?"

Norman felt for it. His dread, at the first search, that it was lost helped towards his recovery. He found it and, exhibiting it to Dan, dropped it. They both stooped together to pick it up, and in the stooping Norman lost his balance, falling over on Danny's back. Of course, it had to be at that precise moment that the perambulating policeman came back.

"So you're playing leap-frog now!" said he.

Dan retrieved the key and handed it to Nairn.

"I think he's fit to go in," he declared.

The policeman surveyed Norman with critical eye.

"Oh, I think so," he said. "They're pretty decent folk, though."

Dan shook Norman anew.

"Listen," said he.

"I'm listening."

"There's your key. Now you go in at the gate and over the ckuckie-stones here quietly. Let yourself in quietly. Hang up your hat and dinna knock over the hall-stand. Where do you sleep? Up the stairs?"

"Yes."

"Well, just you slip up the stairs quietly, and whatever you do—don't sing."

"Thank you," whispered Nairn. "I'm all right. You watch."

He backed away from them. When he opened the gate it gave a long squeak at the hinge, and he shook a finger at it. "Hush, hush!" he cautioned. He closed it carefully and, "Hush, hush!" he repeated when it squeaked again. In a whisper he hissed between its bars, "Watch me," and, turning away, went tiptoeing over the gravel. Then, apparently full of rejoicing at the perfection of his stealth, he burst into loud and cheerful song.

"A-ah!" moaned Danny to the policeman.

The policeman chuckled.

"After all you've done for him!" said he.

But the song was only of a moment's duration. Perhaps it did not awaken the house. They heard, coming from the porch, a husky, whispered, "Hush, hush!" and then the door was gently shut.

Dan had a long way to go home, but the morrow was Sunday, and he could lie late abed.

On the Monday morning, in the Shirtings department, he was explaining in detail to Mr. Huntley and to Willie MacEwan all that had transpired on that Saturday night—all that, as he said, he had done for Norman Nairn.

"I hope it will be all right," said Mr. Huntley. "It may be all wrong. It is a queer notion of a cure to me. It may be all remorse of conscience with him this morning."

At that moment in came Nairn very smartly.

"A letter for you," he said, holding it out to Dan. The moment it was taken from him he turned and ran.

There stood Dan with the envelope in hand. It had been so heavily smeared upon the under side with mucilage that he could turn his hand, open, about and about, and still it adhered. He looked at the boss of the department with disgust.

"What do you think of that?" he said.

Mr. Huntley only briefly chuckled and shook his head. It was often impossible to carry off that old trick of the warehouse, so well known. Once or twice in his time Dan had played it upon Nairn, but never until that Monday morning had Nairn been able to play it upon him. There he stood still, turning his hand to and fro while Willie MacEwan retired to a safe distance to laugh.

"The dirty devil!" exclaimed Dan at last. "And after all I've done for him!"

CHAPTER XIII

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL ...

It has been said that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives. On that Saturday evening when Dan Huntley of the Shirtings was doing his best, according to his lights, to help Norman Nairn of the Dress Goods, formerly of the Winceys, in another quarter of the city old Fenwick was in deep distress.

Janet was worse, much worse. She was suffering great pain. In these days medical men could have eased her earlier. In days to come—in one way or another—such moans for help as hers, such whimperings, such beseechings to be set free from prolongation of hopeless agony, such calls to God for release, will be answered, no doubt, by men. Mrs. Hamilton, the woman who came in daily to look after her in Fenwick's absence, was often distressed because of her suffering. Never would she forget one of the bad days when in a husky whisper that rose at the end to a thin scream Janet implored her for help.

"Can ye not mercifully put me somehow out of this pain?" she begged. "Oh, Mrs. Hamilton, why do I live on?" And she fell back on the pillows, racked and wrecked, exhausted.

More than once Fenwick had asked Doctor Brustave if nothing could be done for her, and the reply was always that the opiates at disposal might lose effect after a time—might lose their effect before her release. Brustave was deferring, he said (a man of ready-made and so not always well-fitting phrases), the evil day. On another occasion, when Fenwick went to the consulting-room to tell him of a seizure that the invalid had suffered, and to ask again, plaintively, if nothing could be done at such times, the doctor's answer was the same; and he had added, in a voice that seemed near to callous in the listener's ears, that pain is part of life and to be borne with courage.

"My sister," Fenwick replied, "is nae coward. When she cries out as she did this day she is in pain well beyond endurance."

Dr. Brustave's manner signified that he had already said all on the subject that was to be said.

On that Saturday afternoon (the Saturday of the outing of Dan and Norman) Walter Fenwick hurried home as usual. As he shambled up the stairs he heard Janet, before he gained the landing, key in hand, calling for help.

"Why am I kept alive?" she wept to him as he entered her room. "You would not miss me if I went—you would be saved the trouble of me."

He expostulated that she was no trouble.

"If it wasn't, then, that you might miss me, even as I am," she said, limp, pallid, exhausted, "I would pray and pray to go. I would hold my breath. I——"

He fled for the doctor. Surely she could not last long now with these weakening spasms. Might she not go in peace?

"He's out on a case," said the servant who opened the door, "and he left word he'd no' likely be back till late."

"When he comes in would you tell him that Mr. Fenwick would be glad if he could come and see his sister as soon as he can?"

He well knew that there was no hope of recovery for Janet. Death was certain from her disease. He would be unutterably lonely when she went, and yet, for her sake, he would be glad when she had gone. By his wide reading, his omnifarious reading, he knew of various easeful ways of ending—he muttered the words to himself—"the thin-spun life." Of late she had increasingly asked him why she was being kept alive; and in periods of quiescence afterwards was still of the same mind.

He stood on the pavement before the doctor's house in the greying afternoon. Half a century earlier it had been one of several houses dotted there among gardens and lawns. The tenement builders, so far, had failed to take them all captive and demolish them. Between two blocks of flats it stood back from the noisy street behind a swerve of debilitated grass and one or two of the hardier species of shrubs, a forlorn hope of a house, doomed but defiant. Away south the waving

flames in the air above Dixon's ironworks made an eerie radiance. The tramcars lumbered and jingled past.

No, he was not ignorant of ways to help her. He muttered the words, "To Styx ... to Lethe," and then, "The valley of the shadow. Aye, aye. *Euthanasia*. It comes frae the Greek—*thanatos*, death, and the prefix, *eu*, a well death, an easy death." Some people passing looked aslant at the muttering man and thought him mad.

He could at least, lest she cried again on God for release, have the means to answer her call. He had his week's money in his pocket. Like the porters, he was paid weekly. During the next hour he went from chemist's to chemist's, moving on, looking for the coloured carboys in the windows with the gas-flames behind, or for the gilded pestle-and-mortar sign over a doorway. Such small quantities as could be purchased without a doctor's prescription he purchased.

"What is this for?" he was asked by one man, who studied him under frowning brows.

He had a satisfactory answer ready.

"Well, it is a poison," the chemist responded. "I'll put it in a coloured glass bottle. There it is."

He kept mental note of Fenwick. That was not difficult. Once seen, it was easy to recognise the old man again: square built, with powerful torso; short, sturdy legs; a gait all his own. His face had that look of trouble, anxiety, stress, but when questioned, and looking directly at the questioner, the expression in his eyes was reassuring. They were the gentlest, least malevolent eyes one could wish to see.

When he returned to the small flat again Janet was not moaning, but Mrs. Hamilton who attended her was in tears.

"It has just been dreadful," she whispered. "Oh, Mr. Fenwick, do you believe in God?"

"Is she sleeping?" he asked, ignoring that inquiry.

"Either sleeping or in a dwam after the pain. Was the doctor not in? What keepit ye?"

"No, he was not in. I've been trying to get another. I left word at Dr. Brustave's for him to come as soon as he could, but the lassie thought he might be late."

"You think he could give her some—some consolation?"

Mrs. Hamilton stared at him in a strange manner, as though she would convey by her eyes what she could not speak, as though she would load a look with meaning.

"Aye, some opiate," replied Fenwick, "though he holds to it that it is not time yet, that it might lose its effect before she _____"

"I see. Well, no doubt he kens. But there's those that are of the opinion he is kind of thravn and set in his ways."

Fenwick accompanied her to the door. There she beckoned him to follow her out on to the landing.

"What is it?" he asked, stepping outside.

She peered in his face.

"It's been a dreadful day," she whispered. "She askit me once if I couldna put her out of her pain before you came back. Just to look on at, it is dreadful. I would demand of that doctor to do something to help her. She'll die of sheer weakness, anyhow, I should think."

"I'll demand it of him," said Fenwick.

Biting her lips, weeping, Mrs. Hamilton ran down the stairs.

Fenwick passed quietly back into the bedroom where Janet lay. He sat there looking at the rise and fall of the coverlet over her. At one time he wondered if she was dying, exhausted by the last spasm. He watched, part hopeful, for a cessation of that rise and fall, part dreading it. When his legs felt cramped he changed his position quietly, not to disturb her. He found he had been holding his breath, and expelled it. It was as a long sigh in the room.

The evening wore on. It grew late. In another quarter of the city the chairman in that club would then be announcing the programme for the following Saturday—the fiddling contortionist, the juggler, the skirt-dancer. The street was quiet, save for the singing of a homing drouth.

Janet opened her eyes, saw her brother sitting there and smiled wanly.

"Oh, Walter," she said, "I can thole it no more. Is the doctor coming? Will he no' give me something?"

Fenwick rose and looked at her, in the extreme of anguish.

"He had patients to see to, but the lassie—er—he said he would come later, but for the present——"

"What? I canna bear any more."

"He gave me a bottle to give you help, should the pain get worse, till he got here."

"Then give me some now. Please, give me——"

He went into the kitchen, where his coat hung. He filled a glass from his collected phials. As he stood there a moment, tumbler in hand, he crushed his eyelids together to stem the tears, and shook his head.

"Walter, what keeps ye? Dear God——"

Steadily he walked back to the room. Putting a hand behind her head to help her to raise it, he gave her to drink. She quaffed to the dregs and lay back. Fenwick's hand was still behind her head. He did not remove it.

"It should take effect fairly soon," he said. "How's the pain now?"

She spoke suddenly in a new voice.

"That medicine has a funny taste," she said, "but I believe—I do believe I am——"

She sank back. Suddenly her eyes met his, gazed, dimming, into his. Did she know? Did she understand? There was a look of gratitude as she sighed and died. Her worn heart had stopped.

There came a knock at the door. Old Fenwick stood up. He listened, his left hand still behind her head, pressed into the pillow as she relaxed. No, he would not open. The knock was repeated; no, he would not go.

It came again. Slowly he drew his hand from under her head. He carried the tumbler to the kitchen.

Again the knock. Stepping out into the constricted box-like hallway, he opened the door—to Dr. Brunstave, who looked at him sharply.

"I knocked four times," he said.

"Yes."

The doctor entered the bedroom and, stepping to the bed, bent over her. His head turned slowly, and he looked at old Fenwick in the doorway. He stretched to Janet's arm and held her wrist, only for a moment or two. He stooped lower to look in her eyes, then he stood up, a meditative, conjecturing expression on his face. The smell of the poison was in the room. Dr. Brunstave glanced round at the shelves of books that never failed to astonish the factor when he came for rent.

"You took it into your own hands, then?" he said. "You will hear more of this, Mr. Fenwick."

Fenwick straightened himself as though he were already appearing before an array of jurors. Slowly he inclined his head. He looked at Janet. There was a peace on her face that made him peaceful before the doctor's detection.

CHAPTER XIV

CONFERENCE

On the Monday Mr. Robert came in early. As he passed through the office to his room he thought that Gilmore seemed to be subdued of manner when responding to his good-morning. The mail lay on his desk, envelopes all slit along the top by Tommy Bruce. That was the first routine duty of the office-boy each day.

As usual, after half an hour or so, they heard—out in the office—the junior partner's swivel-chair creak and his voice call, "Boy!"

"Yes, sir."

"Here are some letters you can give to Mr. Laidlaw or Mr. Robertson, and—wait a minute—here are some for Mr. Gilmore. You can tell the department heads I'm ready."

"Yes, sir."

Each head of department, then, in his turn, according to age, received his correspondence for the forenoon: Alexander Maxwell, dapper, well groomed; Andy Middleton, with his long, high-stepping stride, as though he were walking through a furrowed field; Tom Huntley, weel-pitten on, but with that *négligé* slouch of his (as usual, as he knocked at the door with one hand he put his hat down on the counter with the other); Sandy Bain, ill-groomed, *tashed* looking; Henry Braid, pulling down his waistcoat before he entered, taking the lapels of his jacket in his hands and giving them a little tug.

When they had all gone, with handfuls of orders for the day, the inner door opened again, and the cashier was ready at the call of, "Mr. Gilmore, please."

Robert Simson sat within, a letter in hand, but on looking up his mind was deflected from its contents by the expression on Gilmore's face. He had known him over twenty years.

"Is there anything wrong?" he asked.

"Er—well, perhaps we had better have the business attended to first, sir."

"Oh!" said Robert, realising that something certainly was wrong.

So the business was attended to, and then——

"That's all," said Robert. "Now, what's the trouble?"

"The calender-man, Mr. Robert. A woman came in this morning just after we opened with a message from him. His sister—Andy Middleton tells me she has been an invalid for some years—died on Saturday night."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Robert; but, candidly, he was relieved that there was nothing grievously wrong in the warehouse.

"He sent the message by her so that you would know he would not be at work to-day."

"Very thoughtful of him in the circumstances, Mr. Gilmore. I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

He sat back in his chair and repeated again that he was sorry.

Gilmore withdrew. Just as he was closing the door he saw Robert take his private cheque-book from a pocket and, tossing it on his desk, stretch for a pen. After a few moments he came out, an envelope in hand.

"Boy," he said. "Oh, er, Bruce——"

Tommy Bruce was always very pleased to be addressed by his surname. Mr. Robert held the envelope to him.

"Do you know where this street is?" he asked.

Tommy pondered the addressing.

"No, sir," he said promptly, "but I can find it."

"Well, you had better go off and find it now. You don't want him here for anything urgent, Mr. Gilmore?"

"No, sir."

Robert watched Tommy smartly depart and then strolled out into the warehouse and up the stairs to the Wincey Department.

"This is sad news," he said to Andy.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Gilmore mentioned it to me this morning. I fancy, though, Mr. Robert, it is what's called a *happy release*."

"Yes. Mr. Gilmore told me you said that she had been an invalid for some years. I fancy we all here know very little about him."

"It was through my better-half that I heard," said Andy. "Merest accident. Strangest coincidence. She sometimes has a woman from the same stairs where old Fenwick lives to help her with the cleaning, and they got talking—you know the way women will—and, extraordinary coincidence, Fenwick lives on the same stairs—all about him—invalid sister—a dreadful disease." He looked into Robert's eyes and nodded. "Yes," he said, as in response to some unspoken question he saw there. "Yes, a happy release, I think."

"He will feel it," remarked Mr. Robert. "I've sent him a note of sympathy, telling him not to come in till he wishes to. An odd man. I once saw him pottering about at a second-hand bookshop in the lunch hour."

"I have gathered that he is a bit of a reader," replied Andy. "Now and then, when he does talk, he'll tell some old story of a kind he'd only get in books, about people like Lord Byron and the Duke of Wellington."

"Oh," said Mr. Robert in a tone that might mean anything or nothing, feeling somewhat at sea over Andy's remarks.

He clapped his side pockets, clapped his hips, walked down the steps again and round to the inner side of the Fancy Goods counter, where Maxwell and his assistants were busy over the morning's letters. There they lay in rows, laid out as though for some game of patience, and from the low stacks Corbett and Leng extracted bolts already diminished by various clippings, and clipped them again with the great shears, or with the small blunt-ended scissors.

Robert stood back from them, watching the samples being neatly put one upon the other, while Maxwell walked back and forth at the counter, viséing the work. He wondered if Gilmore had mentioned the calender-man's bereavement to any other department head than Andy. By the ordinary everyday manner in which they had all come in for their letters he doubted it. Maxwell turned to halt Leng in a motion and re-read one of the orders.

"Yes," he said, "that's all right. Yes, you're right. It goes on there." He stood beside the junior partner. "Too bad about old Fenwick," he said quietly.

"Yes, too bad, Mr. Maxwell. Very sorry," replied Robert. "By the way, any calendering can be done, till he returns, by the calendering-house."

Mr. Maxwell inclined his head.

"Quite," said he.

He went back to the correspondence and the patterns and Robert strolled up into the Dress Goods. He had not yet got accustomed to seeing young Nairn there instead of that long, lean dandaical fellow with the cough. They were all busy. Henry Braid was one who attended strictly to business. He paid no attention to Mr. Robert, went on with his work as though the junior partner were but a fly on the wall.

Robert walked down the stairs, and as he was passing back to his office up from the basement came Sandy Bain, one arm behind him holding the door open for some one who followed, and:

"I can assure you," he was exclaiming, "when I said I wanted them taken out first thing Monday morning I didna mean

next Monday morning!"

Behind him came Peter Pringle and Willie Scott, looking very subdued with their packing-sheets over their shoulders, but winking one to the other. They moved on hurriedly, smartly. Sandy Bain, seeing Mr. Robert there, called after them: "Watty Yule will show you the pieces, or Wem up there."

Wheeling, he looked up in his boss's face.

"Ye'll have heard about Fenwick?" he inquired, standing a little sideways and thrusting his head forward.

"Yes, Mr. Gilmore told me."

"Aye, after ye got through the morning's letters, eh?"

Robert's innocent blue eyes opened wide. He was not so depressed by the calender-man's bereavement as to be dulled to something humorous in Sandy Bain.

"Yes," he admitted.

"Aye, I thought so," said Bain. "I thought ye didna ken about it when we was in for our letters. It's too bad, too bad, Mr. Robert, but it comes to us all." And away he went to his department after the porters.

Robert cut across the warehouse to the Shirtings. Mr. Huntley, Dan Huntley (he who was no relative) and Willie MacEwan all had their backs to him, standing there in a row, bending over the counter at their windows. Danny, in that coarse voice of his that always seemed to hold the hint of a laugh even when he was most solemn of aspect, was able apparently to divide his mind and talk about other things while employed, as he was then, upon business.

"That envelope," he was saying vigorously, "is just going to remain there. I'm going to hand him back the same one, one of these days, and with some mair gum on the back of it, too. The same one!"

Mr. Robert saw the envelope in question on the long ledge, tilted against a window, and recalled his days of "learning the business" from department to department. So they were still at it. Men may come and men may go, but the old pranks continue.

At the sound of his step they looked over their shoulders. Mr. Huntley picked up a letter and marched into his little office at the department's end. Robert followed him. With the edge of his hip on the high stool, hat on back of his head, Tom Huntley turned inquiringly.

"Did Mr. Gilmore tell you about the calender-man?" Robert asked.

"No," said Tom. "I noticed this morning he wasn't below there. Is there anything wrong with him?"

"He won't be in for a day or two. His sister died on Saturday."

Tom Huntley nodded his head slowly.

"Died on Saturday," he repeated. "I understand he was a bachelor, and lived with her alone. I think it was Andy Middleton told me that a while ago. She was an invalid, I believe he said. He'll feel it. I was reading a book the other day, a cynical kind of a book. It said, 'We think we remember, but really we forget,' and it struck me it would be just as true, or as false, to say, 'We think we forget, but really we remember.' It is amazing how things pop into one's head from away back. When is the funeral to be?"

"I don't know. He just sent in word that he would not be in—and why."

"Uh-huh."

Returning to the office, Robert considered that Fenwick would probably be back on Wednesday or Thursday.

But on the Tuesday morning there was a new development. Below-stairs and above-stairs it was perturbing.

Down in the basement Duncan Ramsay, having studied the *Situations Vacant*, turned the pages of his morning paper and frowned over a paragraph somewhat as, before long, other members of the staff at Simson's would frown over a

paragraph in the papers regarding himself. He turned and——

"Peter!" he called. "Come here and read this."

Peter, who was tightening loose nuts in the press, laid down the wrench and came curiously to his side, for the tone of Ramsay's voice suggested there was something startling to be learnt. As he read Willie Scott, though he had not been called, leapt down—with a clash of his heavily-tacketed boots on the cement floor—from the counter on which he had been standing to clean the windows for more light, and bent, reading, to Ramsay's other side. Any one coming down the stairs then might have been excused for thinking that Peter was giving a turn of his whispering singing.

They were reading of a police inquiry, and of the arrest, on a charge of murder, of Walter Fenwick, calender-man by calling, employed by a firm of soft-goods manufacturers in Cochrane Street.

Up in the private room John Simson was leaning against the mantelpiece, his back to the fire, turning the pages of the morning paper while his brother drew from the slit envelopes the letters they contained, opening each one wide to be sure it held no other communication or soft-goods sample before dropping it into the waste-paper basket.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed John.

"What is it?"

"Read this."

Robert rose, alarmed by the note in his brother's voice, and as John at the fireplace with arms wide apart held the paper open he read, and:

"Good Lord!" said he, too.

"They don't say Simson's in Cochrane Street," John observed. "Just a firm of soft-goods manufacturers in Cochrane Street."

"It's dreadful, isn't it?" Robert stood back. "I hear from Andy Middleton," he added, "that she was a hopeless invalid."

"Hopeless invalid?"

"Yes."

"What has the old fellow done—got desperate, do you think?"

"It looks like it, and people in that walk of life—I looked up his address the other day in the employees' book—people in that walk of life can't afford special pleaders."

"That old fellow would never commit a murder," vowed John. "Did you ever get a straight, direct look from his eyes?"

"I have indeed. He looks like the missing link from behind, by the way he shambles along, but he's one of the gentlest souls, or I'm away out. If he did it, I'd swear it wasn't to be rid of her as a burden, but to save her pain. Andy Middleton gave me to understand it was a bad case."

John brought his hands together, closing the newspaper, folded it and laid it upon the table.

"I feel we must do something about this," said he. "Let's get through the letters first."

They sat down in their places, one on either side of the big table, on which their small desks stood, and the correspondence passed back and forth for a few minutes, John now and then drawing a stub of pencil from his waistcoat pocket to write a word or two in a margin.

"All right," he said.

Robert swung back in his chair and, stretching to the door, opened it.

"Boy!" he called. "Bruce!"

"Yes, sir."

"Here's a bundle for Productions and here's one for Mr. Gilmore, and tell the others we're ready, please."

Well—they all knew. It was clear that they all had a look at the morning's papers before beginning work. Evidence of that was even on Henry Braid's face. They spoke in low voices. When the last had gone with his sheaf of letters John Simson slewed his big bulk round sidewise, threw an arm over the back of his chair (a mannerism of his when grave discussion was required) and said he:

"Now let us consider this business of the calender-man."

CHAPTER XV

ON THAT SATURDAY

There had been various occurrences, results of some of which would be revealed during the succeeding days, on the afternoon or evening of that Saturday on which Danny Huntley took Nairn in hand—with oddly good intentions—and Walter Fenwick tended his sister in the valley of the shadow.

A diversity of creatures they were—the staff of Simson's.

Maxwell and Mrs. Maxwell went to a theatre in the evening, their younger son, who had been to the football match in the afternoon, accompanying them. Tom Huntley, after dinner in his lodgings in Crosshill, walked round the South Side Park, on the way back got a book from the circulating library to the rear of Gillies's stationery shop in Victoria Road and, donning a loose pair of brown slippers, spent the evening among imagined characters. Sandy Bain accompanied his wife on her shopping in the main street of their part of the city, waited for her at doors of grocer and greengrocer, butcher and baker, watching the throngs and feeling himself one of Jock Thomson's bairns. His own bairns, at home, played hilarious nap for matches. Andy Middleton, while Mrs. Middleton was shopping in the main street of her quarter of Glasgow, and the lad was out with his *veolon*, honed two razors that had long been in need of honing. In the evening they all went to St. Andrew's Halls to hear a *mæstro* of the violin. Henry Braid went there also with his fiancée. Gilmore and Mrs. Gilmore, in the afternoon, went for a walk, accompanied by their daughter—their son at the football match. Duncan Ramsay went to the football match while his wife shopped.

As for the juniors:

Jack Corbett cycled far into the country beyond Bearsden along roads changed since his tramp of the summer, leafy trees turned to high trceries of twigs in which a wind out of the Highlands whistled shrill. Johnny Leng went to see the football match in the afternoon, and in the evening he and two or three acquaintances of his neighbourhood, as by herd instinct, gathered together at a corner. Then, finding themselves convened, good singers all, they strolled through the streets harmonising, well aware when lassies, promenading by, halted to listen, or even when women, gossiping on the pavement with baskets on arm, ceased gossiping to hearken to thae lads. Willie MacEwan took car to Pollokshaws and tramped out to the village where his girl lived, had tea with her and her people, strolled with her through woods in which the sequined ceilings had fallen. Rustle, rustle, rustle, with a sound—as he remarked—like wrapping up parcels in tissue-paper, they walked through the autumn woods. After supper at her home he tramped back to Glasgow through the crisp night.

Arthur Laurie, out at his village or small town south of the city, attended a rehearsal of the amateur dramatic and operatic society there, which all the cast greatly enjoyed. Watty Yule went to a *conversazione*, *soirée* ("cookie-shine," in the warehouse word), and returned to his home elated, in his right waistcoat pocket a heart-shaped conversation lozenge with these words upon it: "Wait till your beard grows." It was the saccharine response to one he had coyly presented to a young lady, one on which was the blunt inquiry: "Do you love me?" He had then hope for the future, a hope slightly frayed by the disturbing thought that the young lady might not look upon conversation lozenges as binding. Wem Mackay drilled in the Volunteer Hall, the high glass roof of which echoed to the yelps of the drill sergeant—formed two deep, formed fours, formed square, prepared to meet cavalry, drilled happily, voluntarily, because he liked the camaraderie of the volunteers, their drills, their marches, their smoking concerts. Maitland, out at the farm with a dog at his heel, went up beyond the fields on to the moors where the sheep trotted quickly over the crests and strung down slowly into the sheltering hollows. On his knoll-top he watched them. Sere tufts of bent whipped to and fro. The bleating of the sheep and the thin high screaming of the wind in these tufts were the only sounds. His eyes watered looking into the north, out of which, skimming the low inky-blue of hills there, dun clouds moved swiftly, by a trick of perspective appearing to slope upwards towards him, soaring, soaring, scurrying over.

Tommy Bruce went to the football match and viewed it, uneasily, through a knot-hole, balanced on two or three bricks set atop a small pyramid of earth he had teed-up against the hoarding.

Willie Scott sat for an hour in a pub, drank one nip of whisky and one glass of beer, took part in an informal political debate there, and by inventing statistics to prove his case, when a disputatious and heckling politician of the other party cornered him, retired from the field in the pride of an unscrupulous victory. Peter Pringle, like Andy Middleton, spent a

long time honing and stropping a razor. On one day of the week—Saturday—he shaved (as Sandy Bain did on every day) on return from work. His Saturday afternoon shave was a luxurious one. When chin and jowl were smooth as ivory he donned collar and tie and went out to the Glasgow Green. There he moved from group to group, listening to the discussions—political and theological—between the two men who stood in the midst of each. Beyond the last group he walked on, with a feeling of mental stimulus, to meet his Jean Morrison.

Slowly he walked back with her through the Green, past the jail, along Clydeside to Jamaica Street, up Jamaica Street to Argyle Street. There they turned eastwards again, to the corner where, years earlier, they had collected tramcar tickets. Naphtha flares quaked over the kerb-side displays of hawkers. A showy woman standing beside a barrow saw them coming.

"Buy your sweetheart a diamond ring and locket," she chanted. "Buy your lassie gowden earrings."

They stopped. They surveyed her stock, the diamonds and the amethysts of glass, the pinchbeck locket, and "gowden" earrings.

"Would you like a pair, Jean?"

Jean only smiled.

"How much are they?" asked Peter.

"The gowden earrings? Only sixpence a pair."

"I'll hae them."

The garish lady—bright was her hair, brilliant was her shawl—gave them no opportunity to retract.

"Let me put them in for you, lassie," she suggested. "Oh, your ears are no' pierced! That's all right. Haud still a wee."

"Ooooooh!" gasped Jean.

"Well, just a meenite now, just a second for the other ear. Ye canna wear one earring!"

"Oooh!"

With her soiled and heavily beghassed hand the woman nicked away the drops of blood from each lobe. An onlooker ejaculated, "My Lord—that might create septic trouble." But neither Jean nor Peter, if they heard, understood the meaning of that. The rest of the way home with her, Peter had anxiety enough, constantly turning to look at her, and he was intensely relieved when the pallor passed from her cheeks and she was herself again.

George Laidlaw lolled at a window of his home—which was a villa overlooking the High Street of a small town, a satellite, south-eastward, of the city. There he lolled, enjoying himself in his own way, watching with silent contempt the Saturday activities of his fellow-villagers. Dick Robertson went to the football match. Bob Simson, John's younger son, had mentioned casually over breakfast that he thought he would lunch in town, go to the football match and, after it was over, snatch a cup of tea somewhere and bustle off to hear a lecture in the Renfield Hall on The Future of Electricity.

He went instead to a stable. There, by appointment, a gig and a sprightly high-stepping horse awaited him—and a young lady to match. They drove into the country and lunched at an inn—with oats for the horse, sherry for the lady, and what Bob called "the real Mackay" for himself. The baited horse in the shafts again was frisky, and by the way the ostler who held its head winked at the barmaid looking out of the bull's-eyed window at the departure, so was Bob. But he got his lady aloft, climbed to the seat and gathered the reins in a way that, had his father seen, would have caused John Simson to reply with a definite *Yes* to an inquiry made to him some days later, "Can your boy handle horses?" Instead of going to hear the lecture on The Future of Electricity, he went with his friend to a music-hall.

And here we have to leave, for a moment, the staff, have to leave Bob, to tell about his father. For his father decreed, even in the midst of his worry over old Fenwick the calender-man, what was to be the result of that little outing.

CHAPTER XVI

PRODIGAL SON

John Simson was of a type. The drift of the years has perhaps made those of his order, those fathers with his views upon fatherhood, less numerous.

He prided himself on his sense of fairness—and was aware that young Bob often behaved in such a way that fairness came near to losing the day to exasperation. He looked upon himself as a good, solid, honest Glasgow body, the sort of parent and employer who could temper discipline with mercy.

Now it chanced that there had just arrived in Glasgow from Toronto a buyer representing a new firm established there. It fell to John to entertain him. Not knowing anything of that buyer's tastes, he had, in the trial trip that Saturday afternoon, taken him ringing through Glasgow in a hansom-cab to see this and that, such historic houses, for example, as Provand's Lordship. When they halted there, and the bells ceased to ring save when the horse fidgeted, he explained:

"The only pre-Reformation house left in our city."

"Indeed? Very interesting," said Elmer Strong politely.

Mr. Simson was not dense. He realised that Mr. Strong was uninterested in any Reformation, *pre* or *post*, and that antique architecture bored him. The new buyer cared more for the present and for those passing by on the sidewalk in the sunlight of his own day. They did not alight.

"Are you keen on music?" John Simson inquired as they tinkled back towards the club.

The affirmative reply being hearty, he mentioned tentatively that a certain mæstro of the violin was to be playing that evening in the city's leading hall. That, apparently, was not the kind of music Mr. Strong had in mind. So John Simson and he did not go to the recital that Henry Braid and his fiancée heard, that the Middletons also heard—Andy, Mrs. Andy, and their son.

"I would rather like," said Strong, "to take in a show."

"To go to the theatre, you mean?"

"Or a vaudeville show."

"Oh, a music-hall."

That was how it happened that Mr. Simson discovered his son Bob was not attending a lecture on the Future of Electricity on that Saturday evening, but listening to a song that was amazingly haunting, the refrain of which went, "At the footyball match last Saturday," and joining in the community singing (John saw him from the box in which he sat with Mr. Strong) of:

"Some gang richt and some gang wrang
The whole way through...."

He sat up that night at home, waiting for the arrival of his younger son. Mrs. Simson, Ian, Meg and the servants were all abed. Bob had been allowed to have a latchkey on his emancipation from High School, and on hearing the key in the lock, his father rose, moving into the hall.

"Well, my boy, and where have you been all afternoon and evening?" he asked pleasantly—horribly pleasantly.

For a moment fear was upon Bob. He did not like the way John Simson stood on the hearthrug before the hall fireplace, with his shoulders drawn up and his head settled down. That attitude gave him a bullish look. His eyes also seemed to have come closer together than their wont.

There were times when Bob thought that his dad was tyrannous. It was as though he did not merely advise or request or even direct, but heavily sought to impose his will, and that—to the young man's mind—was an unfair extension of

prerogatives of paternity.

"Have you no voice?" Mr. Simson demanded and took a step forward, a light step for one of his size, on the ball of a foot, like a boxer.

For a second Bob thought his father was going to fell him.

"I went," said he, by some splendid inspiration of truthfulness, "to a music-hall."

"Indeed! I thought you were going to hear a lecture on electricity."

"I changed my mind, sir."

"Indeed! Did you go to the footyball match in the afternoon?"

Bob laughed.

"What—are—you—laughing—at?"

"At *footyball*, sir."

"Who said *footyball*?"

"You did, dad."

"I did? Well, I may have. But did you go to the match? Answer. Don't meditate."

"No, sir."

"Where did you go?"

"Out into the country," replied Bob blandly, "for a breath of fresh air," he added.

"Fresh air! Alone? Don't meditate."

"Yes, sir," Bob lied.

"Oh! And after taking the air in the country, solitarily, you returned to town and went to a music-hall"—Mr. Simson paused—"with a baggage!"

So his father had somehow seen him! How fortunate thought Bob, that he had admitted the music-hall in answer to these probings. Here, thought he, was an opportunity to annul leeway.

"Baggage?" he echoed, with an attempt at injured dignity.

"Yes—disreputable baggage," repeated his father.

"Disreputable, sir!" exclaimed Bob. "That is a dreadful way to talk of a young la——"

"Rubbish! Don't try that on me. Where did you meet her? Who introduced you?"

Something happened inside Bob. He wished to precipitate a climax, to come to an end.

"We just gravitated each to the other," he replied; and then he did think that his father was surely going to fell him.

Mr. Simson clenched a fist.

"Go to bed," he said. "I'll think the matter over. I've had my suspicions for some time. Since leaving school you have had the manner of a young man about town instead of a decent warehouseman."

Bob hung up his hat and ascended the stairs.

"I may mention"—John Simson spoke coldly after him—"that I had to entertain a business acquaintance to-day, and he wished"—(Bob, mounting the stairs, stood still, but did not turn his head)—"to go to a music-hall, and I saw you there. I

am at least glad you did not lie to me about where you had been."

"Thank you, sir," said Bob, thinking of his afternoon's jaunt, undiscovered. He went upstairs to bed feeling the affair might have been worse.

Mr. Simson thought the matter over. He pondered it deeply. On Monday he discussed it with two fathers at the club, while awaiting the arrival of the new buyer from Toronto to have lunch with him. What would they do, he propounded to them, if they found a son in the company of a woman who was, obviously, of the town? One of them looked back into his own youth and answered, "I think I'd do nothing. If it continued I'd hint to him that it had its dangers." The other responded that he had no idea what he would do, and remarked that boys were different when he was young.

Over the lunch with Elmer Strong thoughts of Bob and that "baggage" were at the back of his mind. Mr. Strong began to talk of the Dominion and mentioned, in a personal aside, that he doubted if he would stay in soft-goods. He had a brother in cattle, in Assiniboia. Cattle—or at least so it would be till competition and market-glutting might spoil the game—were lucrative. He had already invested in his brother's venture.

"Venture?" he went on. "No, a sure thing—at least at present. And it will last a good while."

Mr. Simson was listening with increasing attention. It came to him that what his son Bob needed was roughing it. He did not brand the boy in a talk into which he launched then.

"I have a son," he said, "fine boy, lots of spirit, but I think he has got into company that—er—might eventually lead him astray. It just strikes me that a little—er—roughing it, roughing it out in the world on his own, would be good for him."

"Nothing better for a young man," Mr. Strong agreed.

"Do you think that in Assiniboia, for example, he could get some sense of the actuality of life knocked into him?"

"He surely could," replied Mr. Strong.

"My idea," John Simson explained, "would not be to finance him, you know, not to send him out like these remittance men one hears of. He's not that sort of boy, my son, thank God. I want him to——"

"Rough it," suggested Mr. Strong.

"Yes. Earn his own living. I may have been unwise in my allowances of pocket-money."

"So far as that goes," said Mr. Strong, "I could get him work on a ranch out there. Can he ride? Can your boy handle horses?"

Mr. Simson fortunately—or unfortunately—was unable to answer with a definite affirmative. He had had little personal observation of his younger son with horses.

"Well, he'd learn," said Mr. Strong, receiving no reply to the inquiry. "I get your idea: You think he should go out for a while just as a hand? Forty-five per month, and chuck."

"Forty-five pounds a month!" ejaculated Mr. Simson in horror.

"Oh, no, no—dollars. He'd be wasting his substance on riotous living if it was pounds."

By the Tuesday evening John Simson had his mind made up. He had had other matters to think about all day, not only business ones. The arrest of the gentle-eyed calender-man for murder greatly troubled him. Yet he had also considered, fully, the matter of young Bob.

Every now and then he made up his mind. There were times when he merely thought he had done so and his wife could change it for him; but she knew, when he told her of his intention regarding Bob, that here was not one of those times. She confronted an imposer of his will, a dictator who would not be thwarted. Yes, he had made up his mind.

She found the announcement perplexing, for he did not tell her of the allegedly disreputable company in which he had seen her Bob. So far as she could make out, that Canadian buyer he had been entertaining had turned his head with talk of what Assiniboia could do for a young man. She knew she could do nothing to change his mind for him. Perhaps, thought

she, Meg might. John Simson doted on Meg. So Mrs. Simson appealed to her daughter.

"Couldn't you use your influence on your father, dear?" she asked.

"What about, mother?"

"Oh, you don't know? He has only told me so far, then."

To the mother's astonishment Meg (on hearing what was planned for her brother) was on her father's side. She thought that it would be *the very thing* for Bob—or at any rate for a year or two.

Mrs. Simson was bewildered. Bob did not, according to her impression of him, stand in need of any Very Thing to help him, to do him good.

"I think it's a ridiculous idea, Meg—just because he came home late on Saturday"—her gaze fluttered from her daughter's eyes—"so far as I can make out," she added.

Actually Meg knew Bob better than his mother knew him, better than his father, even. Had she been like Corbett's detective sisters she could have had many a thrill of performing a righteous duty in reporting what she accidentally knew about her little brother's ways of "going to the baths," or "just going off to the gymnasium."

Mrs. Simson realised that even if she won her daughter over the girl would not plead with any air of conviction for renouncement of "this ridiculous idea" to send Bob away to the spaces of prairie, long-horned cattle, and bucking horses. Miserably she watched for an opportunity to confer with her declared prodigal son alone.

When she began with, "My dear boy, this is dreadful," he presumed she knew all, that her distress was because of the company he kept—or the companion with whom his father had so unfortunately seen him.

"It's dreadful," she repeated. "And I do think that just because you come home late sometimes—I'm saying nothing against your father, dear—but I do think, I must say it is extreme to send you away. It seems a drastic punishment."

Bob recovered.

"To send me away?" he echoed inquiringly. He had not heard of the intention. His father had practically ignored him since giving him release bedward after the scene in the hall.

Sadly she informed him of the paternal decision—and to her amazement he commented that it might be good fun. He was coming, relieved, to the impression that she did not know all the cause of his father's ire. As he was so considering, she confirmed that impression by complaining again: "It seems rather drastic, Bob, just because you came home late on Saturday."

For a moment he thought she was going to ply him with questions, to get to the core of the reason for his father's stern verdict. There was troubled inquiry in her eyes, but she did not voice it. He evaded her scrutiny then, however, very much as her gaze had fluttered away from Meg's when discussing the "ridiculous idea" with her daughter.

Mrs. Simson was no more dense than her husband. She surmised that coming home late was not all, but what the entire charge might be she did not wish to know. At least she would not play inquisitor to discover it. There was something, no doubt, of what is known as the ostrich quality in her. Fate might inform her of it, but she would not probe. Such was her attitude towards her suspicion, partly by a kind of fealty to her boy, partly in protection of herself from possible blighting of an illusion regarding him.

At the warehouse on Tuesday Bob did not see his father all day but when Mr. Simson came home at night, about half an hour after his son, it was clear that the "thinking the matter over" was at an end. There was no more perpending, Bob decided. Part of him was inclined to announce, over dinner, that he thought he would go along to the baths—and to go there. Another part of him was impatient for the cloud to break so that there might be clear sky again. When his mother and sister left the table he made up his mind, sitting down again after their departure, to remain till his father either spoke or went.

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Simson, lighting a cigar and turning to Ian, "I'm sure you would like to join the ladies, eh?"

John junior—Ian—solemnly rose. With Bob he had discussed the affair, for to him Mrs. Simson had also spoken of it. But what was the good of saying anything to anybody? He knew when his father was King of the Castle. He retired. He left them.

So they were alone. John Simson's manner was less ogreish than it had been on that Saturday evening, or Sunday morning to be exact—for the hall clock had struck one as Bob, after the pause upon the stairs, had continued on his way, released.

There was just a hunching of Mr. Simson's shoulders as he sat forward.

"You are going to Assiniboia, Bob," he said.

"Yes, dad."

Mr. Simson started slightly, frowned.

"Mr. Elmer Strong," he said, "a man whose brother is in the cattle business, and who has himself interests in it, has kindly agreed to get you work out there on a ranch. I suggest a matter of two years. You will——" he was suddenly again that restrainedly violent and fearsome father, "get some sense and stability knocked into you. I'm not financing you beyond the cost of your passage, and the necessary and suitable clothes. You understand?"

"Yes, sir." Almost did Bob add, "I'll be glad to go." There was a side of his father—the intimidating side—that he rebelled against.

John Simson rose and plunged his unfinished cigar into his coffee-cup where it expired with a sizzle.

"Disgusting!" thought Bob.

CHAPTER XVII

BUSINESS AS USUAL

On the Wednesday Mr. Robert arrived early, Mr. Simson (John the Second) only a few minutes after him. The morning's correspondence having been attended to, Robert went out. As he crossed the office, his brother called to him, "Just a minute." He turned and went back into the private room, closing the door, but promptly came out again.

"Yes, yes, I'll suggest that," he said. "Of course, we don't know the legalities ourselves yet."

"No, quite so," John's voice growled, "but it's worth suggesting."

"Distinctly," replied Robert.

Without any word regarding when he would return, or where he might be found should he be wanted in his absence, he departed.

Then the three in the office heard Mr. Simson telephoning.

Robert had quickly learned how to talk successfully into the receiver, as quietly as he might to some one sitting in a chair beside him. John tried to do so, but usually, after a sentence or two, he marvelled anew at his brother's ability with the thing, and to those who heard him it seemed that he had the impression that electricity had nothing to do with the conveyance of his words, only the volume of his voice.

Mr. Gilmore poised his pen over his ledger. Maitland ceased rustling the invoices. The office-boy held his breath. The boss was discussing the booking of a berth on a boat to Montreal. For whom could that be?

"Yes," he bellowed. "John Simson speaking, but the berth is for Robert Simson."

"All right. I'll look in later."

John must have hung up the receiver and grabbed his hat. He branged out of his room while the look of puzzlement was still on the three faces in the counting house. He seemed to be less John Simson, Manufacturer, that morning than the Will to Power. He strode heavily across the office. The three members of staff there cocked an ear to catch what he might have to say, whether "Going to the Exchange, if I'm wanted," or "Won't be back till after lunch. Ring the club if I'm wanted," or "Back in half-an-hour." He said nothing. He slammed the door. His determined tread rang in the corridor and he was gone.

A few minutes later there entered a man the office-boy had never seen before. He left his desk to attend to him, but the newcomer looked beyond him, and Mr. Gilmore dropped his pen.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed the cashier. "Mr. Waterbury!" and he stepped to the counter, stretching out his arm at full length—as Mr. Waterbury was doing on the other side. Heartily they shook hands.

"When did you arrive?" asked Gilmore.

"Came north on the night train. How's everything?"

"Not too bad."

"How's the bronchitis?"

"Fancy you remembering that! That's my winter entertainment only. It hasn't begun yet. How's London?"

Flashed upon Tommy Bruce's intelligence who this man was with the Vandyke beard. Many a time, when he had copied a letter, in doubt if he had pressed a fair impression, he would read it on the damp flimsy page to see if it was legible, and often he had come upon the words, "We are giving instructions to our Mr. Waterbury to call upon you in the matter."

And often he had posted letters to Mr. Waterbury at the amazing, the perplexing address of St. Paul's Churchyard. So here was their London agent—"our Mr. Waterbury", from the churchyard.

"Neither of the bosses in?"

"No. And I don't know when they'll be back," replied Gilmore.

"That's unusual. Well, I'll step out and see the boys in the wareus."

The puff of air from the silencer had hardly ceased to sigh in the room when there was a light step in the corridor belonging to no member of staff. The door opened and another total stranger—or total stranger to Tommy—arrived. The office-boy took two steps to the counter, on his face his wonted innocent look of inquiry. That stranger beamed at him.

"Hullo!" he said. "New office-boy since I came north last! Haven't seen you before," and over Tommy's head he radiated geniality to Mr. Gilmore, wagging a hand in the air, and gave Maitland a friendly nod.

"Well, well, Mr. Renton!" exclaimed Gilmore.

Renton! Renton, mused Tommy Bruce. Yes, he had posted letters to Mr. Renton, and in communications to Midland firms he had read the words, "We have instructed our Mr. Renton to call upon you."

The cashier and "our Mr. Renton," greetings accomplished, leant elbows on counter, one on either side, and gazed at each other.

"Bosses in?"

"Just gone out a little while ago. Can't imagine they'll be long. They did not say where they were going." Gilmore slewed round and goggled at the clock and remained so, staring at it, as though he thought it had stopped. Then said he, "One of them will surely be back before lunch."

"Well, I'll go and have a walk round the wareus."

"You'll find Mr. Waterbury there."

"Oh, he's ahead of me, is he?"

Whatever the irregular excitements in the warehouse in Cochrane Street that morning, business went on as usual. The time came for Tommy to visit the departments, collecting any letters that had to go out for the forenoon's box-clearings. Our Messrs. Waterbury and Renton were chatting with Mr. Maxwell as he went his rounds and returned with a sheaf of letters to copy, address, and promptly despatch. He enjoyed office-life. He enjoyed the outings incidental to the life of an office-boy.

Going along to the post office, he saw the brave glitter of copper sunlight in the windows of the City Chambers, and the dusty sparkle on the glass roofs of the railway station at the far corner of the square. He was very cheerful till, his letters posted, he decided to have a whiff of half a cigarette that he had retained in his pocket for such an opportunity. He struck a match on one of the pillars of the portico, and immediately a red-coated, black-bearded man stalked up to ask him a foolish question.

"Do you think this post office was built for you to spark matches on?" he demanded.

Tommy made no reply. He walked sadly down the steps, realising that he was no young-man-about-town, still only an office-boy—to everybody.

On his return to the counting-house he had to make what was called the trial balance of the petty-cash. After the morning letters were posted that had always to be done, not in the Petty Cash Ledger itself, but on a scrap of paper. It was an office regulation. If any one, in his absence during the lunch hour, took stamps from the box without putting money in it or leaving a note to inform him how the stamps had been used, he, on his return, youth though he was, could briefly become important and institute inquiries.

This morning he made his calculation carefully, and definitely it appeared that instead of there being a matter of threepence over wherewith he could buy a packet of cigarettes, he would have to pay in a solid sixpence from his lunch

money. He had just done so miserably, the pangs of hunger already upon him, when Mr. Gilmore wheeled and spoke to him.

"How do you balance?" he inquired.

"Balance even," replied Tommy sadly.

Mr. Gilmore's eyes affrayingly protruded.

"And how the devil did you manage to do that?" he demanded. "I took a sixpence out, when you were posting the letters, just now, to tip the dustman, and I did not put an I.O.U in."

"I'll calculate it again, sir," said Tommy.

Gilmore stepped back to his desk. Maitland, over his invoices, without moving his head, watched, aslant, that balancing. Tommy did not take long this time for it, and whipping the sixpence out of the tin box, announced, "Sixpence short, sir."

Maitland snorted.

"Oh," said Gilmore, and going to the safe that stood between the end of his desk and the window, he slowly put his hand in his pocket, slowly drew forth his ring of keys, gazing out as he did so at the high windows across the street, the cornices, the projecting eaves. "Pretty day, pretty day," he remarked, then bent to the safe.

He swung the great door open and educed a small chamois-leather bag in which he fumbled.

"Got a sixpence in the box?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Give it to me. There's a shilling. Now we're square. You can go to your lunch in peace without worrying over business."

Tommy had the happy impression that neither of them had seen his monetary transaction over the petty-cash box. Maitland had the impression that only he had seen it. But both of them had cause, next moment, to consider that Mr. Gilmore had noticed it.

"I suppose," he said, moving back to his desk, "if your balance had come out the other way you would have taken it out instead of paying in."

Tommy was mirthful over that—with a guilty note in his laugh.

"It's a good thing for you," the cashier declared, "that you're here in Simson's to go into the wareus later, and that you're not going in for book-keeping. For, if your ideas, young fellow-me-lad, of keeping petty-cash were to prevail when you got to keeping major cash you'd find yourself in jail."

The office-boy laughed again.

"He thinks it's funny!" ejaculated Gilmore, turning to Maitland. Then he seemed to think it funny himself, and so did the clerk, and all three laughed together.

The telephone bell rang. Their laughter ceased. Gilmore took down the receiver.

"Hullo?... Yes, Simson's—oh, yes, sir. No, Mr. Robert has not come back.... Tell him you're where, sir? Newton and Barclay, solicitors. Very good, sir.... No, just Mr. Waterbury and Mr. Renton.... All right, sir, I'll tell them. Good-day," and he bowed to the wall as he hung up.

"Hie you, you embezzler," he said, "or, at least, account-cooker, go out and tell Mr. Waterbury and Mr. Renton to wait, not to have lunch, that Mr. Simson will be back before twelve to see them."

"Yes, sir," and Tommy meekly hurried away.

Mr. Maxwell and his two assistants he saw at work at their counter. Neither of the agents was visible in the gallery

departments.

"What have you lost?" Johnny Leng called to him.

"I'm looking for Mr. Waterbury and Mr. Renton." Tommy responded, grinning.

"In the Shirtings."

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it."

Tommy hurried into the Shirtings. There they were standing with their backs to him, both in the same pose, arms folded, rising and falling gently on their toes after the manner of Mr. Robert when chatting. Facing them, with legs crossed, Mr. Huntley was leaning back against the counter, loose and angular. He was not laughing. Any preliminary light exchange of genial talk, that these may have had, was over. They were apparently discussing some serious subject.

"Well, what I say," Mr. Waterbury was decisively voicing his views, "is this—that the day will have to come when a board of doctors can be appointed for such a case."

"That might open the way to jookery-pokery over insurance," Mr. Renton remarked. "There are unscrupulous people in the world who would not hesitate to——"

"I said a board of doctors," Mr. Waterbury enunciated. "You would not get four medical men—one of the finest professions in the world—four doctors all conspiring to do away with somebody for any crooked reason."

"The patient would have to be willing," said Renton.

"Absolutely, absolutely, undoubtedly," agreed Mr. Waterbury. "All that I'm saying is that if you get a board of doctors agreeing that somebody is a gone coon anyhow, and if—er—he—er——"

Mr. Renton seemed to be a man of humorous bent.

"—or she, the gone coon," he assisted.

"Quite," said Mr. Waterbury. "If the patient asks for release, and four—let us make that the minimum—good doctors decide there is no cure, I'd say—" he nodded his head to Renton, he nodded his head to Huntley.

"You'd say, let them go easy," Tom Huntley ended for him. "Let them go easy. Yes, I think I agree." He looked beyond his visitors. "Something you want, Tommy?" he asked.

"Mr. Simson has just phoned and Mr. Gilmore told him that Mr. Waterbury and Mr. Renton are here, sir. He says he'll be back before lunch, and would they wait."

Renton jabbed Waterbury in the stomach.

"That's lunch at the club for us," he said.

Huntley took out his watch and glanced at it.

"It's after twelve now," he said. "Where did he phone from?"

"Messrs. Newton and Barclay, I think it was, sir?"

"Newton and Barclay!" echoed Waterbury. "Newton and Barclay. New to me. What do they peddle specially?"

"They peddle law," replied Tom Huntley.

"Oho!" said Renton.

Tommy Bruce was lingering as though he were part of the company there, or had been invited to stay.

"All right, Tommy," said Huntley.

"Thank you, sir," and the boy turned away, so all that he heard as he passed out of the Shirtings was another "Oho!" and then, "I expect the boss is getting advice for the poor old calender-man."

In the office, Gilmore was coming to the same decision, though not with the same certainty, for he had that other telephone conversation to consider—John's talk with a shipping company. What was Mr. Robert going to Montreal for? To arrange about having an agent there, for the Canadian market, as they had agents in London and Manchester? Hardly likely, when the Canadian buyers came over with such satisfactory results. So he wondered and debated, then suddenly realised that it might be John's son, Mr. Robert's nephew—young Bob—who was going to Montreal. There may have been some dust-up with the lad, thought he. Perhaps he had been misbehaving himself, and was going to be thrown out with a remittance to be paid him through lawyers. Canada, Western Canada, was one of the places to which wild lads were sent by stern fathers.

There had been something extraordinarily masterful about the boss that morning and there was no getting away from it, Gilmore told himself, that young Bob was pretty much of the type of that other fellow in there, young Robertson, the leather merchant's son.

"If you ask me," he ended that rumination, "they look like a couple of young sparks."

But the Simsons, he hazarded, probably were interesting themselves in this sad business of old Fenwick—though of that he had no proof.

"We'll see what we'll see," he decided. "Time you popped off to lunch," he told the office-boy, and when Tommy had "popped" off he turned to Maitland. "Just give me a minute or two to get my hands washed before you go, Maitland," said he, and went down to the basement.

Several of the boys were there. There was always a run on the wash-room about that time of day. Gilmore marched, businesslike, past the groups. Nobody in the lavatory. He went in and washed and just as he was coming out bumped into Andy Middleton.

"Hullo!" they duetted.

Andy detained him, caught him by an elbow, and bent his long gaunt frame over him.

"I hear," said he in a whisper, "that John Simson is out getting legal advice on behalf of old Fenwick."

"You've heard more than I have, then," replied Gilmore, goggling up at him. "Who told you?"

"Renton told me."

"Renton told you! Renton has only just arrived."

"Well, he said that John phoned from a lawyer's office to say he was coming in soon."

"Oh, that!" ejaculated Gilmore. "He did not tell you anything else, did he? You haven't heard any other private news?"

"No. What else is there?"

"You may hear later," said Gilmore. "Anon, anon! Don't rely upon circumstantial evidence. Don't jump to conclu—things may not be—what they—you never know."

Circling round Andy, he raised his left hand in a quaint gesture—he was a man of quaint gestures—while with the other hand he took the Wincey boss's elbow and thrust him into the vacated room.

As he passed back through the basement there was a lull in the talk there. They were not in awe of Gilmore, but when he had that manner upon him, suggestive of a melancholy decision on his part that he was the only one in the place attending singly and whole-heartedly to business, they humoured him, and looked caught, contrite. Silence fell as he went by and, unobserved by him, they winked one to another. It was only a momentary silence. As he walked toward the stairs he heard their revived chatter.

"Well, if you were really fond of some one," it was Willie MacEwan who spoke, "and she—or he—was dying, anyhow, and nothing could be done, you would certainly be tempted, above all, if you were begged——"

"Of course, we don't know she begged him," said Arthur Laurie.

"No, I know, but it's highly possible. That's how I feel about it."

"Life isn't such a hell of a fine business," came the head-packer's voice, harshly, "that it is worth clinging on to when you get into a fix like what Mr. Middleton says Fenwick's sister was in."

Gilmore went slowly upstairs and through the high, empty despatch and receiving room into the warehouse. Slowly he crossed the warehouse, slowly entered the office. When he opened the door there were our Mr. Waterbury and our Mr. Renton and his own John Simson, just going out into the corridor.

"Back after lunch, Maitland," Simson was saying over his shoulder. "Phone the club if anything important."

"Yes, sir."

Gilmore went round the counter's end and, hands in pockets, stood at the window a moment gazing out over the green lower portion, lost in thought, from which he was drawn by hearing the clerk speak.

"I'll just go now, Mr. Gilmore."

"Eh? Oh, yes. Certainly."

Gilmore returned to his meditation and then, as often when left alone there, was possessed by what was perhaps more emotion than thought, though had he cared he could have found the words to express it: The bosses' room was empty; clerk and office-boy were gone; the three tall stools, the two high desks, the safe, the ticking clock on the wall seemed suddenly to be the true owners of the place, and he only a transient sharer.

At these times, when that emotion came to him, all the folk of Glasgow were remote. Just the thickness of that sheet of glass away, hidden from him because of the green lower portion, they went on secret errands to unknown destinations. Quick steps, leisurely steps, scuffling steps went by just on the other side of that glass. Gilmore listened for a few moments, then took up his pen again, and returned to his day's duties.



CHAPTER XVIII

RUMOUR AND INFORMATION

Business continued—even though the case of old Fenwick intruded on the thoughts of the staff and on both the time and thoughts of the Simson brothers, as the staff was soon to discover.

The Manchester agent and the London agent had just departed when the mills' foreman, Mr. Bolton, arrived for a week of conference with John, Robert, and the department heads.

Mr. Bolton was a Yorkshire man. Maxwell, from former acquaintance with him over many years, easily understood what he said, and as Mr. Maxwell was by no means Braid Scots of speech, Mr. Bolton was able to understand what the general manager said. But when Johnny Leng spoke, his speech, to the Yorkshireman, was in a foreign language. So it was to Johnny when the mill foreman talked. As they conversed each would swivel his head more and more sidewise, this way, that way (as one may sometimes see a dog behave when listening to strange sounds), trying to comprehend through the left ear and right ear alternately, frowning and frowning deeper. Mr. Maxwell had to interpret.

When Bolton paused on his way to the Flannelettes, to shake hands with Andy and have a chat with him, he only got the gist of what was said. Dimly he realised that something unfortunate had happened, either in Glasgow or in the warehouse. He caught the word, "murder."

"Eh, oh, ah, well!" he said, and shook his head, looking solemn.

Sandy Bain frankly acknowledged the difficulty of converse with him. In the middle of their talks, as they bent over some web specimens, Sandy suddenly stood erect and squarely confronted Bolton.

"Tell me something," said he. "Do ye ken all that I'm saying to ye?"

"Well Ah——"

"Ye dinna! I'm just the same wi' you. But we aye seem to get oot of the bother somehow."

The rest of the warehouse wondered what, considering the cloud that hung over the place, could have set Bolton and Bain laughing so hilariously. Looking up at them from the Fancy Goods floor, or across at them from the Dress Goods gallery, they had the quaint appearance, between the pillars, of the puppets in a Punch and Judy show. There they stood facing each other, throwing their shoulders backward, bowing, each slapping his palms together, each delivering a slap to his thigh in intense amusement. It cannot be said exactly that they were bringing the Empire together, but certainly they were establishing the Union of England and Scotland.

Henry Braid looked at them seriously for some time and then, turning to Laurie, shook his head, perhaps less at the shockingness, the offence, of that loud laughter when such a serious matter as all knew of existed, than at the sincere vulgarity of it.

It was after Sandy and Bolton had discussed their business that the mill foreman (realising that despite difficulties he got more than the mere gist of what Sandy said) jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the Wincey department, and——

"T' Wincey boss there were trying to tell me summat o' a murder, but Ah could mak' nowt o't," said he.

Sandy suddenly grew solemn and pointed to the floor under his feet, puzzling Bolton thereby a moment.

"It's the auld calender-man," he said.

"Nay! Not surely yond old chap been murdered!"

"No, no. I'll tell you," and he told Mr. Bolton.

The mill foreman, lending an ear, and peering at him, got the whole story.

"Dear, dear," he said, "that's terrible. And you think t'bosses are going to do what they can for him?"

"Well, that's the rumour."

"Ah know a case something similar," began Bolton, and plunged into it.

It was in his nature always to know cases somewhat similar. In that instance, Sandy gathered, there had been a hanging. Other gossip Mr. Bolton heard after he had been into the Production department for a look at the Yarn and Loom Books.

"Ah see t'boss's son in there," he said to Mr. Maxwell. "'E's a fine, cheery lad. Doesn't put on any airs."

"He won't be here long," replied Maxwell. "Mr. Simson was telling me only to-day that he has changed his mind about putting him through the departments here, at least for a year or two. He thinks he should go out and have what he calls a look at the world first. Quite a good thing for a young man, if one can afford it."

Bolton lowered his head and looked long in Maxwell's eyes, as though trying to convey some thought thereby, or as though coaxing the other man to say more, so that he might say more. But Mr. Maxwell, whether he caught the intended hint or not, did not respond to it.

"'E looks to me kind of a bit of a laad, like that young Robertson," Mr. Bolton ventured. "Perhaps t'boss is getting him off t'sober 'im up."

"Possibly," agreed Mr. Maxwell.

"Ah tumbled to it as soon as you spoke! Ah've seen t'cut of his jib before. You know, 'e's like one of my own boys. Didn't know what to do with 'im. Out and about every night, pitch-and-toss and nap, whippet races and——" he suddenly made a movement of his arm, thrusting his elbow high in air to signify the draining of tankards. "Ah had a serious talk with 'im one night, told 'im Ah wouldn't stand it. Late again t'next night. Ah sat up for him. Went to sleep in the chair. And here was the morning, and all t'mill-whistles blowing when I woke, and the clogs clattering in t'street. That laad had been out all night!"

Maxwell, a father himself, became interested. He was glad that his boys had never been of that kind.

"And what did you do when he came back?" he asked.

"Came back? 'E never came back. Joined the swods."

"The swods—oh, the army," said Maxwell.

"Aye, indeed," replied Mr. Bolton. "That's t' place for 'im. That'll make a man of 'im. Got to be in when 'e's ordered there, or they'll let 'im know about it."

"I don't suggest at all," said Maxwell, "that young Robert Simson is being packed off as a young rake. His father says he thinks it will be good for him to have a year or two on his own resources to stiffen him up. That's all."

"Aye," and Mr. Bolton winked shrewdly. "Ah've seen t'lad," he added.

On the case of Walter Fenwick there was no difficulty in getting a consensus of opinion. It was the talk of the warehouse when warps and wefts, patterns or consignments did not demand entire attention. George Laidlaw, of Productions, had contempt for the staff's interest in the affair. The man was a murderer, apparently, and there was an end of it to him. He looked upon those who continued to talk of Old Fenwick as either morbid or sentimental. If, on his way through the warehouse, he heard his colleagues discussing the matter, his sneer deepened as he lumbered by.

One afternoon Tommy Bruce, going the rounds for letters, waited patiently—interestedly—while Braid, Maxwell, and Sandy Bain stood in mid-warehouse discussing various aspects of the case. Laidlaw, on the way from the counting-house to his quarters to rear, Loom Book under arm, found his way blocked by the office-boy. He grabbed Tommy's wrist and, twisting his arm, violently thrust him aside.

"That hurt!" exclaimed the youngster, grabbing an elbow.

Dick Robertson, happening to come at that moment out of Production department, stood pat. He spraddled his legs apart, and when Laidlaw made to pass upon his left, he swayed left, when Laidlaw made to pass upon his right, he swayed to

right.

Laidlaw glared at him.

"You're going to get into trouble one of these days," said Robertson, "if you think that office-boy came here to have you twist his arm, and kick his backside, and jab him in the ribs, just as you please."

Laidlaw's sullen jaw became more sullen.

"All right," said Dick, stepping to one side. "Just a warning, that's all," and with no more than a little nod and a grin to the office-boy—who was looking at him with the gaze of idolatry—he swung on upon his way through the warehouse and downstairs.

It was Sandy Bain who first heard, definitely, and from the fountain-head, that the bosses were doing something about the calender-man's case, and precisely what they were doing.

Mr. Robert, after a few days, again took his normal stroll round the warehouse when the letters had been distributed. John had gone out, tossing over his shoulder, "Just going to the Exchange if I'm wanted."

The head of the Winceys, observing the junior partner again at his usual unperturbed perambulation, hoped to have news from him in verification of the rumours. Up came Robert and stood beside him in the wonted way for a few minutes—to comment on the weather and the current municipal topic, or exterior one. A year or two ago there had been the ceding of Heligoland to Germany by Lord Salisbury; at lesser distance in time, the Sino-Japanese war; more recent still, the defeat of the Italians in their attempt to invade and conquer Abyssinia. Always there was something to exchange a word or two upon with Andy. Then, clapping his haunches, he moved on, leaving the Wincey boss to wish he had not waited for disclosures but had asked for them. Seeing that Mr. Robert stood a while chattering with Mr. Maxwell before returning to the office, Andy stalked down into Fancy Goods.

"Robert say anything to you about—you know?" he asked, bending over Maxwell secretly.

"About what?" asked Maxwell.

Andy pointed down the well.

"No, no," said Maxwell.

"Oh!" and Andy stalked back to his winceys.

For Sandy Bain the uncertainty was unbearable. Sandy had a directness of character. He had been talking to "the wife" about it at home, and she had remarked that she was surprised that he could not find out if the bosses were doing anything. Well, damn it, he would find out. He would be blunt about it. He would ask.

On the next day, when Robert strolled along to his end of the gallery and halted there to watch Watty Yule and Wem Mackay collecting the bolts for their orders, Sandy stopped in the midst of his arranging of sample-cuttings atop of letters. He wheeled round jerkily.

"Oh, Mr. Robert," he said, "if it's a fair question, are ye doing anything about the auld fellow down there, the calender-man?"

Robert always wondered, when hearing that approach—if *it's a fair question*—if umbrage would result from a reply that the question was unfair. He looked down at Sandy a moment, meditatively, and slightly amused.

"Well, Sandy," he said, "I don't mind telling you: We are."

"Oh, ye are."

Sandy crossed his legs and turning sidewise leant against the counter with one hand and put the other upon his hip, in the attitude of waiting for more.

"Yes. It is all very sad, terribly sad. We have the details. She was a confirmed invalid. She was dying daily. She was often in agony for long periods. She even besought the doctor that they had in attendance to put her out of her pain.

Fenwick used to have a woman to come in and sit with her."

Sandy was on the point of saying, "I knew that," but did not, *held his wheesht*, as he would have said, lest any remark from him might halt Mr. Robert's narration.

"She once even asked that woman," Robert continued, "to put her out of her agony."

"How did ye get all this?" asked Sandy, as man to man.

"My brother and I," replied Robert, "felt that we should do something. We have been having legal advice. People have been interviewed. We have engaged counsel. He could be granted counsel, of course, but we want to be sure he has the best."

"That's rale good of ye. Who are ye getting?"

"The lawyers are Newton and Barclay. We are having Sir William Wallace, the K.C. He is taking a great interest in the case. The subject it brings up is one that has interested him for a long time, he tells me. He says that frankly he looks forward to the day when the rigid rigour of certain laws will be mitigated, as in the case of Fenwick, for example. I understand it is a personal matter with him. Some one in his family, I believe, suffered as Fenwick's sister suffered—hopelessly."

"People have been interviewed, ye say. They'll be getting evidence to clear him?"

"The crown has its evidence," said Robert, "and Sir William tells me that Mr. Fenwick is the most difficult man to instruct. Evidence—evidence! There is evidence you would say to move a stone. It is one of the most heart-breaking things I've ever heard of." He spoke as man to man with Sandy. "I said to my brother, the moment he showed me that note in the paper, that the old man never committed a murder, not in the ordinary sense, anyhow."

"Did ye ever get a fair glance from his eyes?" inquired Sandy.

Robert was astonished for a moment.

"Yes," he answered. "That was one of the things that made me sure."

"Does Sir William think he can get him off?"

Robert shook his head.

"He thinks he can get mercy for him," he said.

"They tell me Sir William's a great spaycial pleader," Sandy remarked.

The junior partner, who seldom made a gesture, made one then, raised a hand and opened the palm.

"What can be done but special pleading with the law as it is?" he demanded. "The evidence is all against Fenwick, according to law. He doesn't try to hide it. I understand even the investigating police were miserable over the business. The only thing he did not seem to want to do was to give them the names of the chemists who supplied him, and he only did that when they assured him there was nothing culpable in their action."

"Has the auld man broken down?"

"No, it seems not. I don't know what sustains him."

"Has your brother seen him?"

"No, he hasn't seen him."

"Have you seen him?" asked Sandy abruptly, peering at Mr. Robert.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have," said Robert.

Suddenly he buttoned up his jacket, turned to go, then turned back.

"Let this be between ourselves, Sandy," he begged.

"Certainly, Mr. Robert."

"I don't quite know why, but I feel that way—in the meantime, anyhow."

"I quite understand, sir. It's mum wi' me."

Robert walked along the gallery past Andy Middleton, who, single-handed, holding an order-form, was drawing pieces from the stacks and laying them on the counter. He walked on down the steps and into the office, feeling very close to his staff.

A day or two later Sandy was greatly perturbed. A good deal of what the junior partner had told him, he discovered, was being discussed in the warehouse; and Mr. Robert, as Sandy had assured his wife, was none of they auld blatherskates that tell something to everybody and bid them all keep quiet about it. He was puzzled regarding the origin of their information, and at last found out that it came through Andy Middleton by way of that woman who lived on the same stairs as old Fenwick, the woman who occasionally went to help Mrs. Middleton in redding-up her flat.

When one day he saw Andy, on his way up from the basement, halt Mr. Robert on his way through the warehouse to wash, and talk with him a long time, and noted the puzzled frown on the boss's brow from time to time, Sandy Bain came to a resolve. He waited till Mr. Robert ascended again. He followed him into the office. Apparently he was preparing to go home, for he had not shut the private room door, and he was standing by the mantelpiece, brushing his hat.

"Could I have a word wi' ye, Mr. Robert?"

"Yes, Bain," said Robert, somewhat coldly.

Sandy stepped in and closed the door.

"Mr. Robert," he began, "you'll excuse me, but every one in the wareus kens now all that you told me yon day. It's common property, as the saying goes. I wouldn't like ye to think I'd gone back on my word to keep mum."

"Oh, that's all right."

"No, it's not all right. I wanted to tell you. It seems there's a woman lives on the same stairs as Fenwick, and she goes out working in houses—houses of folk that have nae servant but get a hand in, whiles—and she works for Andy's wife. She's been at the Middletons' recently and given them the latest news."

"I see," said Robert. And then he lied. "I never imagined," he declared, "that you had gone back on your word, Sandy, but I did wonder—I don't mind saying I did wonder—how so much was known about it. Well, it will soon be over."

"Aye, so I notice by the papers. The courts are sitting."

The first day of the trial was a tense one in the office. Mr. Robert did not come in all day. John, alone, distributed the correspondence and having done so, stamped through the office, saying, "Don't know when I'll be back. If anybody important, make appointment for to-morrow."

The trial was not concluded that day. On the next day, again Mr. Robert did not come in and John, taking a tour through the warehouse instead of his brother in the forenoon, showed no annoyance when he came upon some member of the staff engrossed over a newspaper instead of unremittingly completing orders.

CHAPTER XIX

THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY

It was one of the most harrowing periods in Robert Simson's life.

Of all the procedure, the possibilities, the probabilities of that impending trial the prisoner had been fully informed. Fortunately for Robert—because of the close of the case—he also had been informed.

Permitted to see Walter Fenwick he discussed everything with him. He would never forget those interviews. The old man looked very much as Robert used to see him when passing through the calender department. There seemed to be something within sustaining him.

Apparently he had no regrets. What characterised him chiefly was an amazing gentleness of voice and manner. His chief anxiety was that his books be sold to pay for what he called "her decent interment," and Robert recalled the occasion on which he had seen his calender-man searching in the dips of a second-hand bookshop near the crest of Buchanan Street. He was genuinely distressed, though deeply grateful to the Simsons, that they were putting themselves to expense on his behalf by retaining counsel instead of being content, as he would have been, with any defence counsel appointed at the order of the judge.

When Robert talked of the legal procedures to the old man, it was as if they talked of what might befall to some third person not present.

"I see," Fenwick said, and again, "I see. I know."

He was, apparently, far less disturbed by his position than the man who sought to comfort or encourage him.

On his way home, after their first talk, Robert censored himself for weakness. There was a time, he considered, when to any observer it would have seemed that they had exchanged places, exchanged rôles as it were. He could hear Fenwick's voice again. It had not left him. It remained in his ears. He thought it would remain for ever. Fenwick had tried to ease the distress that he himself must have shown.

"Och, we mustna get upset ower this, Mr. Robert! It's no' worth it, it's no' worth while. It's richt that I am here where I am. The doctor did his duty—his duty to the state. The duty of the jury will be to give me justice."

Robert frowned and Fenwick gave the strangest short laugh he had ever heard. That laugh, in fact, had a quality more poignant to the ears than tears.

"I see what ye are thinking," the calender-man continued. "They'll give me law. Och, well, dinna fash yersel' ower much, sir. After all, here's where we live," and he raised a hand to slap the protruding front of his gleaming cranium in a gesture that would have been grotesque or histrionic had it not been for the light of sincerity in his eyes and the stress of the moment. "The longer I live the mair I feel that, the mair I realise that. There's an awful lot in life that is bitter and—and incredible whiles, aye, incredible." Again he raised a hand, patted his head. "But in here—here is the winnowing-room."

He gave that little laugh again (the laugh that, when heard down the well in Cochrane Street, had sounded odd to the staff at Simson's), as though suddenly embarrassing himself despite his clear sincerity. There was a simplicity about him. If the occasion had been less solemn, less important, less dreadful, he would have been ingenuous indeed.

"Say no more about it," he begged. "We've all got to go sometime, and I hae some grand things to think of while I'm waiting here, bonny things."

At that, suddenly, it was as though he who counselled *dinna fash* was going to break down and bring the rôles back to the expected. Perhaps he suffered a stab of pain at thought of leaving the things he had found bonny in life, the things he had found gracious—whatever they were; but he took hold of himself. Even when Robert left there was no breakdown.

There had been a time when both John and his brother, thinking of the appearance of the accused—superficially considered—had feared that he would be damned at a venture by the jury. That heavy torso, those ungainly legs, that

shuffling gait; would these give evidence against him? But the jury, to judge by their faces, grew increasingly troubled over his plight and unhappy under the onus that was put upon them.

Counsel for the accused, realising that his nose might give false evidence against him, drew out the facts that he had some occasional nasal inconvenience due to his calling, that he was never under the influence of liquor, was in fact more than abstemious, a total abstainer, and that his income went on rent, food and apparel, the doctor's bills, medicines for his sister, and wages to Mrs. Hamilton, there in court, and that his only personal "luxury" in life was in books.

During the cross-questioning of the prisoner—a cross-questioning that he obviously thought utterly unnecessary—there were sounds here and there indicating, to those acquainted with law courts, that the people were deeply moved: a shuffling, a coughing of a certain sort, a clearing of throats.

"In giving this draught, was your intention to alleviate pain?"

Sir William had already told Robert that Fenwick was the oddest man in all his experience, the least amenable to instruction.

"In a sense. I really gave it to her intending"—the old man shook his head, lowering it, and gazed before him—"to end her pain for ever."

That was one of the responses that caused throat-clearing and stifled sounds as of choking in the court.

At the end of the whole business, the end save for the jury's decision—when they had left the box and miserably creaked and tiptoed out—a note was brought to Robert Simson. In his summing-up the judge had instructed the jury as to how the law looked upon this, had explained to them what, in the eyes of the law, constituted murder and what constituted culpable homicide. He had explained the difference between premeditated and unpremeditated murder, and as he did so there had been tensivity in the court, people there undoubtedly recalling the old man's "intending to end her pain for ever."

Perhaps with the words "malice aforethought" that jury might seek a way of escape, arguing that malice had no part in Fenwick's action. But what did "malice aforethought" mean to the rigid law? An intention to cause the death of any person, whether such person is the person actually killed or not; knowledge that the act which caused death would probably cause death.

Robert unfolded the paper that was slipped into his palm.

"There is always a possibility that the jury may be perverse," he read.

Another technicality, or legal phrasing: perverse. Perverse, he considered. There was no doubt about it, thought he, that if the jury had understood the judge as he had understood him, his calender-man had been guilty of murder. *Perverse*—that was the word applied, then, to a jury that took the law into its own hands (heedless of a judge's explanations) and by a twist turned it into justice—or to injustice, as the case might be.

He stared before him, wondering what would happen in the court if, when the judge inquired of the foreman of the jury in the usual terms if they had come to a decision, the decision given was, "Not guilty." The court would rise and cheer, he decided; but the judge, even if as a man he understood why that verdict was returned, would consider: "That was a perverse jury!"

No—they could not do that. Of course this was Scotland, and in Scotland there was such a thing as a verdict of Not Proven. How that verdict must hang over the head of a guilty person set free, haunting him with awareness of his Damoclean insecurity! No, they could hardly bring in Not Proven in this case. Old Fenwick had been the least amenable to direction by counsel in all the long and brilliant experience of that counsel. It had assuredly been proven. Would they be perverse, then, and——

"Order in the court!"

Immediately there followed a moment or two of disorder in the court—shuffling and moving, coughing and general rearrangement. All eyes were on the jury. The prisoner was again in his place.

Robert looked from jury to prisoner. They were pallid, but he was very much as the junior partner was accustomed to seeing him at those times when, after having washed, instead of coming up the stairs under the Flannelette gallery, he

strolled through the calender department and came up from the packing-room.

Old Fenwick stood in the box somewhat hunched or bowed, but his head was raised and his limpid gaze was directly before him. The foreman of the jury was standing. The judge had asked him a question across the court.

"We find the prisoner guilty of murder—and would make a plea of strong recommendation for mercy."

Suddenly Robert was aware of what the judge was about, what the small square of black cloth was in his hand. He lowered his head and cupped his forehead in a hand, and sat so, trying not to hear the words that were being spoken:

"... To be taken from this court ... hanged by the neck until you are dead ... may God have mercy on your soul."

There was an extreme silence suddenly broken by sobbing of people who did not know old Fenwick, and at least by one who did. Mrs. Hamilton, who had given evidence as to his character, and evidence also as to how she herself had heard the woman who had been murdered (murdered!) calling for relief from life, sat there shaken with sobs. She wanted to cry out, "It's a crime!" and had no voice.

When he looked up again Robert had a brief view of the calender-man shambling away out of a door, and it seemed to him that the enormous policeman standing to one side as he passed through bent over him in a manner of utter commiseration.

He was permitted to see Fenwick again and explain to him, as he had explained before—as the lawyers had explained to him—that the next part of the procedure would be a recommendation from the judge to the Home Office for the mercy that the jury had taken upon itself to request. He felt he wanted to go home. He felt he wanted a long rest. He wished the house at Cove, closed at the summer's end, was still open so that he might go straight to it, away out of the city altogether. But that was only a momentary weakness. He had much to do. There was the petitioning to attend to.

He went back with Sir William to his quiet office, and there that matter was discussed with an extreme calm as though it were merely part of the routine of the day, to Sir William all as normal as those letters written in Cochrane Street with samples enclosed and, "Our Mr. Waterbury will call upon you in the matter."

Next day the correspondence columns of the papers held little else save letters on the Fenwick case. Public opinion, apparently, was highly sympathetic to Walter Fenwick. Signatures were being collected all through the city. In all the soft-goods warehouses, wholesale and retail, heads of departments and assistants paused a moment in the day's business to dip a pen and sign.

The following morning there were more letters in the press. There was one signed merely *Medico*. It was an interesting letter. It came as near to stating as statement could be made without definite words to that effect, that the writer, an aged physician and surgeon, as he called himself, had twice in his lifetime done what the sentenced man had done—on one occasion by the request of an agonised patient in hopeless condition, on another by his own decision, unasked (by aid of an overdose of an opiate), on behalf of a woman who, in another twenty-four hours, would have died at any rate. Widowed, and in extreme poverty, she had made arrangements for the future of her only son, he not yet in his teens, knowing that her earthly end was near, and was suddenly taken with distress lest she had not planned well for her boy.

"Would any one suggest," *Medico* wrote, "that it would be crime in the eyes of any God to let such a one pass in peace instead of in agony of body and distress of mind?"

The evening papers as well as the morning ones gave their correspondence columns to the case of Walter Fenwick. A day or two later there was another letter that horrified Robert Simson.

It was signed: *It is Written*. It horrified not only the junior partner—it horrified the staff at Simson's—or all save one, perhaps, for Laidlaw expressed no opinion on the matter one way or another, seemed entirely uninterested. That letter was written to remind readers of the command, "Thou shalt not kill."

"We are told, 'Thou shalt not kill,'" it said, and it continued with statement of the opinion that our pains are sent to try us. It continued further with the pronouncement—how come by was not explained—that God, after death, would complete the period of suffering that He had ordained if mere man made any attempt to run contrary to His Divine Intent.

"O my God!" ejaculated Robert.

Across the table his brother looked up.

"You have been reading that letter signed *It is Written?*" John asked.

"I have. There doesn't seem to be anything in this world that there is only one opinion upon," said Robert. "In a war thousands are killed, and not even a cleric reminds us of 'Thou shalt not kill,' and here is a case in which one poor racked woman——"

"That man, that man or woman," interrupted John Simson, "whoever wrote that—oh!" And so he ended. He rose and, marching out through the office, growled, "Just going along to the Exchange if wanted."

The Home Office had no great difficulty in making a decision, what with the judge's recommendation and the enormous bulk of the petition.

"Evening paper! Evening paper! More about the Fenwick case!"

This afternoon the voices of the newsboys came calling closer as they ran eastward out of George Square into Cochrane Street.

"Boy, boy!" Mr. Robert shouted from his room.

"Yes, sir, I'll get you a paper," came the office-boy's reply.

Robert heard Tommy Bruce's heels beating round the counter and out of the door. He heard, in the corridor, other feet tramping hurriedly out of the warehouse and returning. Then the paper was put before him.

The Home Office had responded to the plea for mercy: the sentence upon Walter Fenwick had been commuted from hanging to life imprisonment.

Robert put down the paper and considered. Would it not have been as merciful to hang the old man? No, no, unthinkable. The telephone bell in the office rang. He raised his head and listened. Perhaps some one was wanting to speak to him. He waited for a ring on his own phone. He heard Gilmore lift the receiver.

"Yes, this is Simson's," said the cashier. "Consignment of Shirtings?... Shirtings, did you say? ... Certainly. Just a minute, and I'll switch you on to the department."

CHAPTER XX

EXASPERATION

For the time being, at least, another calender-man was not engaged. The plant below had not been altered since John the First's day. It was antiquated. Since that Monday—on which Mrs. Hamilton arrived with the message from Walter Fenwick—all calendaring had been done by an establishment in Virginia Street. The head of that firm, Mr. Grant, came over to Cochrane Street to confer with the Simsons, and an agreement was drawn out for a year's trial that satisfied both houses.

It was on the day of that conference that Bob Simson passed from department to department giving his adieux. The staff did not know—though some may have suspected—that he was in disgrace with the boss. The general view was that he was lucky. Why his father, who in their opinion was not one who vacillated, had not thought of giving him a little glimpse of the world before putting him into the warehouse only cursorily puzzled them. There was no talk of giving him a presentation. That would have been foolish. He had only been a matter of months in the warehouse, and was to be gone only, as it seemed, upon a longish vacation. His own attitude sustained that view.

"This is only adieu and not good-bye," said Mr. Maxwell. "Your father tells me he thinks a year or two will be all."

"Yes," answered Bob. Apparently he already had his plans. "Canada, perhaps New Zealand and Australia, and a look at South Africa before I come back."

"It is what I would have given my boys," said Maxwell, "if I could have afforded it."

John Simson speeded the departure because the boy's mother, though apparently—apparently—having come to the decision that her husband's idea was simply splendid, had got hold of the opinion from somewhere that the only time of year to arrive in the Dominion was spring. He explained that that was possibly so for a farmer looking for what they called a pre-emption out there.

"Though it has to be remembered," he added, "that they have sometimes a late and sometimes an early spring, and the man who has arrived in the winter is there, ready to go out looking for a good location as soon as spring opens."

She expressed perfect comprehension of that.

"But it must be cold waiting," she remarked, as in an afterthought.

In reply to that John said that people were misled by pictures of Canadian winters.

"My goodness," he declared, "I've known Canadian buyers shivering over here on days we would call mild. Theirs is a dry cold; ours is humid, penetrating, miserable. Anyhow, I've got a job waiting for Bob—and he's eager to go."

Her questioning of the wisdom of the decision regarding Bob had declined into an attempt to delay his going. John Simson realised that if he gave in to his wife over the question of when to go to Canada, and agreed to defer the boy's departure till the spring, she would prepare her brief against his going then. As a matter of fact, though vacillation was not a characteristic of the boss's to the minds of the warehousemen, there had been moments when Mrs. Simson, had she pled for annulment of the decree of exile, might have won. With Bob gone, John had some twinges of remorse and doubt. The vacant chair at the breakfast-table on the morning after his younger son sailed gave him (as well as the others) a lump in the throat. On the next, it asked him mutely if he had acted unwisely. Then he told himself that he was being sentimental, and that softness must be expunged. Still he missed Bob.

The head of the firm was somewhat taciturn during those days—both before and after his son left.

Soon after Christmas there came a morning when Simson's, Cochrane Street, was again in the papers. The letters had just been distributed for the day. Sleet was falling outside. The fire crackled. Robert, more ruddy than usual, too ruddy, was sneezing, sneezing. John leant against the mantelpiece, looking through the daily paper.

"Read this," he said suddenly, stiffening.

Robert had a feeling, as he stepped from his desk and bent over his brother's right arm, of having done this before. John's

big hand crinkled up the paper so that he might jab a thumb on the place.

"There!"

Robert read. What he saw was that Duncan Ramsay, packer and porter in a firm of soft-goods manufacturers in Cochrane Street, was being sued for divorce by his wife on a charge of alleged bodily assault and infidelity.

John put the paper down on the table.

"Sack him!" he exploded. "Sack him!"

"Sack him?" inquired Robert in temporising accents, sitting down again at his side of the table.

"Yes. We don't want a man here working for us who would hit a woman."

"We haven't heard that he did," Robert pointed out. "Alleged—alleged."

"The papers have got to say that," explained John, "to avoid libel charges, that's all. He's a beetle-browed, lustful-looking fellow, anyhow."

Robert hunched forward in his chair, clapping the back of one hand with the other.

"There may be faults on both sides," said he.

"Well, he hit the woman!"

Robert paid no attention to that.

"Andy Middleton was telling me the other day," he said, "that he happened to come in the back way once on his return from lunch, and out in the court there was a shrewish woman vituperating Ramsay and looking as if she was going to claw him. Andy said it gave him quite a start. It was like one of these glimpses you have into horrible closes in the lowest quarters of the city. Ramsay was just standing still, taking it all. Suddenly the woman saw Andy coming in, and dropped her hands and controlled her face. They sort of milled at the door, zigging and zagging, and Andy apologised, and Ramsay apologised, and he seemed to think it was up to him to make an introduction, and did so. That termagant was Ramsay's wife. Andy tells me there was something dreadful to him about the way she simpered and said she was pleased to meet him."

"Well, there you are," replied John, taking two or three paces across the room and back again. "That only goes to show that with a fellow like that here we may have scenes in our backcourt like what you see down the—what was it you said?—damnable closes where the riff-raff live, or something."

Robert sat back and laughed.

"It's none of our business," he declared.

John sat down.

"Perhaps it isn't," he agreed, "but I don't like it."

With that there came Gilmore's discreet tap at the door.

"Come in!"

The cashier entered and, closing the door:

"The head porter, Ramsay," he said, "wonders if he could have a word with you."

"Oh! Yes, yes. Tell him to come in," said John Simson.

Gilmore opened the door, made a movement of a hand, pointing inwards, ushered in the packer and departed.

"Yes, Ramsay?"

Duncan Ramsay stood midway between the bosses at the side of the table.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he began. "I've always been very comfortable here in your employment"—he included Robert, turning his head towards him and back again—"but I should like to give in my resignation."

John sat back, glared across the table at Robert, then up at Duncan Ramsay, and:

"I'm sorry to hear that, Ramsay," he said; "but of course you know your own plans."

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry to have to go. I was wondering if you could give me a recommendation as to character."

John glanced at his brother again—that time with an expression of faint inquiry—and Ramsay, noting the direction of his gaze, turned to the junior partner.

"Why, surely," said Robert. "All the time you've been here, Mr. Ramsay, we've never had so much as a bad order reported from any of our consignees."

"Well, that's a tribute," John interjected. "I'll say that." And then, because neither of the others spoke, he remarked: "I remember my father once boasting about a packer who was here in his days that he had never had a bad order report. Yes, we have found your work here"—(was it only in their fancy that brother Robert and Duncan Ramsay both heard something hard and oblique in that *here?*)—"excellent. I shall have pleasure in saying so. When do you want to go, Ramsay?"

"According to our agreement, sir," replied Ramsay, "I've just come to give the month's notice according to agreement."

The senior partner gave the alleged infidel his first glance of approval at that.

"All right," said he. "We'll see that you have a good letter of recommendation."

"Thank you, sir." And Duncan Ramsay quietly departed.

John rose.

"Well, that's settled," said Robert cheerfully.

"Yes, that's settled," said John. "Damn it, I shouldn't be surprised if you're right about the man. There may be faults on both sides. All the same, there are our marriage vows. But God forbid that I should be censorious. I think I'll just take a little walk round the warehouse before lunch."

Out went John to the warehouse, telling himself that he should not be intolerant. He turned to right and to right again to pass into the Shirtings. There was something about Tom Huntley that always affected him with a feeling of bonhomie. Huntley's rich voice, with the chuckle behind it, Huntley's easy lolling manner even when working hard, did him good somehow to hear and see. But Huntley was occupied with a customer.

John turned and walked out of the Shirtings. Corbett and Johnny Leng were busy at the long counter of the Fancy Goods. As he passed them he inquired: "Mr. Maxwell?" Johnny pointed to his department head's office.

"Talking to a buyer in there, sir," he said.

"Oh! Don't trouble him. Nothing special."

The two porters, Pringle and Scott, were up in the Dress Goods gallery with their big sheets spread on its floor. Laurie and Nairn were handing to them, very busily, the pieces that they were building upon these sheets to wrap up and carry away. Henry Braid was bending at the counter, deeply engrossed over letters and patterns. The boss moved back along the outer side of the Fancy Goods counter and climbed to the Winceys, where Andy Middleton, elated over a small order, was building it up.

Along in the Flannelette end of that gallery a total stranger to John was thoughtfully feeling his chin with thumb and forefinger, frowning down at a large and heavy tome. It looked extraordinarily like the Loom Book. The boss strolled slowly towards him, and as he approached the stranger looked up and nodded as though he knew John, though John did not know him. When he spoke it was clear that it was so.

"Good-morning, Mr. Simson," he said, slightly deferential of tone, but with an expression as of one caught in some iniquitous act.

"Good-morning," replied John Simson pleasantly. "Is there somebody looking after you?"

"I think they're all looking after me," said the young man. Then he explained. "I'm from Mann, Rutherford, sir. I'm just trying to find out definitely when a flannelette order can be delivered to us. Our customers for it are urging."

At that moment there came little Watty Yule pattering up the stairs that led directly from mid-warehouse to the gallery. His face was alight with the pleasure of one bearing good news.

"By Thursday at latest," said he.

"The whole order?"

"Complete," answered Watty.

"Splendid!" Smartly the young man departed, with a "Good-morning, sir," to Mr. Simson.

John walked over to the counter, stood beside the Loom Book. For Loom Book it was.

"What is this doing here?" he inquired.

Watty Yule was perturbed.

"I was looking it up, sir," he explained, "just to see when an order could be delivered."

"Oh, you were looking it up."

"Yes, sir." And Watty brought his hands together and fidgeted with his fingers.

"And did you not find all you wanted in it?"

"No, sir, so I just ran down to the Production department to make sure." And there he stood like a consciously guilty schoolboy before the headmaster.

"Do you realise," asked Mr. Simson, "that this Loom Book"—and he dabbed a page on its extreme left with a rigid forefinger—"is a little too enlightening? Do you realise that here in these columns you have Cost of Yarns, Cost of Transport, Cost of Weaving, and so forth, up to"—and he dabbed the finger upon the extreme right—"Profit?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I realise that."

"You do? And you leave the book lying open here for a customer to study in your absence? You're sacked. Do you understand? You're sacked!"

He lifted the Loom Book, put it under his arm, and marched down the stairs leading to the main deck, heavy of tread. He wheeled vigorously to right and trod to the door of the Production department, in which, but recently, on stepping inside he would have seen Bob sitting at a high desk beside Robertson and Laidlaw. He entered. Laidlaw was alone, so he permitted himself vent for his feelings; and the whole warehouse behind heard him, before the door shut, asking, "Laidlaw, what the devil do you mean by allowing this Loom Book to go——?" The door slammed.

Sandy Bain came hurrying up from downstairs and, crossing the warehouse, ran up into his department. There stood Watty Yule, fumbling his fingers. Sandy was very busy that morning. Wem Mackay had not arrived. The day before he had been sneezing violently, was bleary-eyed and flushed. Sandy had thus only one assistant to help, or hinder, him. That was how he felt about Watty, of whom the best that could be said was that he tried to do his best.

"Well, damn it, what are you standing there dreaming about?" Sandy demanded of his well-meaning but bungling assistant.

"I'm discharged," said Watty.

"By Goad, it's about time. Discharged, are ye?"

"Yes, and I think Laidlaw is discharged, too."

"There's nobody will lose sleep over him going. I'll say it for you: we'll maybe remember you. Who discharged you?"

"The boss."

"John?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're discharged, then. What for?"

Very sadly Watty Yule explained.

"A fellow came in from Mann, Rutherford when you were down below to ask when they could have delivery, and so I went into Production to find out. Laidlaw was busy, told me to look it up myself, and so I brought the book out and"—he tapped the counter—"I was looking at it here, but I wasn't sure about the dates. So I went back to make sure in the Production department, and when I was away it seems the fellow was studying the book——"

"And John Simson just chose that time to come along, eh? It's a pity for you it wasn't Mr. Robert that took the usual daunder through this morning."

The Production department door opened, and John tramped out.

"——certainly will be if anything of the kind happens again," they heard him bellow; and malevolently, it seemed, he strode between the stacks and the pillars, enraged. He wrenched open the counting-house door. It closed with a long sigh.

Subdued, the warehousemen worked—all save Watty Yule, who stood as in a daze. They heard the door between counting-house and corridor slam, the boss's departing steps, the thud of the front door. He was gone.

Hope, hope! Perhaps Mr. Robert would come out and say that the matter had been reconsidered, "... But don't let it happen again." Evidently (to judge by the tail-end of Mr. Simson's remarks as he came from the Production department) that was how it was left with the glum Laidlaw. But no. The junior partner, as a matter of fact, not feeling at all well, had gone home while the senior was in the warehouse, leaving word of his departure with Gilmore.

"I suppose we had better get on with the business," suggested Sandy. "Ye don't mind lending a hand while ye're still here, do you? You have a month with us yet, I suppose."

"Oh, I'm sorry," murmured Watty. "I was thinking."

It was then that Mr. Gilmore appeared, crossing the warehouse. His right arm was outstretched. When coming out of the office it was his way to make an arm rigid for the thrust against the brass bars across the door with the flat of his hand. Often, after having entered the warehouse, he would apparently forget for the space of several paces to drop his arm. There he came with it out-thrust rigidly. Was he going into the Production department? No, he was coming up to the Flannelettes, but not through Andy Middleton's end of the gallery. He forgot to drop his arm till he was level with the counter where Corbett and Leng were at work. His eyes were near to popping out of his head. He came up the flight of stairs in the middle of the gallery. He put a cheque before Watty Yule. His voice was hoarse, as if he had an attack of bronchitis again. It might have been laryngitis. His speech was indeed but in a husky whisper.

"I was to give you that," he said. "Salary to date and a month in lieu of notice."

Having hoarsely whispered so, he turned and went the way he had come, looking neither to right nor left.

So it was that little Watty Yule—you'll remember him—left Simson's, Cochrane Street, and without any presentation. He had but to get his hat and coat and then, with his heart in his mouth, go from department to department, saying good-bye.

While he was giving his sad farewell to Corbett and Leng, Dick Robertson passed through the warehouse, and he leapt at the opportunity to say good-bye to him there. He did not want to go into the Production department, for there would be Laidlaw, and he had had enough of grief for that day.

Having completed his dismal ambit of the warehouse—leaving a word of farewell with Sandy Bain to be delivered to Wem Mackay—he opened the office door, said, "Good-bye, everybody," let it sigh shut again. Downstairs he went to give his adieux to the astounded packers. Reascending the stairs, he felt a coldness and rigidity round his lips. As he came to the top the back door was thrust open and a carter stepped in.

"Below, there!" he bellowed. "A delivery for ye."

"All—right!" came Ramsay's voice.

Watty slipped past the carter into the court, edged round the hubs of a lorry, dodged to one side timidly when the horse turned its head to see who came, and scuttled on—out the back way.

CHAPTER XXI

REMARKS

Wem Mackay was not the only one who was flushed and sneezing. An epidemic of influenza had invaded Glasgow. Next day Robert Simson was in such miserable condition that he remained in bed. When he tried to rise the room oscillated, and he felt as though he had been most cruelly cudgelled. His refusal even of gruel caused his housekeeper to call in the doctor.

He remained in bed for a week. And another week had almost passed before his legs would obey him—to the annoyance of the doctor, who had too many patients to attend to, and had influenza himself. He was exasperated that the tonic for convalescence did not act quicker.

There were changes in the warehouse by the time the junior partner got back there, though that return was only two weeks from the day he was gripped. On the first of the month he had left before lunch-time, feeling very seedy, and on the fifteenth he returned, feeling somewhat remote from the world, though in it. He arrived late, after the letter-sorting and letter-distribution, was gaped at by the office-boy, eyed solemnly by Maitland, and goggled at with doubt, because of loss of his ruddiness, by Gilmore.

"Ah, there you are. Feeling better?" asked John on his entrance.

"Little wobbly still, but all right."

"Seeing you've arrived," said John, "I think I'll pop along to the Exchange before lunch."

Robert had been looking forward to seeing the warehouse again, and rested only a few moments before making his usual peregrination. There, to his astonishment, up in the Flannelette department, apparently not merely visiting but working, was his nephew, John's elder son—christened John, but generally called Ian to distinguish him from his father. He paused to assure Mr. Maxwell he felt better, and for a chat, and as they chatted his gaze intermittently drifted up to the Flannelette gallery.

"I see my nephew up there," he said.

Mr. Maxwell gave a small bow. So the senior partner, thought he, had not informed the junior partner of that.

"Yes, your brother installed him a day or two after you were taken ill."

"Has there been a sudden impetus in Flannelettes, then?" Robert asked.

"They're busy," replied Maxwell; "but—er—Yule was discharged, you know."

"Discharged! When? What for?"

"Mr. Simson called it 'utter incompetence,' and I must say it was certainly very——" Maxwell shook his head and puckered his mouth.

Robert frowned. He did not like such phrases as "utter incompetence." Under his genial exterior he had the view that this is somewhat of a hard world, and because of that belief he tried to take life as easily as possible and make it as easy as he could for others.

"I didn't know," he muttered.

"He left one of these books"—Maxwell nodded towards the door of Laidlaw's department—"one of these books, showing the profits, lying open on the counter where a buyer from one of the retail houses had an opportunity to study it."

"He shouldn't have done that," said Robert slowly, but did not voice an appended consideration which was in his mind: that it was somewhat drastic to discharge him. "Just away two weeks—and changes," he added instead.

"There's going to be another change, I hear," remarked Maxwell. "Two changes in a way."

"What are they?"

"Willie MacEwan of the Shirtings is getting married."

"And leaving us?"

"No, no. I just meant a change for Willie. But my Jack Corbett has handed in his resignation."

"Indeed! He's going abroad, eh?"

This question was because of certain stipulations in the Simson warehouse regarding possible resignation of employees: Young men coming to the firm were indentured for a period of three or four years. Service might only be terminated during these years (apart from any gross misbehaviour, or marked inefficiency) if the employee was not remaining in the country, or was not leaving them to go to another house, at home, in the same line.

"Yes," said Maxwell. "I have the impression he is not happy at home—for he's happy enough here. He is going to South Africa. I understand he has a job through Mr. Vannan."

"So MacEwan is getting married," observed Robert. "Well, whoever the girl is, she's getting a pretty decent chap."

Mr. Maxwell bowed as though in gratitude and agreement. He was very much head over all the heads that morning.

Robert moved up into the Flannelettes.

"Good-morning, Sandy."

"Good-morning, Mr. Robert. Are you feeling yourself again?"

"Yes, I think I'm all right."

"You've lost a bit of flesh."

"It pulled me down a bit. Good-morning, Mackay. You look pulled down a little, too."

"Yes, sir. I had a pretty bad time," replied Wem. "I'm feeling better now."

Ian was twinkling sidelong at his uncle.

"So you've had your way," said Robert.

He had known that his nephew always wanted to come into the warehouse, but he had not known that soon after the departure of Bob—who had been put into the business on leaving school because he was no captor of bursaries and scholarships—John had had what he called a heart-to-heart talk with Ian over a new idea that was in his mind, the idea being that perhaps after all the warehouse was the place for him. Most complaisantly the young man agreed.

He merely laughed and nodded in reply to Uncle Robert's remark. Clapping his hips, his side pockets, the junior partner walked along the gallery to where Andy Middleton was dabbing some samples.

"Glad to see you back again, Mr. Robert. How are you feeling?"

"Oh, not too bad. How are you?"

"Och, I'm no' just richt. I whiles think I've got a touch of flu myself. I havena really felt richt since that trial, ye ken. I wouldna be surprised, Mr. Robert, if all that you passed through during that time ran you doon and made you susceptible."

"I wouldn't be surprised either," said Robert.

He passed down the steps and into the Shirtings department. From the middle of the warehouse he had nodded to Henry Braid and his assistants, but Braid attended so strictly to business that he had not ascended the stairs to talk to him. He liked to go into the Shirtings department. There was something about Huntley that did him good. He was an employee, an old employee who, without any transgression of the fitness of things between employer and employed, seemed to be an

old friend. Long and long ago Robert—"learning the departments"—had once been on such terms with Huntley as to allow of handing him an envelope smeared with gum upon its under-side. Those days were gone. Perhaps memory of them lurked. Perhaps it was memory of them that made a certain light in Mr. Robert's eyes when Huntley turned to greet him—and a certain twinkle in the eyes of the boss of the Shirtings.

"Well, Huntley."

"Glad to see you back again, Mr. Robert."

On the impulse of the moment they shook hands, and then Huntley stepped back and, leaning against the counter, examined the convalescent.

"Am I right in thinking you've lost some weight?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed I have. I suppose as one gets older one doesn't pull through as easily, either."

"Come, come, Mr. Robert, you're not old."

At that moment Willie MacEwan came into the department behind them, and Robert held out his hand.

"I hear we have to congratulate you, MacEwan," he said.

The squinting eyes twinkled up into his face.

"Thank you, sir. Oh, yes, you have indeed."

"When's the date?"

"Just two weeks come to-morrow night."

"Have you arranged with my brother for——?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir. I've to have a week. He says I can have a week in the summer, too. I'll have a fortnight this year instead of ten days."

Came in then Dan Huntley, bustling and busy, his elbows out and curved, his shoulders urging forward, left, right, as though he thrust the odour of Shirtings before him. Seeing Mr. Robert there, he desisted from that *gallus* manner.

"Good-morning, Dan."

"Good-morning, sir. Glad to see you back again, sir." And Dan passed on, taking a pencil from behind his ear to initial an order form that lay on the counter.

Robert returned to the office. Duncan Ramsay the packer was just coming out and stood to one side, holding the door open for him.

"Glad to see you back, sir," he said. "Are you feeling some better?"

"Yes, much better."

"Thank you, sir," said Ramsay, as though in gratitude for the improvement.

The door of the private room was open. As he entered behind him came Gilmore's voice, "Just a minute, Mr. Robert."

"Yes, Mr. Gilmore?"

"The head packer came in just now to ask if he might have a loan on his month's wages. He's leaving at the end of the month, you know."

"Yes, I remember that. That reminds me: Has my brother given him the letter of recommendation?"

"I believe not. He mentioned it just now. I presume I was all right in advancing him half his month's wages?"

"Oh, yes, surely."

"He gave me an I.O.U. I've put it in the box."

"That's perfectly all right. Yes, I'll just write a letter for him now."

Gilmore closed the door and Robert sat down. "*We have great pleasure on behalf of Duncan Ramsay, who has been in our employment for ...*" He stopped and, opening a drawer, took from it the book on the cover of which had been pasted a piece of paper bearing the word, in a strong and flowing script, *Employees*. He sat back in his chair and opened it.

He was still feeling slightly out of the world, not attached to its activities. There was plenty of time for the doing of things. He did not turn to the current pages at once to discover when packer Ramsay had come to their employ, but dallied through the book. There they were, columns of names, like marching regiments, columns of names and columns of dates, and then the wide space headed: *Remarks*.

He began to read the names on the page at which the book had fallen open. They were all strange to him. They were strange to him not because any fever remained, but because they were of men he had never known, written down in his father's earliest handwriting before it became cramped and heavy. The column for remarks was often empty. There had been employees in the house of Simson of whom apparently nothing was noted. Not but what they had their own lives, no doubt, Robert considered, lives important to themselves, though without repercussions in Cochrane Street. Or perhaps the intention had been to confine the remarks to matters pertaining only to their lives as lived in Cochrane Street.

Robert turned the pages slowly. No, it was not that. Here was an entry proving otherwise. John the First had dipped his quill to indite regarding one named James Robert Maclean. "Father a minister in Mull. Amusing interview. Told me he would not have his son a clergyman to be criticised by all the old women in the pews." That was an entry made when the founder of the firm was young. Here was another, of some one named John Frederick Miller. "Getting on very well here, but going in for sugar business instead. Got job in Jamaica. Think it ridiculous."

But this was not writing the letter of recommendation for Duncan Ramsay. He turned some more pages. When was he going to come to names of men he knew? No, not yet. Alexander Bain. So there had been a Bain before Sandy. Why, no, that was Sandy—Alexander Bain, Sandy Bain, of course! "Very eager. Liked by buyers. Almost impudent, but amusing. Difficult to tell when he has had a drink or not. Seems lightly inebriated all the time, even when inconceivable he has had liquor." Thomas Huntley: "Very likeable young fellow. Favourite with buyers. Attends business eagerly, but young devil for pranks." Andrew Frank Middleton. ("No idea Andy had a middle name," Robert murmured to himself.) "Told me to-day," he read, "when talking of old Glasgow, that his father recalls when there were malt-barns where Argyle Street is now, and that where Virginia Street and Glassford Street are now he remembers seeing cows driven in to be milked in a farm there!!!"

Even when his father (who evidently paused to chat with members of the staff also) wrote that, three marks of exclamation had been necessary. It was at the foot of Glassford Street, by the way, that we saw Peter Pringle and his Jean Morrison collecting tramcar tickets. And it was up some stairs near the corner of Virginia Street that young Tommy Bruce found the billiard players, Johnny Leng, Jack Corbett, Bob Simson and Dick Robertson. But of these ongoings Robert Simson knew nothing, dallying through the *Employees Book*.

His eyebrows rose over a piece of news to him.

Evidently Andy Middleton had, by the remarks, been married twice. The marriage Robert remembered must have been to his second wife; and the lad of the *veolon* of that union. But this, he told himself again, was not writing the letter of recommendation. He must stop this, though it was beginning to be very interesting to a lazy convalescent.

Here he was, here he was: Duncan Donald Ramsay. Robert applied himself once more to the letter, and when it was written he dried it very carefully, put it in an envelope which he left open, put that into a larger one and wrote the packer's name upon it.

"Boy!" he called.

"Yes, sir?"

"You might take this down to Mr. Ramsay."

"Yes, sir."

By the appearance of Ramsay, as he had last seen the packer when he stood there holding the door open, he had not been exactly greatly taken. But we are all woven differently, thought he. We are of various textures in one nation, one city, one warehouse. Gilmore's tap on the door put a close to that reverie.

"Come in."

The cashier entered. Walking round to where he could face Mr. Robert, he began to speak according to a formula that always amused the junior partner—and amused John, too, by the way. It indicated that here was to be a talk on business.

"As regards the matter of the retiring of the head packer," said Gilmore, and paused.

"Yes?"

The cashier put a sheet of paper on the desk.

"I have been making a financial calculation, Mr. Robert," he said. "By reason of changing the system of calendering so that all pieces go over to the calendering-house in Virginia Street, there is much less work for the porters to do. Goods for delivery in the city are sent direct by the calendering-house. One of the warehousemen merely goes over to visé them before dispatch. There is a slight additional expense in this method, and I have tried to indicate it as nearly as it can be calculated on that memo before you. By reason of the inequality of the sales from month to month, it can be only approximate or average. I make it about equal, for a month, to the wages paid monthly to the packer. As I say, the porters have less to do. I suggest there is no necessity to get another man down in the basement."

Robert realised, as often he had realised before, that here was indeed an excellent accountant as well as excellent confidential servant.

"This is very good of you, Mr. Gilmore, to consider the matter. I expect you are right."

"I think you will find it so, sir."

He did find it so, and, having discussed the subject with John, after they had lunched together to celebrate his return to the warehouse, Robert went down to the basement. It was his experience that when porters were ordered to the private room they usually arrived in a condition of anxiety or of distress, as though holding the view that such a summons was of necessity a call to judgment.

He strolled down the stairs and beheld an extraordinary sight. The head packer, Ramsay, was not there, but Peter Pringle stood with his head slightly lowered, and round him was a small circle of the staff—Willie Scott, the other porter, Norman Nairn of the Dress Goods, who used to be with Andy in the Winceys, Johnny Leng of Fancy Goods, and Dan Huntley of the Shirtings. Robert could not imagine what they were about. Just as he walked away from the foot of the stairs they came erect.

"Encore!" they cried out. "Encore!"

Oh, some prank of the place! It was perfectly clear—an easy piece of lip-reading—that Willie Scott said, "Here's Rab!" Leng came hurrying past him. Nairn dashed into the wash-room. Danny Huntley crossed to Ramsay's desk and, licking a thumb, began to turn the pages of an oblong book in which triplicate records of shipments were made, one for the consignees, one to remain there, one for the carters who took the bales away. Peter Pringle stood pat and Willie Scott took up a canister of twine and set it down again.

"I want to speak to you, Pringle," said Mr. Robert.

"Yes, sir."

Doing his best to imitate the manner of a good sergeant addressed by his superior officer, Peter straightened his cravat and stood to attention. Dan Huntley and Willie Scott marched away upstairs.

"I suppose," said Robert, "that Mr. Ramsay has mentioned to you that he is leaving at the end of the month?"

"No, sir, he has never mentioned it to me."

"He hasn't. Well, he is leaving, and we have been considering that, with a big decrease in the work down here due to the calendering people coming in themselves to carry away goods, it is hardly necessary to have three of you. I expect you find it, yourself, quite slack at times."

"Yes, sir," said the whispering singer, a little shamefacedly.

"So we have decided, Pringle, to offer you the post of packer at the wages Mr. Ramsay had. Would you care to take it?"

Jean Morrison in the two-room-and-kitchen flat, *in a dacent locality!* He wished she were there to hear. He swallowed, and:

"Thank you, sir, thank you, indeed," he said. Then, feeling he was hardly being manly about this: "I'm sure, sir," he added, "that you will have every reason to feel satisfied with your decision."

"I'm sure I will, Pringle," replied Robert. "Where is Scott?"

"He was here a minute ago, sir."

There was a sound of footsteps—Nairn emerging from the wash-room. Very businesslike, he walked past them and ran upstairs. Then a pair of heavy boots showed at the top. Somebody was coming down slowly—Willie Scott, balancing upon his shoulder a load of pieces. He set them down on the long, low table beside the packing-press.

"Oh, Scott!" said Robert.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know that Mr. Ramsay was leaving us?"

"No, sir, I did not." And Willie stared fixedly in Robert's eyes to give assurance that he was speaking the truth, really did not know.

"Well, he is. I have just been arranging with Pringle here to take his place." A shadow seemed to pass under the skin of Scott's face. "You will take your orders from him, and as there will only be the two of you working down here there will be an increase in your wages also." The shadow passed. "I'll have Mr. Gilmore calculate just what it will be, and he'll advise you later."

"Thank you, sir."

There was something about Willie Scott's manner that made Robert, moving away, add: "You'll take your orders from Pringle, of course."

"Yes, sir, I quite understand that."

Robert was of the opinion, considering the physiognomy of these two, that orders from Pringle to Scott would be given in a manner less likely to cause revolt than orders from Scott to Pringle. At any rate, Pringle had been there longer.

He went upstairs and back into his own room again. As he entered he noticed that he had left the Employee's Book lying upon the table. Neither he nor his brother John had ever inserted any remark in it. The fancy took him to begin to do so. He turned to the last pages, and opposite the name of Peter Pringle he wrote: "Appointed head packer," and the date.

Then his eye travelled up the page. Walter Yule. In the remarks column he wrote, "Discharged," and the date. Alisdair Lennox: "Went to Arizona for his health." He could not remember the date. Walter Fenwick. He paused for a moment and then, leaving the space blank, set down the pen.

"Poor Fenwick," he said.

He closed the book and thrust it into the drawer.

CHAPTER XXII

PRESENTATIONS

On the morning following that day on which he left an I.O.U. with Mr. Gilmore for half a month's wages in advance, Duncan Ramsay did not come into the warehouse. Pringle and Scott, called up from below by Tom Huntley, carried down loads of shirtings. Successfully, out of their experience, they baled the pieces, trundled the bales on the noisy truck over the cement floor to the hoist, and had them all up in the receiving and despatching-room before the clash of hooves in the court told of the arrival of the lorries to carry them away.

After lunch there was still no Ramsay, nor word of Ramsay, and Peter Pringle—considering the fact that he was soon to be head packer—was swithering over the question whether it was or was not his duty to go up to the office and let Mr. Gilmore know of Duncan's non-arrival when the cashier came down to wash before going out.

"Mr. Ramsay not in?" he inquired.

"No, sir, he hasn't been in the day, and there is no message from him."

Gilmore stood still for a moment, meditating.

"Perhaps he's got the flu," he said, which was by no means a voicing of the thought in his mind.

Ramsay did not arrive next day. He did not arrive the day after, and no messenger came to explain his absence, but Pringle and Scott proved he was not indispensable. The work of the basement went on without hitch. On the afternoon of the fourth day, after John had left for home and when the office-boy had gone to the post office to buy stamps, and Maitland was out on business, Robert—as frequently when the cashier was alone—stepped into the counting-house. They chatted of this and that, civic affairs they had read of in that day's papers, and affairs in the farther world.

"By the way," said Gilmore, during a lull in that desultory chatter, "Ramsay has not been in for four days."

"Oh, indeed. No message from him?"

"No."

"He's probably ill."

"There were no signs of approaching illness on him," remarked Gilmore, "when he came on the fifteenth and got me to give him half his month's money."

"Oh! I see. You think——?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised. They have no children, and it's been a cat-and-a-dog life, Andy was telling me. He knows about them. I understand she's gone to live with one of her married sisters. I should not be surprised if Ramsay has slung his hook."

Duncan Ramsay, they had to decide eventually, had *slung his hook*.

John Simson did not seem to be interested when, two or three days later after Willie Scott had gone on a certain errand at Gilmore's request, he was told of the packer's absence.

"Well," said he, "what could you expect of the man?" and added: "We owe him some money, then; and he owes us some time on his month's notice. Perhaps he's ill."

"No. Scott went to his house, Mr. Gilmore tells me, to see if he was laid up. The place was empty. A neighbour said there had been a roup, and had no idea where he had gone. He's not ill. He's flown. He got an advance from Gilmore on the fifteenth."

"What? For the whole month? Just what you would expect!"

"No, no, just for the half-month, just to the fifteenth, and he gave Gilmore an I.O.U. for it, so that's square."

"Oh, well, he was honest, then. Anyhow, he's gone. But he didn't get that letter of recommendation he asked for. I wonder if he'll have the nerve to write for that later if he needs it."

Robert smiled.

"What?" demanded John.

"I wrote one for him, as a matter of fact, on the day he got the half-month's wages."

"He asked for it again, then?"

"He mentioned it to Gilmore."

The brothers laughed cheerfully together over that and dismissed discussion of packer Ramsay with that laughter.

The warehouse had happier matters to consider. There was the presentation to Willie MacEwan. It took place in the late afternoon when no more buyers were to be expected from the retail houses.

By ancient usage in Simson's, Cochrane Street, there were certain gifts for various occasions. For those who were going to be married there were clocks, one might say Clock A and Clock B. Clock A was a heavy one, the face bound in bronze, to one side of it Julius Cæsar, or some celebrated figure of history, sitting in a chair (generally some old Roman for the sake of the folds of the toga), one arm resting over the top of the dial. Clock B was gilt, with cherubs or cupids like those of Fragonard ramping round it. Those who, though leaving the firm were not going abroad, generally received a suit-case and an umbrella; those going abroad had, as a rule, a choice between a pair of hair-brushes in a leather case accompanied by a pair of razors in another leather case, or a revolver in a holster.

Willie MacEwan was to have the gilt clock. All day it had reposed at the end of the table in Mr. Maxwell's office. All day, as pauses in work permitted, the various subscribers to its purchase had dropped in there to admire it. At five o'clock John Simson, who had to go home then, as he had a dinner appointment and had to get dressed, tramped down to his wash-room, and on the way back, he having been a subscriber, stopped at the Fancy Goods counter.

"May I have a look at the clock?" he inquired of Maxwell with a benevolent smile.

"Certainly. Come in here, sir."

Maxwell lifted a fag-end of Fancy Goods off a hump on his table, and John, with hands in pockets, leant back and admired Clock B.

"Fat little fellows these, dancing round it," he remarked.

"Yes, they are a bit on the plump side," Maxwell agreed. "Well fed."

To see John at that moment you would have had no difficulty in believing the office-boy's story—had he ever dared to tell it to you—of waistcoat-buttons and trouser-buttons at the Exchange.

"Yes, it's a nice cheerful clock," he decided. "Well, I must push off."

He seemed to be going directly back to his room, but suddenly paused and deflected into the Shirts department. Tom Huntley was sitting in his office at the counter's end, tidying his desk. Danny was not there. MacEwan was putting initialled forms relating to the last completed orders of the day into a clip.

"Oh, MacEwan——"

"Yes, sir?"

"I'm sorry I've got to push off before—er—I just wanted to wish you good luck, MacEwan."

"Thank you very much indeed, sir." MacEwan grasped the extended hand, and they pump-handled warmly in the manner of the warehouses. "And thank you for the envelope Mr. Gilmore gave me from you."

The envelope contained the usual cheque (the honeymoon cheque, as it was called) from the heads of the house of Simson.

"Oh, that's all right. Don't mention that. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, Huntley."

"Good-night, sir."

Danny was skulking between the stacks of soft-goods in the main warehouse, waiting for the signal. Up in the flannelette gallery there came a call from Sandy.

"How about it, Mr. Maxwell?"

Maxwell looked up and nodded.

"I think so," he said.

"All set?" came Henry Braid's melodious voice.

"Yes," replied Maxwell. "Send round the fiery cross. Get a hold of Danny."

They did not have to get a hold of Danny. He suddenly appeared.

"Is it all right, Mr. Maxwell?"

"Yes, get them all along, get them up."

So they were gathered. Arthur Laurie and Norman Nairn came down with Braid, their boss, from the Dress Goods, Sandy Bain, Wem Mackay, and Ian Simson from the Flannelettes.

"Come along, Andy," called Maxwell.

"Oh, you're ready. I was just finishing my work up here," Andy shouted, and Maxwell smiled.

Dan Huntley had swaggered away downstairs and returned with Pringle, Willie Scott and Dick Robertson—whom he had found below.

"You ask Laidlaw to come, will you, Dicky?" said Danny to him.

"Oh, all right. But I thought this was your job," Dick replied.

"Well, he's your head, isn't he, in the Productions?"

Dick put a hand on his chest and bowed low.

"My colleague," he corrected; "but I'll bring the swine out."

He hurried to the end of the warehouse, opened the door, made some remark into the interior, and then returned to the place of the gathering.

"All ready now?" asked Dan.

"Yes, all ready," said Mr. Maxwell.

Dan turned to go, then wheeled and glared at the counter.

"Where's the bloody clock?" he demanded.

"Oh, the clock!" exclaimed Mr. Maxwell. "Bring the clock. We've got to have the clock." And he bustled into his office to get it himself, accompanied by his two assistants.

As he carried it out, Johnny Leng unnecessarily begged him not to let it fall. It was set in place, covered by the shred of fancy goods, like a small statue for unveiling.

Off then went Dan, back to his department, and in a few minutes appeared again with Tom Huntley. Each held an arm of the victim—victim seemed the word because of the sounds that greeted his coming, low cat-calls and moans as of deep sympathy for one in sad straits.

"Goad, I've forgotten the men that keep the books," said Dan, and, leaving his colleague of the Shirtings to be led forward by the department boss, he dashed into the office.

"Come on," he commanded. "Come on. We're going to execute him now."

Out they all came—cashier, clerk and office-boy—to join the throng. And there all stood—some of them ridiculously nervous, it would appear, even Andy Middleton, one of the oldest there. He had the manner of trying hopelessly to hide his gaunt six-feet two inches behind the five-feet ten of Wem and the five-feet seven of Sandy Bain. One thing he could not do, he was wont to say, was make a speech.

Sandy was all too eager to make his. He had been rehearsing it all afternoon. Alexander Maxwell, who looked at such moments especially like a stage ambassador (and in the drifting of the years had been variously titled Lord Saltcoats, Lord Ardrossan, Lord Millport ...) put those who were nervous at ease. Seeing the porters hanging back, he strolled slowly along the counter's front and, putting an arm behind each, urged them before him, saying, "Come along, boys," very paternal.

"Aye, aye, come in to the body of the kirk!" called Sandy. "Everybody into the body of the kirk!"

"Well, Tom," said Maxwell, turning to MacEwan's department head, "who giveth away this man? I think it's up to you."

"Go ahead, Alec, go ahead," Tom Huntley responded. "I told you this afternoon you were to do it."

"You're his department boss," Maxwell pointed out; "but we'll not quarrel about it, if that's how you still feel."

He looked round the throng for a little applause.

"Speech!" called Andy Middleton, and having spoken, stepped farther back and drooped.

"Well, boys," began Maxwell, "we are——"

There was a clumping sound from the rear of the warehouse, Laidlaw arriving late.

"——we are assembled here, Willie MacEwan—it is to you I'm speaking—to wish you much happiness in your married life, and want you to accept from us all, and the bosses"—suddenly remembering that Ian Simson was present, he bethought him that a more respectful and dignified way of referring to them might be better—"Mr. Simson and Mr. Robert, a small gift as a token of our esteem for you. And that is all the speech I am going to make."

He looked round the gathering and observed those who flinched, those who were perturbed, and one who seemed eager.

"I will now call upon Sandy Bain," he ended.

Sandy took a step forward.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "this is the richt way to begin a speech, even when there's nae ladies present. I ken what is under that rag o' fancy goods on the counter there. It was none of my choosing, but nane of them would listen to my suggestion. What I suggested was a hot-water bottle; for, ye ken, there is naething mair disagreeable than having cauld feet"—he paused to allow a little laughter to subside, and then got his point—"thrust up against ye in the night."

This remark was received with great appreciation, genuine or feigned according to the ideas of wit in the minds of the hearers.

"Nane of them would listen to me," said Sandy, shaking his head dolorously. "They wanted to gie ye a clock. Well, I was willing to meet them. I was willing to meet them with an alarm clock, for to get ye up in the morning. No, they said, they would not care for that. Well, I could see the reason. I hadna been married very long masel' when there was no alarm clock needed for to waken me, and I'm no' speaking about the morning, either. All nicht long——" He suddenly screwed his face up and, making a fair imitation of a baby, began to babble and whimper.

(Laughter in the warehouse.)

"We all wish ye great happiness, Willie, everybody here, myself included." And Sandy Bain bowed and stepped back.

"Speech!" said Andy again.

Maxwell looked in his direction, elevating his brows, but Andy shook his head.

"Come on, then, Braid," Sandy insisted.

"No, no," protested Henry Braid.

"He's just watching this," explained Sandy, "to see how it all goes. We're going to give him a hot-water bottle before long." And he nodded at the young head of the Dress Goods knowingly. "Man, he's blushing!" he added.

"Well, MacEwan," said Maxwell, "I've very great pleasure in presenting you, on behalf of all the staff here at Simson's"—he whipped the cloth off—"this clock."

There was a little cheer. Tom Huntley thrust his assistant forward.

"Now, then, Willie, dinna be blate," he said.

"To tell you the truth, I feel kind of blate," replied Willie.

"Not being accustomed to public speaking," put in Sandy.

"Aye, partly that," admitted Willie, "and partly, to tell ye the truth, because I dinna ken what to say."

"He—never—expected—it!" declared Tom Huntley, slapping him on the shoulder. "It is a complete surprise. Pick it up, Willie, and get away hame with it to show to her."

That seeming to be the end, they gave three cheers, muted cheers by reason of the presentation taking place before closing time. The noise brought Mr. Robert out, smiling, from the office.

"I heard the sounds of revelry," he said, "and just came out to wish you good luck and all the best in your married life, MacEwan." He held out a hand.

MacEwan had the clock by then in the crook of his left arm, his right round it for further security.

"Dinna drop it!" Sandy cried out.

"I don't know what dropping a clock and breaking it might imply according to the superstitious," said Robert, "but I'm sure, MacEwan, you'll have no ill-luck." And, having completed the handshake, he backed slowly away and the others moved off also.

Tom Huntley to one side of him, Danny to the other, Willie MacEwan carried his "nice cheerful clock" to the Shirtings department.

"There's a box to put it in," said Danny. "It's in Maxwell's office. I'll get it." And he dashed away.

Tom Huntley dropped a hand on MacEwan's shoulder.

"Aye, aye, Willie," he said. "That's over—and many happy days to you, a long and happy life thegither."

"Here's the box," came Danny's voice as he bustled in with it.

The ceremony of presentation to Jack Corbett began in much the same manner, but ended otherwise. Mr. Maxwell had a pleasure to perform—thus went his speech—but with regret, which, he said, sounded like contradiction. Here under this glass roof many had come and gone in his time. There, *beyond the foam*, he hoped the glass roof would be remembered, and all the boys who (he stepped to the counter to lift a concealing cloth), as a token of friendship and esteem, "present you, my dear Jack, with this——"

Corbett, asked to decide between hair-brushes and razors or revolver in a holster—or was there anything else he would

fancy?—had chosen the revolver.

"It's for you to shoot yourself with," said Sandy Bain, "oot yonder when you're hamesick and havena the price to get back to guid auld Glasca and Simson's in Cochrane Street."

Jack Corbett, especially considering the repression at home that had kept him in the adolescent and uncertain stage too long—the ceaseless adverse criticisms that caused him to think all he did was wrong—made a good speech in reply.

Now it so happened that some of the juniors had dared the office-boy many times to give an envelope, gum-smear on the back, to the glum George Laidlaw. He had yearned to do it, but never took the dare. Here, with this crowd of witnesses, Tommy Bruce thought it would be safe to do so. Laidlaw could not throttle him before so many. He had been watching the ceremony from between wincey stacks, and suddenly appeared, very businesslike, from the direction of the office.

"A letter for you, Mr. Laidlaw," said he politely.

Laidlaw took it, and as he felt the gouts of gum cling to his fingers he lost his temper. He cuffed young Bruce on this jaw and on the other. He grabbed him by an arm and whirled him end up and fell to spanking him, all so swift that no one for a moment or two interfered.

Then Dick Robertson stepped easily forward and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Come off," he said, in a voice almost gentle.

Laidlaw wheeled and smote at Robertson who, stepping lightly on his toes to one side, let the blow go by and drove a fist under the other's chin that lifted him, sent him spread-eagle fashion, slithering on his back, along the floor. The column against which he stopped was, fortunately for his cranium, not of iron. At that moment the office door opened, and as George gathered himself up Andy Middleton warned, "Here's Mr. Robert."

Robert Simson looked momentarily surprised at sight of Laidlaw's face, more glum than ever, and on tapping the feeling of tension there.

"Presentation over?" he asked.

"We were just arriving," replied Mr. Maxwell, "at the cheer." He should have been a diplomat.

"Let it go, then," advised Robert and looking at his nephew decided to ask him later what exactly had been happening before he arrived.

They let it go—a hearty cheer.

"Well, Corbett, good luck to you," said Robert. "I hope you'll remember us and I hope we'll hear from you from time to time. You must have lots of friends here to write to."

"Thank you, sir. I was going to look in to the office to say good-bye to you. I said good-bye this afternoon to Mr. Simson."

Yes, no doubt he would remember them all, and the warehouse—remember how then there came overhead a sudden assault of hail. He would remember them all looking up at the roof, listening a moment, and Sandy's voice exclaiming, "By golly, it's hail!" and how they all cleared away then, as though the hail had come through down there, and they fled for shelter.

CHAPTER XXIII

MOVING THE PAWNS

On Corbett's departure, Tommy Bruce came out of the counting-house to pass into the Flannelettes under Sandy Bain, with Wem Mackay for colleague. Ian Simson passed out of the Flannelettes to take Corbett's place in the Fancy Goods, under Mr. Maxwell with Johnny Leng for colleague, and Mr. Robert asked the cashier to put an advertisement in the papers for a new office-boy.

A few minutes after he had made that request, Gilmore knocked, entered, and closed the door, all very definitely.

"As regards this matter of advertising for a new office-boy," he began, standing between the bosses, "I have taken the liberty to have a talk with Maitland——"

John sat back in his chair and thrust out his beard at his cashier, as at a meddler, but not without a twinkle in his eyes as though amused at the meddler.

"Since we had the phone installed," went on Gilmore, "there is no getting away from it that the office-boy has had really very little to do. Messages out and about through town to deliver letters and wait for answers are practically of the past. I was drawing Maitland's attention to this and he says that most office-boys are more trouble than anything else, anyhow."

"Well, there are always letters to stamp and post," John pointed out, "stamps to lick."

"He doesn't lick them now," replied Gilmore, a glint of fun in his eyes, "since we've got that little thingumyjig, that little roller that spins round in the little water-trough."

"I always use that too violently," remarked Mr. Robert, "and take the confounded gum off."

"How about the wet sponge idea?" said John, warming to the contest in persiflage.

Mr. Gilmore laughed.

"I am just making a serious suggestion," he said. "Maitland wouldn't think it infra dig to post letters at noon, and in the evening on his way to his train."

"Well, you need not put the advertisement in the papers, then, till we see how your suggestion works. Maitland must be due an increase in salary now, anyhow."

"He is," Gilmore agreed.

It worked exceedingly well as the days slipped by, the weeks, the months—a year.

Thompson of Australia, Heriot from New Zealand, Sinclair from Montreal (these three who brought the Empire together on the day of the procession) returned in their orbit. Vannan also, of South Africa, arrived—with friendly messages from Jack Corbett. The London agent, the Manchester agent, and the mill foreman—who, when conferring with some members of the staff, required an interpreter to understand and to be understood—came and went.

Summer came and all the staff had their ten days in country or by shore-side, and Willie MacEwan his week. During his holidays that year, a dour member of staff, George Laidlaw, was married, but all that his colleagues in Cochrane Street knew of it was the announcement in a daily paper. Later, another was to be married with no word to his fellows but, by general belief, when news of his wedding leaked out (there was no announcement of it even in the press), differently moved to reticence. When the notice of Laidlaw's marriage was seen, most considered that it was none of their business in his mind. So they dismissed, from theirs, the affront of his silence and thus nullified it. By his secrecy, he had received no wedding-gift, and on his return from holiday, no congratulations. They speculated briefly on what manner of girl would have him for husband—what charm had been revealed to her that was hid from them—and there was an end of it so far as they were concerned.

Something pathologic, perhaps, rather than psychologic was at the back of Laidlaw's taciturnity—some inherited, some

congenital kink. All his brothers and sisters were as glum, as dour. Of them the warehouse knew nothing but here may briefly be told what manner of home his was. The father and mother, whatever their courtship had been like—and probably it had been a bickering one—were one day friends, and another day enemies, pallid with bitterness, not on speaking terms. In that ménage there was no humour. Their four young—conceived, one might be excused for thinking, in hate—were seldom, if ever, all simultaneously on speaking terms. Guests of one or another had been known, and frequently, to cut short their stay in the Laidlaw house because of misery and indigestion. At table, if one wished to ask another a question, the chances were that it had to be asked through a third who was on speaking terms with both. "Minnie, would you ask Gwen—so-and-so;" and Minnie would say, "Gwen, Martha wants to know—so-and-so." The young folks learnt that nonsense from the parents. "George, would you ask your mother if she would care for another helping." "Mother, father wants to know if you would care for another helping." "Tell your father 'No, thank you'." "Mother says, 'No, thank you'." There are various sorts of folks in the world—and in Simson's.

With the shortening days, holidays all over, there was a discussion on the advisability of installing electric light in the warehouse, and the question was left for later consideration. Up in the Wincey gallery, when Mr. Robert talked it over with Andy, that man of old stories and contemporary gossip recalled how in '84, he thought, the post office had been lit by electricity, and how, along the pavement there, for several nights, there had been promenading citizens, young and old, observing the brilliance. Yes, Mr. Robert remembered that.

"Between ourselves," said Andy, with a conscious whimsical seriousness, "I dinna like it. I prefer gaslight. I find it kindlier on the eyes."

Autumn came again with the wet winds running, keen draughts in the streets; and then it was that Dan Huntley of the Shirtings, swaggering not at all, but subdued—although with his mind entirely made up—stepped into the private room to give his resignation.

Was he going abroad?

"No, sir. You'll maybe be astonished, gentlemen, when you hear, but—dinna laugh—" (and he made such a comical grimace that they were both inclined to laugh on the instant) "I'm going on the stage."

"On—the—stage!" exclaimed John.

(Robert remembered how, one Saturday, when he was up chatting to Andy shortly before closing-time, they had noticed Dan come out of the Shirtings carrying a suit-case, and dressed in louder checks than they had ever seen him wearing. He had hurried out the back way precipitately. "Funny exodus, that," Robert had remarked, and Middleton had informed him, "Between ourselves, Mr. Robert, I believe he's away off to do a turn at one of the working men's clubs. It is extraordinary how things will leak out. He thinks naebody kens in the wareus, but I've heard news of it.")

"On the theatrical stage?" asked John Simson.

"Music-hall stage," replied Danny.

"Oh! And what's the special turn?"

"Dancin' of various kinds, sir—clog-dancing, specially, and accompanied by appropriate patter for the moment, ye ken, sir."

"Indeed!" said John, beaming. "Could you give us a step or two here?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid not. I need the music. But, I tell you what I'll do, sir, I'll send ye baith complimentary tickets when I get an engagement in one of the halls where you wouldna be ashamed to see me."

He half closed one eye, and gave his head a slow nod in a manner, somehow, highly whimsical.

"When I saw that nod and wink," said John to his brother later, "I thought it might not be such a crazy move, after all, as it struck me at first."

The result of Danny's departure was that Ian went from the Fancy Goods into the Shirtings to help Tom Huntley there, with Willie MacEwan for colleague. Tommy Bruce went from the Flannelettes into the Fancy Goods, under Mr. Maxwell, with Johnny Leng. Mr. Simson gave Gilmore instructions to put an advertisement in the papers, "Wanted,

warehouseman, junior, some experience preferable...."

Having done so, he went out for lunch. He had a good lunch. It was one of these days of autumn on which, after rain, a wind comes and dries the streets and there is a crispness in the air. As he was coming back to the warehouse along St. Vincent Place, passing the *Citizen* building, he was suddenly aware of the pitter-patter of footsteps beside him and, looking down found a smiling and petitioning glance raised to his.

"Mr. Simson," said Watty Yule.

Mr. Simson slowed down slightly and Watty fell in step beside him, or fell in step to the best of his ability, for it seemed he had to take two strides to John's one.

"Walter Yule," said Walter Yule, as though introducing himself. "Yule remember me, sir."

"Yes, yes, surely. How are you?"

"I'm—er—I'm out of employment, sir."

John frowned down at him.

"Do you mean to tell me that you've had no employment since you left our service?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir, but it was only temporary."

Remembering the reason for the discharge of Yule, almost did John Simson say, "Any employment you could get would be only temporary." On the impulse to say so, he decided he was not being human with the poor little fellow and stopped dead there at the corner of Queen Street.

"And what is it you want?" he inquired, wondering if it was financial assistance.

"I was wondering, sir," said Watty, "if there was any chance of getting back with you? I happened to meet Mr. Middleton to-day, and he mentioned that one of your staff had resigned."

There they stood, Watty looking up hopefully, John looking down sourly. This was a dirty trick of Fate to play him, thought he, to halt him on that crisp day and put the problem to him whether to take into his service again one incompetent and inefficient, or to tell him "No," and go on with the joyance knocked out of the day.

"You'd better come along in the matter of an hour," said he. "I'll have discussed it then with my brother."

His brother, however, seemed to be having a long and leisurely lunch.

"Yule is here to see you, sir," Maitland announced, half-an-hour later.

"He's more than punctual," growled John.

He rose, and paying no attention to Watty Yule whatever, branged out into the warehouse. By his tread the staff knew there was something wrong. He strode up past Middleton into the Flannelettes.

"Sandy!"

"Sir to you, sir!" replied Sandy Bain perkily. Because of what he considered his sterling independence, Sandy had always to talk in that fashion when he thought an attack was going to be made upon him.

John drew near to him.

"You know that fellow Walter Yule who used to be with you—the young fellow I discharged for a piece of gross incompetence. Is he any good at all?"

"Oh, he's willing. If he's written to ye for a letter of recommendation, ye can say he's willing and eager."

"No, no, no, not that! I mean, is he any good?"

"Well, I'm telling ye—he's willing, but he's a dithering kind of a lad whiles. He's nae shirker, that's one thing, nae

shirker."

"Oh! Well, I think we'll take him back on trial—on trial again. Could you do with him in your department, Sandy?"

"I certainly could do with somebody," said Sandy, whether brusquely or indignantly, John Simson was uncertain. "You gave me your son and then took him away, and then you took young Bruce from me next. Wem Mackay is a willing lad, but he's all I have now. I can put up with Watty on one condition."

"And what is that?" asked John.

"On this condition," replied Sandy very seriously, "on this condition: that he doesna, when I come in each day, aye say to me, 'Good-morning, Mr. Bain, have ye used Pears' Soap?' It's beyond human endurance."

John began to laugh. He continued to laugh, remembering the way in which he was accosted along in St. Vincent Place—"Yule remember me." All the warehousemen knew that whatever had been wrong, if anything, had been put right. They probably heard that laugh even in the secluded Shirtings department.

"I'll leave it to you," said he, "to tell him that. He's here. I'll send him out to you."

And so it was that, a few moments after John had returned to the office, the warehousemen observed coming from the counting-house a small figure that they thought had gone from their ken for ever, with a remembered ingenuous smile upon its face.

All round the place rose a delighted crowing of, "Oh, look who's here!" It was such a jocund greeting that the last of his anxiety slipped away from Watty Yule. He waved a hand to them.

"Yule remember me," he said.

He mounted to the Flannelette department by the central flight of stairs. At the top stood Sandy, levelling a finger at him.

"And if I hear ye say that again," said he, "you're dischairged. I'll dischairge ye myself. 'Yule remember me.' It's beyond human endurance. Well, we'll go and get to work. You're back again, like the bad sixpence."

Sandy Bain was not merely being pawky. Genial, merry Sandy Bain was not as merry at heart as he had been. His "weans" were growing up. Even the youngest was hardly a wean any longer, and she was an anxiety to her parents. She was flighty. She was prone to various little tricks of dress that worried her parents. "Where she gets the notions from, beats me," Mrs. Bain said to her husband, reporting some of them. Going out to hear the band in the park on Sundays, so her mother had discovered, the lass had taken to folding up two handkerchiefs and pinning them over her breasts to add to the effect of bust, busts in fashion then—"and the scent she uses, Sandy. She's like a perambulating scent-factory when she goes out." Bain was worried about the girl.

The autumn of that year fled away with a ruffle of sere leaves in the city parks, a whistling of wind in chimney-pots, rain and dun clouds that at night sometimes seemed to smoulder and break into flame, reflecting the wavering flames from the blast-furnaces.

New Year time came, and in the basement Willie Scott was one day visited by various members of the staff, each telling the other to go down and have a look at him. There was no doubt that Mr. Robert had chosen well when he made Pringle the boss there. Pringle was a good boss. Pieces to be packed he was carrying down all alone that day, and when any one asked him where his helper was, he merely told them Willie wasna feeling very weel.

On the contrary, Willie was feeling extremely well. He was feeling so well that Peter was disturbed lest he might think the advice to him to stay down there was ridiculous. When Willie was drunk he imagined himself endowed with the gifts of a profound character-reader.

There was a time during that day when only heads of departments were visible above-stairs, all the younger members below to listen. He was as one inspired and, when his findings were defamatory, very plain-spoken. There he stood with his back to the fireplace, full centre, swaying slightly, elated by consciousness of his gift.

"Leng," said he, "when I look at you I realise that you are one of these let-her-go-Gallagher kind. You've nae sense of responsibility in life. I wouldna put it past you to take advantage o' a lassie. Lookin' in your eyes I would say you have

the makings of a bad old man in ye."

Those standing by expressed thorough concurrence with that view and, thus cheered, Willie Scott gave a character-reading of Arthur Laurie.

"I would say you can sing," he said.

"That's nothing," replied Laurie. "You know I can sing."

"Well, I can see it on you all the same. But you are," he peered shrewdly at him, "a flirt—a male flirt."

Laurie blushed so red that there was additional hilarity. So it went during that day while the inspired one forgot that he was in Simson's, Cochrane Street, and seemed to imagine that he was in a booth at a fair.

While that entertainment was proceeding below-stairs, Mr. Robert had an opportunity to see the lad of the "vee-o-lon," of whom the last that he had heard from Andy was that he had resigned from his clerking job and was playing in a theatre-orchestra in the evenings and during the afternoons giving music lessons. Andy Middleton had been away from the warehouse for two days and his son called to explain the absence. He was ill—of pneumonia; the doctor was calling twice daily.

Before January was at an end, Alexander Maxwell was moving dismally from department to department collecting money for the wreath that was to be sent to Andy's funeral.

CHAPTER XXIV

A CITY MAN

For Maxwell, Huntley and Sandy Bain, for John and Robert Simson, a bit of the past went with the passing of Andy Middleton.

Maxwell walked towards home, westward, on the evening of the day on which the news came, in deep meditation. He saw the men and lads homing from the warehouses of Cochrane Street and Ingram Street, Glassford Street and the rest, those who entrained at Queen Street station cutting diagonally across George Square, those whose station was St. Enoch a spate of bowler hats down Queen Street, those for the Caledonian Station moving in the same direction as he, though it was not there that he was going. He was not a suburbanite. He lived in Garnethill, but at the corner of Union Street and Gordon Street he boarded his tramcar nightly.

As he walked he had a feeling, despite all these throngs as usual, of emptiness in the city—all because of the removal of one man. He must not, he told himself, be mawkish about Andy's going. Crossing Queen Street and coasting the exchange on its northern side he saw, as usual, a group of clerks and warehousemen looking at the illustrated weeklies in the window of a newsagent whose custom it was to hang these open at the central double-page picture. Circumventing the big Exchange building, over which a multitude of wires hummed to an upper draught of air, he turned into a short passage, for pedestrians only, of broad paving-stones, that led to Buchanan Street. Another little crowd clustered there before another newsagent's to ponder the displayed weeklies. There, also, was the Bodega into which once or twice he had dropped on a Saturday afternoon for a "nip" with Andy.

He had the feeling of belonging to this city and of this city belonging to him, not in any large single way, perhaps, but by a reason of a multitude of small things—such as the continuance of these two newsagents who had been there when, at fifteen, he entered Simson's. At the corner of Buchanan Street and that passage there was a jeweller and optician of whom Mr. Sinclair of Montreal might have said that he brought Glaswegians together. Almost all who passed that way had sometimes stopped—and many of them made a point of stopping always once a day—to check their watches with Greenwich time by his clock. John Simson would halt there and take out his heirloom watch, the one he affectionately called "my dad's old turnip," and move on, proud of its exactitude. Office-boys, with their first watches, would halt there also, flourish them, and pass on, proven young businessmen of the city.

"Exact to a second!"

Maxwell crossed Buchanan Street into Gordon Street, looking keenly and by second-nature at a bolt of fancy goods in a retailer's window there, its end shaken out in a studied negligence of folds. Little intimate things that some might think of no moment seemed highly important to him that evening. He glanced down Mitchell Street at the sign over a warehouse; the name there was on the Simson books. He had known it since he left school and bought his first pair of blunt-ended scissors in a sheath and learnt that sheaths were for amateurs and that the scissors should sit upright in the top left waistcoat pocket, protruding.

Crossing Union Street not for anything would he have decided the rowdy dispute of three gamins as to which of them was to sell a paper to him. For years, before getting on his tram at that corner, he had taken the few steps farther west to buy his evening paper from a decent-looking, impoverished-looking, yet always pleasant-smiling woman who stood before the station entrance. For years, seeing him coming, she had drawn his *Evening News* from under her arm, and given him a welcome.

Andy Middleton had been part of all this life, as Maxwell knew. Andy, to be sure, usually went home in a different direction, to transpontine Gorbals, down Miller and Dunlop Streets, past the Holmes' bookshop, and under the railway viaduct beneath which, when a train rumbled above and lorries rattled on the cobbles, the compressed din was terrific. But every Saturday, as he had once told Maxwell over a "nip" in the Bodega, he came as far west as Buchanan Street, and then passed down to St. Enoch Square to get *The People's Friend* for Mrs. Middleton, *The Weekly Citizen* for himself and a musical journal for the lad.

The conductor of the tram knew Mr. Maxwell. He did not smile a welcome like the woman with the newspapers, too busy to look at the faces of those queuing on to the car, only watching to see that the feet of the last were safely in place

to give his bell the two rings and get away. But when, taking the fare, he heard "Charing Cross" in a familiar voice, he glanced from hand to face a moment with a flicker of recognition in his eyes.

On the day after the funeral, Gilmore came out and beckoned so vaguely from mid-warehouse that neither Maxwell nor Sandy Bain knew who was wanted.

"Am I wanted?" asked Maxwell.

"Is't me?" came Sandy's harsh voice from the Flannelette gallery.

"Both of you," replied Gilmore.

The letters had already been distributed. There must be something else to discuss. Together, Maxwell and Bain went to the private-room. John was tilted back in his chair with his right arm over its back, propped with his foot against the table. Robert was sitting, large and easy, at its other end. Mr. Maxwell stood between them and made his little bow.

"What is't?" asked Sandy, by his side.

"Gilmore has been making a suggestion to us," said John, "and we just wanted to have your joint opinion on it."

Sandy stepped back to the fireplace and leant an elbow on the mantelpiece.

"Aye?" said he, inquiringly.

Maxwell remained where he was. That room might have been in the Foreign Office and he about to discuss a foreign policy.

"Gilmore has been pointing out," John elucidated, "that the call for winceys has been dwindling and dwindling."

"You didna need Gilmore to point that out to you," said Sandy.

"Quite!" John agreed, quenching a momentary annoyance with a tolerant amusement. "That brings us to the point: Should we keep on with a wincey department?"

He glanced at Maxwell.

"I feel in this matter," said Maxwell, judicial of manner, "that if a new firm of soft-goods were starting up, the question could be easily settled whether or no to have a wincey department."

"The answer would be 'No'?" asked Robert.

"Precisely."

"But you think, then——" began John, looking still at Maxwell, and waited for him to continue.

"I think that with an old-established firm such as ours," Mr. Simson noted that *ours* with no disapproval, "it might be advisable to retain some winceys."

"Aye, that's so," said Sandy, "After all, there are folks who would be wanting to place an order, maybe, for fancy goods, or dress goods, maybe, or shirtings, or above all, for flannelettes, and they might want a piece or two of winceys. Well, they would go to the firm that still paid attention to winceys—for their flannelettes. Ye see what I mean?"

"Exactly, Sandy," replied John. "That's what we were thinking. But, you know, there is no getting away from it—and this not going against the reminder to speak well of the dead—that Andy was doing mighty little for a long while. He couldn't help that."

"Oh, we all ken that," said Sandy. "Pulling a stack down and building it up again, half the time."

Robert laughed gently.

"What's the matter," suggested Sandy, "with just making that gallery flannelettes with a pickle o' winceys on the side?"

"And what about some one to attend?" asked John.

"Anybody could attend," answered Sandy. "Most of the lads have been through the Winceys in their time, and, between ourselves, what does it amount to?"

"We expected you would say that, Sandy. What is your opinion, Maxwell?"

Alexander Maxwell, manager over all the managers, had the air of giving the decision.

"I quite agree," said he.

So it was that when Andy left Cochrane Street for ever, no addition was made to the Simson staff.

Later in the day, Robert leant up against the long counter of the Fancy Goods beside Maxwell, watching him ranging samples, and talking of Andy.

"In a way," said he, "I feel there is a certain fitness in Middleton's going. It hurt him—the decline in winceys. And I noticed of late, when I was chatting with him up there," and he wagged his head to the end of the Flannelette gallery where used to be the Wincey department, "that a lot of changes in Glasgow irked him. He did not like the departure of the horse-trams. He seemed to be living in the past, too. I remember him speaking of when the post-office was first lit with electricity. He didn't like it, he said. He preferred gaslight. He found it kindlier on his eyes."

Maxwell nodded and nodded again.

"Yes, I've heard him say gas is far easier on the eyes."

"I used to think, when I heard him talking like that," Robert went on, "how different he was from my nephews. Ian there," and he nodded in the direction of the entrance to the Shirtings, "used to amuse me—the way he kept watch on the streets to know where the new arc-lights were put up!"

"It's the same with my young people," said Maxwell.

Robert came erect. He clapped his side-pockets, moved away.

CHAPTER XXV

SUNLIGHT AND SHADOW

With rain and sleet, rain and sun, March gales that whirled umbrellas inside out and caused many a merry hat-pursuit along the streets; April showers and rushes of intervening sunglow down the walls and over the pavements; May zephyrs bringing nostalgia for hawthorn into Cathedral Street, Cochrane Street, Ingram Street, Virginia Street, the year slipped along. Once again the Simson staff disported in country and by seaside, each in his own manner.

Though the warehousemen were paid monthly, and the packer—or head-packer—also, the porters, by an ancient usage of the firm, were paid weekly. When, by the way, Peter Pringle was elevated to the post of Duncan Ramsay he had asked if he might still have his wages weekly, a request to which there was, of course, no objection. By another ancient usage of John the First, when porters went on holidays, unless they asked for a week's money in advance, it was held till their return. The intention in both cases was paternal and protective.

Willie Scott, that year, had been saving for his vacation. His sister was married, but he, still single, went "doon the watter" with his mother for the ten days. Gilmore asked him before he went if he would like to have his next week's pay in advance, but—"No," he said, "it will be something to come back to," which had been, precisely, the first Simson's view in establishing that custom.

Peter Pringle, who took his holidays later, made similar response. Of his return the cashier was made aware by the arrival in the office of the odd-job man—the "orra man"—who, while Willie Scott was away, had helped Peter, and in Peter's absence had been hired again to assist Scott. He had come for his money. As that casual member of staff clumped away Gilmore took from the safe the pay-envelope he had laid aside for Peter, and went downstairs with it.

Pringle was alone there, honing a bright edge on the knife used for slitting the packing-canvas into the lengths required.

"Well, Peter," said Mr. Gilmore, "did you have a good holiday?"

"We had a grand time," replied Peter. "We went to the Largs, and the wife—she's no' a greetin' kind, I can assure you—grat in the train coming home."

"Your wife!" exclaimed Gilmore.

"Aye," Peter acknowledged.

"When were you married?"

"Just before we went away."

"So it was a honeymoon!" said Gilmore. "And you never told us. You should have had a presentation."

"Oh, weel!" replied Peter in a tone of easy dismissal of the subject.

It was shyness in him that had prevented him telling them of his marriage. Had they heard of it they might have decided—they almost certainly would have decided—to subscribe for some wedding-gift, and he simply could not have faced a ceremony upstairs in mid-warehouse if he were centre of it.

"We'll have to get you up a presentation now," declared Gilmore.

"No, no, please no, Mr. Gilmore. It's past. It's bye now."

"Oh, well," said Gilmore, in his turn. "Did ye ken her long?" he asked, interested.

"Aye, since we were bairns."

"Well, well, quite a romance, eh?"

"I suppose you'd call it that," said Pringle, looking embarrassed. "I must give you my change of address." He found a scrap of paper and having written that change of address on it, handed it to the cashier, remarking, "We have a twa-room

and kitchen house of our ain there."

"You have? Well!"

Gilmore strode away, back to the counting-house, where Mr. Mackenzie, the yarn merchant, and Renfield the saltpetre merchant, had just arrived to take John off to lunch with them. When they had gone, Maitland, carrying a sheaf of letters and a package containing his lunch sandwiches, departed into the warehouse. He would go out by the back door—the shorter way—to the post office and then return to the basement to eat by the fire.

In the private room, Mr. Robert was making noises of preparation to go out, putting paper-weights in place, opening and closing drawers. Then came the whisk-whisk of hat-brushing. Out he came.

"I've just heard," said Mr. Gilmore, halting him, "that Peter Pringle is married."

"Married! While he was on holiday?"

"Before he went."

"He never told us. Was it hurried, then?" asked the bachelor.

"Oh, no. Anything but, I believe. Nothing like that. He told me they'd known each other since they were bairns."

"Why didn't he let us know?"

"Shy—shy, I think. Couldn't face a presentation."

"No harm in giving him a cheque from the firm now, even if it is a bit late," said Robert.

"I'm sure he'd appreciate it, sir."

"I must remember to do that. I'll be back after lunch."

"Very good, Mr. Robert."

On returning from lunch, Robert had to attend to some letters that had arrived by an afternoon delivery and, that done, he asked himself, "What was it I had to do? Something I was going to do. Oh, yes—that belated honeymoon cheque to Pringle."

He made it out and putting it in an envelope, went into the warehouse and through the despatching-room—void at that moment. Inanimate things, to Robert, often seemed to be endowed with some dim, strange entity, and that empty chamber had for him an air as of waiting for the bustle incidental to the next arrival of pieces from the mills in their heavy bags, or the departure of others in knotted sheets or tightly-stitched bales. A broom left in a corner from the last sweeping, after the last activities there, was the only occupant of the place.

He went lightly downstairs. As he descended, he heard laughter, and a voice pleading, "Help, gentlemen! Oh, gents, find the pea. Where has the little jigger gone? Can no one find him? Only one penny a guess, gents. Even money. Where has the little jigger gone?"

He was at the foot of the stairs by the end of that whimsically plaintive peroration. At the far end of the basement he saw a group of the staff, Willie Scott, Johnny Leng, Arthur Laurie, Tommy Bruce—and Henry Braid, too. They were clustered round Peter Pringle who had a small board horizontal against his midriff and held there by a string from its outer edges that went round the back of his neck.

The fellow was thimble-rigging! Yes, that's what he was doing. There were three thimbles on the board. In fine professional style, Peter raised an arm high to exhibit, held between curved thumb and forefinger, the small, ubiquitous, elusive pea.

"Once again! Oh, gents, oh, gents, where has the little jigger gone? Can no one find him?"

"Under that one," Robert heard the head of the Dress Goods say.

"This one? Not there. Dear me, I'd have thought so myself. Where—oh, sir!"

That was addressed in horror to the unexpected junior partner, suddenly observed.

"Don't stop," said Robert. "Don't stop."

But all seemed to be shamefaced.

"When did you learn this game?" asked Robert.

"Long ago, sir."

"I should think you could add to income with it. From the glimpse I had just now you seem to be expert."

"Too risky, sir, when a fellow has others to think of. The polis don't like it."

"Very amusing, very amusing," murmured Braid and hurried away.

The others followed him in a scuttling fashion, and Willie Scott looked round for something to busy himself over, then marched smartly away also up the stairs.

Peter, with the board still in place, gazed at Mr. Robert.

"Let me see you do it, Pringle."

Pringle decided to be a man and do it with no embarrassment. He would do it well. He cleared his throat. He piped up—omitting only, "A penny a guess—even money."

"Help, gentlemen, who can find the pea? All done by a turn of the wrist. Where, oh where, has the little jigger gone? Can no one find the little fellow? Here he is—and here he's gone!"

The little jigger had disappeared. Robert tossed on to the board the envelope he had brought down.

"Under that one," said he, and pointed.

"This one, sir? Well, well—it is not there. Where can it be? Let us look and see where he is. Why, here's the little jigger! Who would have thought it?"

"I certainly never would," replied Robert. He indicated the envelope. "There's no doubt that that is yours."

"What, sir?"

"That envelope. Mr. Gilmore mentioned to me to-day that you were married recently. He told nobody but me. We usually make some sign when a member of staff gets married, Pringle—and you'll find it in that envelope."

"Well, that's—I don't know what to say, sir. That's very kind of you."

With a nod Robert left him to take off the board and put it away. And to think, considered Peter when he was alone, that was the first exhibition of the pea and thimble game in Cochrane Street! Only because long since he had given up the true professional use of it he had allowed himself the pleasure, when they asked him to do some of his conjuring tricks, of showing them his skill in that one and had brought in his old thimbles, the board—and a pea. Pretty good boss, old Robert was, he decided, as he opened the envelope and looked at the cheque.

Robert passed upstairs thinking that indeed on the staff at Simson's there was a variety of talent, what with Middleton's boy and his *veeolon*, Danny Huntley going on the stage, and that expert of thimble-rigging in the basement.

The odour of a cigar of quality was in the counting-house when he returned, and on going into the private room he found his brother sitting there alone (after the lunch with his yarn and saltpetre friends) smoking it, leisurely and relishingly.

"Were there any afternoon letters?" asked John.

"Yes, I've seen to them. Flannelettes and Shirtings chiefly—one or two Fancy Goods and Dress."

"Well, we'll be settling down to the autumn's work—the winter's work—soon. I fancy all the boys must have had their holidays by now."

"I think the last to go are all gone now—no more after they come back. Nairn, I believe, and that little fellow, MacEwan, are still away."

"Good lad, MacEwan. I like his merry squint," and John leant back, puffing slow smoke.

"Yes."

Willie MacEwan, it may be remembered, had been away from business during the previous year for two weeks, once in the spring when he was married and once in the summer, holiday-making. That second week he had taken late in the year and had spent it at the place of the spring honeymoon—honeyweek, Watty Yule might have called it. He and his young wife had been unable for some time, another summer approaching, to make up their minds which season was the more beautiful there, the season of the dapple of buds on the trees—sifting of green over and through the wicker of the hedges, bluebells under the beeches—or of flurrying of yellow leaves in the woods and the crisp frou-frou of fallen ones underfoot. In the end they decided to have another autumn, or late summer vacation. That is how it was that he was one of the last away.

"Well, they are getting grand weather," observed John. "It seems a shame to be back in town these days of blue sky."

A quick tap at the door.

"Come in. Oh, you, Huntley," said John, and then, "Something wrong?" he asked.

"Yes, gentlemen. It's dreadful."

Tom Huntley for once did not stand loosely erect by the table. He put the flat of his hands upon it between them, bending there, looking from one to the other.

"What's the matter, Tom?" demanded Mr. Simson.

"Willie MacEwan."

"What about Willie MacEwan?" asked John, and from the other side of the table Robert began, "He's not——" and stopped there.

"Aye," said Huntley, and stood erect. "Drowned."

"Good God!" ejaculated John. "We were just talking of him. When did you get the news? Just now?"

"Just now, yes."

"Good God!" said John again. "It seems only the other day that I went in to wish him luck."

Huntley looked at the floor.

"Yes," said he, "just a little over a year ago. Life is queer."

"Is there any child?"

"No. It's a pity for that lassie. It was a good match. I had lunch with them one day. Aye, life is queer. I thought you would like to know—I mean I thought you would want to know."

He seemed suddenly overpowered by emotion. John was about to inquire, "How did it happen?" but Tom Huntley turned hastily and left them.

Robert looked at his brother seriously across the table.

"You understand the personal implication to him, John?" he said.

"Why? Oh, yes, yes, of course. He hadn't been married long before—well, he seems to feel it still. I like Huntley."

"So do I," replied Robert.

When Huntley knocked he had been on the point of telling John about the thimble-rigger. The words had been all but

spoken. "I have something amusing to tell you of our packer. There is indeed unexpected talent among our staff." They sat quiet, after that brief exchange of speech following on Huntley's departure, sat quiet in that room across which went the rumour of footsteps passing by outside.

Inconsequentially, irreverently, it seemed to Robert at first, he was haunted by Pringle's pleading peroration, "Where, oh where has the little jigger, the little joker, gone? Can no one find the little fellow? Here he is—and here he's gone." He could not dismiss it from his mind, and it became at last as the burden of a threnody for Willie MacEwan.

CHAPTER XXVI

1899-1900

Mrs. Simson was duly sympathetic when her husband informed her of that news, but it did give her a sudden hope that perhaps her prodigal son might be brought home to go again into the warehouse—the period of "making a man of him" over. It was not, however, till later in the evening that she remarked, "I suppose you'll have to get some one else to take Mr. MacEwan's place?"

"Mr. Mac—— oh, you mean Willie MacEwan. Yes; but we'll not rush that indecently."

There was time, she considered, for her suggestion, so she would wait a day or two before putting it tactfully before him. She still had the impression that her husband was aware of some naughty behaviour by Bob of which he had not informed her and for a revelation of which she would not probe.

A letter to her delivered by the first post next morning changed the situation. It was from Bob. By the contents of it we have the date of this chapter: 1899. Did they think, he asked, that it was going to come to war with the Boers in South Africa? If they did, and if a contingent was raised in Canada, he thought he would volunteer. It would be a chance, he naïvely commented, to see more of the Empire. "After the war is successfully over," he went on, "unless it is absolutely imperative for all to disband in Canada, some of the boys think then would be a good opportunity to have a look at New Zealand and Australia before coming back here."

Mrs. Simson's heart had leapt on coming to the words "after the war is successfully over," expecting that a request to come home, then, would follow. The consideration that in wars young men are killed did not occur to her at the moment. She was dejected at the discovery that her Bob, instead of wanting to return from his exile, was thinking only of a prolonged absence, and in more distant parts. Sadly she handed the letter to her husband for perusal.

Having slowly read it he snorted, and then:

"Quite a nice little sight-seeing tour," he growled.

"May I read?" asked Meg, and when she had finished Ian held a hand for it. By the time he had it, John Simson was talking again.

"Far better for the boy to come home here," he declared, "than lend himself to that arrogant, imperialistic—och!"

"And he might be killed. He doesn't think of that," said Mrs. Simson, perturbed, having just thought of it herself.

"A nice cause to die in!" remarked John. "Well, we must go."

"I'm off, dad," and Ian hurried away. He had to be in the warehouse before his father.

The newsboys that afternoon shouted of the declaration of war.

In the evening Mrs. Simson asked her husband what he intended to advise Bob, in reply to the contents of that letter. He told her he was "thinking it over," and as she knew his opinion on the South African trouble she let the subject drop for the time being—with hope. She felt sure he would advise the boy to take no part in it.

"Have you written to Bob yet?" she asked next morning.

"Not yet," he replied. "I'll be writing to-day, I think."

That day he did indeed write to Bob. After the distribution of letters Wem Mackay came into the private room to say that he would very much like to "join up" if the bosses had no objection. By his manner he was going to do so, objection or no objection. For a moment, exasperated, John Simson felt inclined to ask him if he had studied the South African affair, but restrained himself. The head of a warehouse had to be, no doubt, what they called patriotic. Not that he was adread of being called pro-Boer. People could call him what they liked, but he was a merchant of the country, he was an employer of labour, and his country was going to war.

"Very good, Mackay," said he, "very good, Wem," and smiled. "We'll keep your place open for you. You ken your ain ken."

So that was that. And that is how it happened that it was upon warehouse paper, headed *John Simson, Manufacturer, Established 1835*, that John the Second wrote a long epistle to his younger son in Assiniboia, telling him how pleased he was at the tone of all his letters, pleased also over good news he had received of him from Mr. Strong. That preamble over, he went on to an account of the changes in the business and how he thought it might be well for Bob to return—and Bob returned.

He did not, as a matter of fact, go into Shirtings to take Willie MacEwan's place. Shirtings were very busy and Nairn had been put into that department from the less busy Dress Goods to help Tom Huntley, with Ian Simson for colleague. When Bob came back he took Nairn's place in Dress Goods under Braid, with Laurie. For the nonce, as cheery Sandy Bain told John Simson, there seemed to be no need to get any one to take Wem's place in Flannelettes. He could manage all right with Watty Yule.

"Wem will just go out there, help to pull up the flag, and be hame again," he opined. "We can get along fine for all the time he'll be awa'."

Broad of shoulders, more lithe of limb than when he left the warehouse two years earlier, and with an exceedingly vivacious brightness and clarity of eyes, Bob passed through the departments, shaking hands with all, and thinking how odd it was that the glass roof should still be there. His memory of the immense cupola of the prairies was from a time so recent that he might, by his emotions, home again, have merely been dreaming of Cochrane Street, still in Assiniboia. There were moments when he hoped it was so, despite the welcome he received. He was actually homesick for that space of sky under this lower ceiling.

There was perhaps something in his blood—it may have been from grandfather Simson or from a Simson farther back—that was also in the blood of his Uncle Robert. Inanimate things had their way with him. Going downstairs to say, as he put it, Hallo to the packers, when he came to the last step and strode off to the cement he stood still. Just there, on that hard surface, there was an indentation made by the brisk impact of feet alighting after the run down, or by the heavy tread of those who carried loads on their shoulders, the cement wearing away granule by granule. That indentation halted him. It had been there when he went away. It seemed to look up at him, mutely conveying a "Hallo! Back again?"

Pringle and Willie Scott, slipping the ends of a packing-sheet over a stack of shirtings in the press, looked round.

"Why, it's—it's young Bobby!" said Pringle. "Well, Mr. Bob, back again? Did you drop something?"

"No, no," replied Bob. "Just picking something up! How's everybody down here? I popped down to say 'Hallo.'"

Returning upstairs again, that reunion over, the scooped hollow at the stair-foot somehow made him feel melancholy. He could have stayed away longer, thought he. The years of his exile—to make a man of himself—were but as a moment, a moment that had had its arduous portions but on the whole had been buoyant.

It had been almost in the nature of a point of honour with Ian to avoid any behaviour, out in the warehouse, as of one having authority there. To be as an assistant—"learning soft-goods"—not the boss's son, by his presence discouraging merriment, was an intention he had successfully achieved, though of truanicies in billiard-rooms, that Bob had not only known of but participated in, he did not know. After his brother's return he felt that he should perhaps comport himself more decorously in the departments as the senior son, the heir apparent. He joined less in the day's nonsense yet did not take it upon himself to frown on it. Merriment could accompany and lighten work, did not necessarily hinder it. It was better than an accompaniment of glumness.

Ian and Bob would remember, years later, no doubt, the day when Mr. Bain, atop a stack of flannelettes—so high that he was bowed under the gallery roof—called down to Watty Yule, who was throwing up the pieces to him, "Better throw up no more. The stack is trig as it is and if I built it higher——" and then whooped, "O Lord!" as the stack toppled. It went down slowly at first as a tree being felled. It had been built opposite the stairs that led from the main-deck to the gallery. Down through that slit it fell, Sandy atop. He leapt. He landed on a stack of fancy goods in mid-warehouse but so heavily that it toppled in turn. He leapt lightly to another and there poised.

"Oh, gentlemen, did you see my agility?" he crowed.

What a chaos! An avalanche of flannelettes lay on the flight of stairs from the gallery. On the main floor, fancy goods and flannelettes were jumbled and everybody present lent a hand to restore order, like shovellers clearing an avalanche at a mountain's foot from a highway running there.

"I'm glad I didn't do that," Watty Yule solemnly remarked, at which everybody laughed, and with laughter not unfriendly. Watty might have his incapacities but he was not disliked.

"I hope the boss doesn't come out while this is going on," chortled Laurie, who had come down from the Dress Goods to help, and both Ian and Bob—both present as it happened—joined in the laughter over that hope.

The grandsons of John the First knew more of their contemporaries than John the Second and Uncle Robert knew. Between them they were aware that Nairn (he who once went to a working men's club with Dan Huntley, whose apotheosis had been in the name of Danny Boy) was interested in the history of his city. They knew that Tom Bruce was secretary of a literary and debating society that met in a hall in Garnethill once a week; that Leng had become an ardent socialist who voiced the views of more recent social reformers than Robert Owen and Henry George, discussed by Andy Middleton and Uncle Robert of yore up in the Wincey department. They knew that Laurie sang. Sometimes, at work, he would break into song—and very well too.

"Have you no string up there to tie that down?" a voice would shout from somewhere in the warehouse.

They knew that Robertson, as well as being somewhat of a dandy, was also somewhat of a wrestler. Now and then he would have a bout down in the basement with Peter Pringle, scientific wrestling versus the wrestling that Peter had learnt when, as a newspaper boy and a boot-black, he had sometimes to contend to his claim for a pitch on a lucrative corner.

Still, as formerly when he used to find occasions to drop in at the warehouse after lectures at the university, Ian loved the place and its life.

Bob was a little amused when, shortly after he came home, his father announced one evening over dinner that they had better not dally as they were all going to a music-hall, to the Gaiety. To the Gaiety! In his memory the smoke of a past evening ribboned and hung blue over a packed audience. Old refrains he recalled. On the stage a star of the halls beat time for "Some gang richt, and some gang wrang, the whole way through..." So they were going to a music-hall *en famille*?

"But, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Simson. "A music-hall!"

"I have a surprise for you," said her husband.

It was seldom that she had been in the warehouse—only once or twice in all the years. A few more times she had walked in at the corridor and turned to the left into the office, and Mr. Gilmore, setting down his pen—and cupping one hand in the other—had come bowing to the counter to say, "Just go in, Mrs. Simson; he's alone," or, "Just go in, Mrs. Simson. I was to tell you to wait." Yes, perhaps only twice she had walked round the warehouse. Only once, certainly, had she been in the basement. She had gone no farther than that little dip in the concrete and there had remarked, "So this is the packing-room," and had turned into the calendering department, returning to the warehouse level by the other stairs.

"You will remember," said John, "once when you were in the warehouse and I introduced you to Huntley."

"Oh, yes, the boss of the Shirtings. A charming man."

"Don't you remember another fellow there, a young man, just a lad—same surname though not related? You were very much amused at the way he curved his arms when I introduced you and bowed with two fingers on his heart."

"Yes, I remember him."

"Well, you're going to see him to-night. Complimentary box."

"Complimentary box! What do you mean, John?"

"You'll see. Robert is going to meet us there too."

They saw. They sat through various turns, some really, as Mrs. Simson said, very, very clever. Then John drew his chair an inch or two nearer the front of the box. The curtain went up again and that young man she had met in the Shirtings department these years before came swaggering in from the wings with curved arms and putting two fingers upon his midriff gave a bow that brought a guffaw from the audience.

Dan Huntley—Danny Boy—was going far. He was going to be one of those whose very names raise a laugh. One had only to say, in years to come, "Did you ever see Danny Boy?" and people would begin to quake; and years and years later, when successors in his tradition, with their own individuality, took his place old men would remark, "He reminds me of Danny Boy. Ah, but you're too young to have seen him. You should have seen Danny Boy."

After his last encore, as he bowed away with those hilarious steps, his gaze drifted up to the box and he gave to those in it a final solemn bow that made the people below, when the lights flicked up again, wonder who they were—two men of middle years, one bearded, a lady of middle years, a girl, and two young men.

John touched his wife's arm.

"Come, dear," he said, "we'll slip round and see him in his dressing-room. Come along, Robert."

While they were away Bob looked down towards the seat in which he had sat during a certain Saturday evening—not, precisely, attending a lecture upon the future of electricity. Since then there had been stock-saddles and branding corrals, the dust and heat, the snow and chill of a life that, remembered there, seemed, in its turn, a life only dreamt. Funny world, great world!

A troubled world also it was: the Boer War dragged on, with what John Simpson called ridiculous histrionics, and was not over when foreign interference in China provoked the Boxer rising and massacre there. The Boxers shared the front pages with the Boers, and Watty Yule was centre of a tense circle in the basement one forenoon as he recounted what he had heard of the massacres from a returned missionary at a meeting he had attended the night before. It was a dreadful story of "foreign devils" slain and their womenfolk taken away captive to unknown ends. The warehouse discussed the rights and wrongs of the Chinese, the thrusting of opium upon them for the sake of business, and read of the allied punitive forces marching on Peking.

During one of these colloquys of the forenoon Maxwell repeated Watty Yule's story to Mr. Robert, whose view of life was that it is strangely blent of kindness and cruelty, of the beautiful and the iniquitous. That he took his way as easily as possible—as easily for others as much as for himself—was the outcome of that impression he had of it. He was not a votary of softness, and to imagine so would be to misunderstand the man, but callous cynicism was abhorrent to him. His private sustenance he came by in odd ways. Of a Saturday afternoon he would often visit the city's museums. In the Hunterian Museum, at the University, there was the crumbling fragment of a dug-out canoe unearthed, by excavations in the city, from the days when neolithic men paddled through, as it were, Cochrane Street, along the edge of the bank rising up from George Square to Cathedral Street. That shard of the past had its influence on his thoughts. In a way he could not explain he found, in the consideration of such things, something he required in life, something necessary to him in his journey through a world cruel and kind.

The cashier, it may be recalled, had occasionally been curious regarding the private life, in relation to women, of the junior partner. The truth of that Robert discussed with none. There had always been a dual control in his nature. As a young man he alternated from gregariousness to aloofness, back and forth. With a cheery, "Hallo, Bobby," he had been hailed in the warehouse region by many acquaintances. In long tramps, solitary, on the moors far beyond the city, in sailing, solitary, in lugsail boats on the Firth—often in wild weather, to his mother's anxiety and the admiration of John the First—he knew a delight that amounted to devotion. In his mother's eyes he had been "susceptible"—by which she meant susceptible to what she called the charm of the fair sex. According to her, in his teens he had apparently doted on various fair ones. A few years after the marriage of his elder brother he became engaged, but the girl had died of an epidemical malady (brought to Glasgow, the health officers believed, on a ship from Portugal), died on the day that had been set for their wedding.

So the fortune of life—and death—had dealt somewhat similarly towards the head of the Shirtings and the junior partner of the house of Simson. In the ways that Tom Huntley and Robert Simson had reacted to that arbitrary fortune—not mawkishly, not morbidly, not even sentimentally—there were certain similarities also. Robert had never forgotten her sufficiently, despite that "susceptibility," for any other to take her place. His way of veering from gregariousness to

solitude, solitude to society, had been accentuated thereafter. Not merely in a sort of periodicity, a turning to staying at home after a period of going out and about, or from a stretch of retirement to a stretch of social gatherings, was it manifest, but in sudden cessations of converse, abrupt withdrawals.

As he grew older he was at times no less perplexed than of yore by the multitude of views upon some given subject when it seemed to him that all humanity could have but one, and puzzled also he was by the quips of life. Not in pretending that all was well was there relief when he felt so. Sometimes he would wonder if his pursuits of pleasures of the sort called æsthetic—such pleasures as his picture-viewing and, when he could afford it, picture-buying—were selfish. He would console himself in these moments of self-searching by admitting that his occasional purchases helped the painters to live, told himself that he could not be called a hard taskmaster to his staff, and that one required to make for oneself a place in which the mind could rest. Walter Fenwick, with his sanctuary, his life of the mind, he often recalled.

The case of Fenwick had had a deep influence upon Robert Simson. Constantly, at some hint apparently remote, he would relive all that misery again and consider, platitudinising, that law is not always justice. He had received several letters from the old man, and he had written long replies, but never did he mention them or him to any one.

He wondered—because of what happened soon after that conversation about the Boxer trouble with Maxwell—if he had, that day, some telepathic communication with Fenwick or if he had just been thinking of him because of a frail series of links following upon the general manager's recounting of the complaints and recriminations, rebellions and punishments, in China, a series of links stamped *Cruel world*. He had, at any rate, been thinking much of the old calender-man that day, and for several days thereafter was on the point of writing to him again, when he received a letter from the prison to inform him that Walter Fenwick was dead.

Well, perhaps it was all for the best. He recalled how the old man, when he had visited him in the days before the trial, with a slap of a hand on the protruding front of his gleaming cranium, in a gesture that would have been grotesque had it not been for the light of sincerity in his eyes, had declared, "Dinna fash yersel' ower much, sir. After all, here's where we live." That was where he had lived since, as well as before, his incarceration. He was at last, bodily as well as mentally, free. If there was a better world, a spiritual world, he would know of it; if not—there was an end.

Robert took out the Employee's Book. Since noting that his father here and there had inserted a remark in it he had also, occasionally, done so, but opposite Fenwick's name had always been a blank space. He wrote, "Died," and the date, and "One of the finest men it has ever been my privilege to meet. R.S."

The months followed the months and, in the manner of returning comets, the overseas buyers again dropped in at Cochrane Street, Vannan of South Africa specially welcome as one who could give them news from that front. But Vannan was not communicative. John surmised that he, too, did not like the Boer War. Summer came and there was dancing on paddle steamers that churned, laden to capacity, doon the watter. Ian had gone back to the Flannelettes during Sandy's absence, so there was no need for him, on vacation—if he were minded to think about the warehouse instead of dismissing it from his thoughts—to worry over what mistakes Watty Yule might be making. But from his holiday-making Sandy returned crusty.

"I think we'd better get you somebody extra in your department, Sandy, or move somebody from one of the others that are not quite so busy temporarily," John Simson suggested.

"Well, I could do with another man. I'm no' saying anything against Watty. He's willing—he's willing."

"I think we'd better get somebody else," John repeated. "I think it was a mistake, after all, doing away with an office-boy. If we had an office-boy who was to continue out of the counting-house and learn the business we could run him into Flannelettes with you now."

"Suit yourself, I'm no' complaining," said Sandy. "I never thought the Boers would hold out so long. All thae flourishes from beleaguered Mafeking make me sick. Suit yourself," and he departed with his bundle of letters.

When he had gone brother looked to brother across the table and they laughed—one of those quiet little laughs that are chiefly a brief chesty quake and a chuckle.

Next day came news that Wem Mackay would not return to the place kept open for him. He had at last met cavalry—out

on patrol with one or two others—light cavalry, a group of mounted and armed farmers, and being Wem he did not surrender. Privately, as well as feeling distinct grief on receipt of the news that Wem was killed, John Simson was aware of an emotion as of plain annoyance. He slouched back in his chair. He thrust a foot against the front of his desk and sat back so, silent for some time. He recalled that cheery youth with his hat atilt on his head. He damned Imperialists and made vehement prophecy to Robert that even if the Boers, in the end, were beaten there would come a change of government and the Liberals would take another look at South Africa and see what could be done there for the credit of Britain. He looked at his watch. Time to go to lunch. He brought his chair down from the tilt with a thud, threw his hat on and strode through the counting-house violently, forgetting in his passage to leave any word with Gilmore as to when he would be back.

When he had gone Robert sat alone awhile meditating on many themes, among them the blend of cruelty and kindness in life. Then, opening his drawer, he took out the Employee's Book and turned its pages to make an entry in the column opposite the name of William Mackay. It was just as though he were taking a roll-call: Alisdair Lennox, Walter Fenwick, Duncan Donald Ramsay, John Corbett, Daniel Huntley, Andrew Frank Middleton, William MacEwan, William Mackay. Since that day, not a decade past, on which we first looked in at Cochrane Street, all these had gone—variously gone.

In answer to an advertisement in the Situations Vacant columns a new young warehouseman (to help Sandy Bain and Watty Yule in the Flannelettes) was added to the staff at Simson's—the first in these years, as it happened.

CHAPTER XXVII

CHANGES

The years slipped along in the usual way and at the usual speed despite an exchange of comment to the contrary between John Simson and Alec Maxwell.

"Well, Maxwell, how are you feeling this morning, and what's on your mind apart from these orders?"

"I was just thinking, Mr. Simson, that time flies more quickly now than it used to."

"It does. Time flies more quickly than it used to."

When John, out in the warehouse, mentioned matters that were not related to business, the duologues were characterised by brevity. Seldom did he linger to chat in the manner of his brother.

The head of the firm and the head of Fancy Goods (senior of all department heads) had both turned sixty. They had seen the coming and going of members of staff of whom we—who did not open the door of Simpson's till the eighteen-nineties—have no knowledge. For shaving-kits and hair-brushes, revolvers in holsters, Gladstone bags and umbrellas, clocks A and B—and wreaths too—they had subscribed for many who had been in the warehouse and left it long before the day on which we saw Gilmore hurrying out to tell Maxwell of the imminent arrival of Mr. Sinclair from Montreal, and went with Tommy Bruce to summon the boss. Yet, just at the usual speed, in spite of that exchange of opinion to the contrary between John Simson and Alec Maxwell, the years slipped along.

Crow's feet showed at the corners of Maxwell's eyes, though he still walked erect and smartly. That little conversation on the passing of time made him think of the changes in his life. His younger son had just been married, and he and Florrie were alone again together—as they had been at the beginning. Mrs. Maxwell was entirely pleased, entirely satisfied, with the marriages of her children. The two girls had married young men with incomes sufficient to give them beautiful wardrobes, and the two boys had married girls who dressed fashionably. Maxwell still adored her and (once he had become accustomed to the departure of their young folks—who did not, of course, all go together upon one day or year) found something very charming in being alone with her again.

Change of another sort was remarked on Sandy Bain. He who was usually alert, quick in response, prompt with repartee, frequently seemed less dull than deep in private considerations. He would stand over his orders at the counter sucking in the drooping ends of his moustache, biting on them, staring before him, and it was not on how to fill the orders that he pondered and fretted. That was simple enough. He was picturing to himself his youngest "wean," his younger daughter, wean no longer, the unmarried one, and wondering if what he surmised was so. Either she was not well or—"Eh, what did ye say?" he would demand after having been asked a question more than once by one of his assistants (Watty Yule, or the new member), and would yank himself out of his reverie to attend to business.

The younger men in the warehouse, looking through the morning papers, turned chiefly to the pages relating to sport, but the elders did glance an eye down the Births, Marriages, and Deaths column. As a rule, when there was an increase to population in Glasgow due to a member of the staff, even if he had not mentioned to any that an arrival was expected, record of it in the press would bring sounds from the warehousemen at first sight of him after the arrival was proclaimed, sounds that he perfectly understood and usually accepted with a radiant expression. When Maxwell, over the *Herald* one morning, read of Laidlaw's contribution to population, he rubbed his eyes and read the announcement again. Laidlaw had been married for years. Maxwell went out of his office and climbed the stairs to the Flannelettes.

"Did you see this?" he asked of Sandy Bain, dabbing a finger on the page.

"Och, aye, I saw it," Sandy replied, and there was an end of that.

In the warehouse, as usual, were hints of a life lived outside by members of the staff. Now and then, for example, Maxwell, or Henry Braid, would arrive in morning coat and silk hat, carrying nattily furled umbrella, flower in buttonhole. Or one of the juniors we knew of old—no longer very junior—would come in specially spruce, spatted and new-pressed (Nairn, or Laurie, or Robertson), and there would be comments of the usual kind—the usual kinds.

"Excuse me, but is that a real flower in your buttonhole?"

"You'll excuse me mentioning it, but your underwear has slipped down over your shoes."

"Going to a wedding, I take it. I suppose it is as well for you to see how weddings are conducted. Ye might have to get married in a hurry some time."

Or some member of staff might arrive with crape band on arm, or wearing a black tie, and for a while he would be immune from the levity of the life in Simson's.

Beyond the warehouse there were other changes noted within it. Mr. Thompson came no longer buying from Sydney, Australia. A Mr. Bright was his successor. It was apropos of this Mr. Bright that John Simson discovered something untoward had happened in Sandy Bain's private world. Mounting the stairs from his wash-room one forenoon, just before lunch, he heard a rumpus up in the Flannelettes.

"Yule!" Sandy was screeching, harsh, like a parrot. "I wish to God you could manage to say to me, 'I hear Mr. Bright will be in this afternoon,' without ye having to add that his bright smile haunts ye still! Your little ways are beyond human endurance."

The glances cast up into the Flannelettes from the Fancy Goods floor, and across from the Dress Goods gallery, were not merely of warning that the boss was within earshot. They were of that, but of something else as well. Passing from the stairhead across the warehouse, John looked up at Sandy's gallery. There stood Watty Yule looking as miserable as we saw him on the day of his discharge. John thought he was a pathetic figure. He was white, and his eyes in that white face were like those of a startled deer. Sandy Bain stood hunched and quaking, equally pallid, before him. Surely here, thought the boss, was excess of rage over a trifle.

He walked on, thoughtfully, considering that for some time Sandy had been cranky. Always, to be sure, he had been abrupt, direct, one who certainly called a spade a spade, but not cantankerous. He was not the man he had been.

John halted before the counting-house door, pondered a moment, then turned left-wheel abruptly and right-wheel with a mind made up over some thought, and marched into the Shirtings department.

There seemed to be no one there. He walked between the pillars of pieces to the counter.

"Oh, there you are," said he, seeing Tom Huntley in his office. "The boys out to lunch?"

"Yes. They're both out."

"Tell me," said John Simson, leaning back against the counter just outside Tom's office, "tell me——"

Tom turned on his stool inquiringly.

"What's gone wrong with Sandy Bain these days?" asked John.

Huntley raised a hand and thrust his hat a little farther towards the back of his head, then grasping his chin massaged it, meditating. John waited.

"Well, there's nobody else kens but me," replied Huntley at last. "He asked my advice, but——"

"Is he in some trouble, worried about something?"

"I think I might tell you, Mr. Simson. I'm the only one who kens in the place, but maybe I'm not blabbing a confidence in telling you."

"It's just between ourselves, Tom," John said, reassuringly. "I'm worried about him."

"It's his daughter."

"Daughter?"

"Aye. He has the four of a family, ye ken."

"Yes, I know. Two boys, two girls. The two boys and the older girl have been married some time, all married young. What——"

"The younger lassie is going to have a bairn."

"Oh, dear, dear. And?"

"That's all. It's enough for Sandy. It's what he calls the disgrace of it that is fretting him. I tried to comfort him by pointing out that Adam and Eve didn't have any marriage certificate. Personally I think he's worked himself up too much over it all. They're going to be married. The lad isn't trying to back out. To Sandy it is an awful disgrace, but I cautioned him not to make the lassie sick and miserable in that condition. It's happened—and he's got to thole it. She's always been kind of flighty."

"I see, Tom. Oh, well—I just wondered what was wrong with him and if I could help."

"You canna help in that."

John turned away.

"I won't repeat it," he promised and departed.

He was not astonished to learn that Sandy had confided in Tom. Both of the bosses had a great liking for Huntley, though they never analysed it in talk, and there were no apothegms of his to produce as evidence to themselves of why they liked him. Virtue seemed to come out of the man when one was with him. He, like Robert, like John, had been high-spirited in youth, a lad of pranks and merriment. The fortune, or misfortunes, in life perplexed him later. Many incidents round him perplexed him too, and asking *Why?* brought no answer. He found much in human existence incoherent, sometimes atrocious, but did not succumb, thereby, into any sort of mental sickliness. With the passage of years, after the death of his wife, he was recognised as the generous member of staff. Juniors who had spent their month's allowance too soon, and had already whispered a request to Mr. Gilmore for half a crown—giving him a secret I.O.U. to deposit in the safe till pay-day—and had spent that also, would slip into the Shirtings to see Mr. Huntley. He knew by the look on their faces before they spoke what brought them there. He was ready to put hand in pocket for the loan.

That he did not talk politics much was because he had the impression that politics could hardly be touched without at least compromise and often blunted the sense of probity. And in politics what wheels there were within wheels! There might be excuse for compromise. A politician might decide that, things being as they were, all he could do was to cast for the attitude that seemed to him least of chicanery. The man in the street, the man in the warehouse, the man in the railway carriage, seldom knew the whole story, he believed, of the political affairs they discussed. He accepted the incomprehensible in life, the contradictory, with his chuckle. His genial manner, his easy bearing: these were the outward and visible sign of an inner philosophy. All he knew was that life has tragedies, incongruities, cruelties and humbug as well as happiness, felicities, and that one could always try to make the best of even a bad job.

The retirement of Mr. Maxwell came as something of a shock to John Simson, despite their agreement upon the acceleration of time. The effect of that retirement in the warehouse was that Henry Braid came down from the Dress Goods and was to be seen by all who swung open the warehouse door standing by the long central counter of the Fancy Goods. Sandy Bain, or Tom Huntley, by reason of seniority, it may be thought, should have taken Maxwell's place; but, at the first words of what John Simson had prepared as a tactful explanation possibly due to Sandy for Braid's appointment, he was interrupted.

Sandy waved the flat of his hand in the boss's face.

"I wouldna have taken it, supposing ye had offered it to me—if that's what is at the back o' your mind," he declared. "Flannelettes, with a pickle of winceys on the side, is mair to the purpose for your banking account than Fancy Goods, even if in the auld times the head of the Fancy Goods was lookit upon as the head of us all."

John laughed, glad to have the matter taken so.

"Dinna worry," went on Sandy. "I mind when Henry Braid and me was both together in the same department, and if he tries to put on any of the Manager of Simson's to me, I'll just naturally turn him over and skelp his—skelp his—skelp him!"

Before Tom Huntley left the private room that morning with his letters the subject of Braid's new position was touched upon to him also.

"Oh, by the way, Tom, I'm putting Henry Braid in Maxwell's place," said John, "instead of either Sandy Bain or you. I know it has been looked upon—or it was in my father's time—as the sort of crack post, but I hardly thought you would want to change out of the Shirtings."

"No," Huntley answered definitely, "and Henry's likely to be here longer than either Sandy or me."

John, without raising his head, looked up at him meditatively.

"Is that all the letters you have for me?" asked Tom.

"Yes, that's the lot, I think, that's the lot."

The retirement of Maxwell brought a new assistant to the warehouse, a lad fresh from school, who was put into the Dress Goods; and with Braid's change, Laurie filled his former place as chief of Dress Goods, a department head at last. Two months later he received the gilt clock, surrounded by the little cherubs gaily whirling the folds of a long gilt scarf one to the other. Down in the basement, before he straightened his cravat to come up for the presentation, Willie Scott remarked, "So our flirt has been caught at last—our flirt and amateur operatic tenor."

The next change—in fact the next two changes—no one expected. It was a case of one surprise after another. The first was the retirement of Sandy Bain. When he was congratulated by Henry Braid on being able to do so he explained that the whole secret of it was in his teetotalism.

"It was a guid day for me," he said, "or I should say a guid nicht for me, when we had our first bairn and I was up tramping the floor in my shirt-tail with him. And while he was spittin' in my face I says to myself, 'Sandy, my man,' I says, 'you're going to be the father of a family and you'll have to give up supporting the publicans.'"

He told John Simson of the house he was buying. It was away out beyond River Cart where used to be only fields and farms when he was a callant, he said.

"Some nice villas there now, Mr. Simson. Aye, we got a villa. It's just like a wee village there, and there's a local bowling green. I'm going to jine the bowling club and play bools again, just like a laddie! If ever you're out that way you'll have to give us a look in. Do you ever play bools?"

"No, I can't say I do," John replied, laughing heartily, for *bools* is the Scots word for marbles and Sandy's question amused him—as was intended. The little man would have been dejected had his fun been lost. That Sandy could be thus merry made John surmise that he was getting over his chagrin in that matter of the premature maternity of the youngest of his family. His laughter over:

"Ye ken your ain ken, Sandy," said he. "I'm sometimes doubtful about retirement. A man is as old as he feels, and to retire too soon is apt to leave one at a loose end, I should think."

"Oh, we've weighed all that up and given it full consideration. I'm near as old as you are," replied Sandy in his blunt way. "The wife has kind of aged recently. She's not as she used to be, and now with all the bairns gone she's lonely and frets. Our last one was merrit not long syne. I'm no' just a callant myself, ye ken. Aye—I've had my worries too, if I havena brought them in here to interfere with business."

Watty Yule had wildly hoped, on Sandy's retirement, that he would become head of Flannelettes. The matter was discussed in the private room. Watty had been long with them, but:

"Never, never," said John. "It's just as Sandy says: the fellow's willing, but that's the best that can be said of him. He won't do for a boss."

"It will rather chagrin him if we put Nairn or Johnny Leng over him," Robert remarked.

"I'm afraid he's got to be chagrined."

"I'm afraid so too," agreed Robert.

And so a day or two later Johnny Leng became head of Flannelettes and a new assistant was added to the staff of Simson's in the Fancy Goods department.

As for the second surprise: Henry Braid, who had attended always strictly to business and had never encouraged either of the bosses in small talk apart from it, informed them, with an air of courteous regret, that he was going abroad. Glasgow had not only happy associations to Braid. In Glassford Street, for example, out of a distant day, dismal memories of a dissolute father—and the Mad Reformer—would depress him.

When the news of his resignation, during an absence of Maitland from the office, was communicated by Robert to Mr. Gilmore, the cashier seemed to be stunned. He could not speak. He could only stare.

"Why, he must be close on forty!" he exclaimed at last. "In fact he's turned forty. Where's he going? What's the idea?"

"He's going to take charge of a big import business in New Zealand."

That afternoon Gilmore paid one of his very few visits of leisure to the warehouse. He stood beside Braid at the Fancy Goods counter and set the ball a-rolling in the ancient fashion.

"I hear you're leaving us, Henry."

"Oh, yes."

"Uh-hu. Mr. Robert tells me you're going to New Zealand."

"Yes, oh, yes, we're going to New Zealand."

"It's a long way."

"Right down through the floor here," replied Henry, "on the other side of the world—a trifle diagonally," he added, and smiled—his formal smile.

"Well, you know we all wish you well. You'll write to us, I hope."

"Yes, I'll write, but I don't know if you'll write to me."

There was reason for that reply. Jack Corbett, after he went away, had written often to his friends on the staff and at first they had all answered. He had continued to write, but responses decreased.

So it was also in the case of "Alice" Lennox. To be sure, Alice had not been exactly what is called "a man's man," but he was sick and it seemed to Henry hard upon him that few wrote to him. "Remember me to all the boys though they seem to forget me," he put into one letter. Though his lung trouble had been cured by the Arizona air he had not returned to his native land. He remembered rather its fogs and its sleet than its blue days. He was in business in Tucson and one of his sisters was with him. On Braid's marriage he had sent a wedding gift of two pieces of pottery, two black bowls with geometrical designs simply and sufficiently running round their gourd-like curves. These, he wrote, were made by Pueblo Indians. A Navajo blanket he sent also, woven on a more primitive loom than those on which Simson's soft-goods were manufactured, but a remarkable gift for one who was acquainted with textiles.

Mr. Robert—he who had a way of meditating upon things as well as upon people—had he known of these, might have mused upon the strangeness of bowls from Acoma and a blanket from the Cañon de Chelly resting a while in a flat in Crossmyloof, Glasgow, and later (as for the bowls) flanking a sideboard, and (as for the blanket) being draped across a doorway of a house on a hill looking down upon Dunedin, New Zealand.

In the last month of his service at Simson's, down in the basement one evening at a quarter to six or so, Braid stood at the door of the wash-room slowly and meditatively drying his hands. The two porters, their day's work done, bent side by side over an evening paper spread on the counter before them.

"Passing of a Glasgow character," Willie Scott chanted the heading of a paragraph, and then he and Pringle apparently perused it together.

"Oh, see here—here's a piece about him too," said Scott, and began to read aloud an article.

A figure well known in the People's Forum, the Glasgow Green—thus went the causerie—seen there more frequently formerly than of late, would be seen there no more, heard no more voicing his views for the creation of a world fit to be lived in. The writer described him as reminiscent of Aaron striking the rock as portrayed in the illustrated Family Bible

of his youth, and called him "the Solomon Eagle of Glasgow Green."

"I dinna ken what that means," interjected Willie, and read on. "'The Mad Reformer, as he was dubbed by many, occasionally got into trouble with the police. Too violently, at times, he expressed his views, in language unparliamentary.'"

"I mind him!" Peter Pringle ejaculated. "I used often to see him."

"I mind him too," said Willie Scott.

"I recall once," said Peter, "I saw him chasing a man—a toff—along Argyle Street. The toff and two callants he had with him jumped on to a car at the foot of Glassford Street, and the Mad Reformer ran alongside shouting after them. Aye—it was unparliamentary language he used all right!"

Henry Braid stared at the speaker, stood there, towel in hand, as if suddenly turned to stone.

"He got cautioned that day by a policeman," Peter continued. "The man he was chasing gied him the slip at George Square, dropped off the car with his twa lads and jinked through the post office." He laughed, remembering. "God kens why, but I followed them. I mind it all, just as if it was yesterday. I followed them all the way to Buchanan Street. One of the callants looked round, when they were across Queen Street and going by the Exchange, to see if the Mad Reformer was still after them. Aye, aye; so he's dead!"

With intense neatness, unaware of what he was doing, Braid folded his towel, folded it, folded it. Suddenly noticing that Peter Pringle and Willie Scott were looking at him frowningly, he wheeled, slowly walked along the basement, slowly passed up the stairs.

At the top he stood still awhile to calm a disturbance within him. He felt stunned over the realisation that for years he had been in daily contact with a member of Simson's staff who had participated in one of the miserable occurrences of his early years. A past that he tried to forget—his tormented and weak-willed father dead, his disappointed mother dead, his rebellious brother (who had emigrated years ago) also dead—returned to him again. So Peter Pringle was that barefoot boy who had slapped along to rear on that agitating, humiliating, ignominious occasion. There, in the warehouse, was a living link with days that had given a sombre cast to his mind—days he would fain forget.

At the head of the stairs Henry Braid stood, how long he did not know. Many memories may pass through a man's mind in mere moments. Perhaps not long he stood there, for no one interrupted his melancholy meditations and when closing-time drew near there was always much traffic on these stairs, down and up.

Although looking forward eagerly to his new life, his new work abroad, he had been dreading the day of departure from the warehouse for, albeit undemonstrative, he liked the bosses and liked most of the staff. As he stood there, absently clapping and clapping the wet folded towel in his hands, he was suddenly aware that he was freed from perturbation over the imminence of farewells. That was one effect upon him of the discovery he had made below stairs.

Though Peter Pringle did not know that Henry Braid was the boy of that troubled glance over a shoulder, Braid would always, seeing him, have the knowledge of a living link in the warehouse with that pitiable past. Thus, being what he was, Henry Braid meditated, and the thought of his departure from the place was thereby entirely pleasing to him, had no residue of regret.

Feeling so, the disturbance within him was quieted. He returned to normality. He moved on across the high-ceilinged receiving and dispatching chamber in which, the back door being open, the murmur of the city faintly echoed, the murmur of the criss-crossing of many lives.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A CARD ON THE DOOR

The removal of Dick Robertson from the secluded Production department to the warehouse proper was due to the fact John Simson had decided "that young man is lost in there."

"We have no Maxwell in the warehouse now," said he, discussing what Sandy used to call *shuffling the pack*. "I think we should get Robertson into the Fancy Goods."

The junior partner raised his head, his eyes opened wide. They twinkled with a perfect and immediate understanding of what his brother meant. Despite certain very marked differences between the elderly Maxwell and the young Robertson, the point was clear to him. If by any chance, at any time, the entertainment of some buyer or other visitor had to be attended to by a member of staff, Dick could ably perform the duties of host. He was of a type very suitable to step into Braid's (and Maxwell's) shoes. He had an easy deportment, and neither an alienating manner of excessive self-assurance nor a disconcerting diffidence.

John Simson was really thinking of the future, not of himself but of the house. A remark that Tom Huntley had made when Braid was appointed head of the Fancy Goods had often returned to his mind. Braid, Tom had said, would likely be with them longer than Sandy Bain or himself. But chance happeneth unto all. Braid was gone. Ian, to be sure, three years Robertson's senior, could undertake entertainment duty; but to have some one out in the warehouse, visible to all comers, who could do so, was desirable. Looking back later on those days, Robert wondered if then his brother realised that the day drew near for his own retirement, when Ian would have to take his place in a chair of the private room. Meg was married. Ian, by various evidence observed at home, was pondering matrimony. He who as a boy had delighted, as it were a game, in keeping records, up to date, of the streets in which electric light ousted gas (and had inveigled his young brother into that game) was evincing interest in many civic affairs. He had grown up. The definite manliness of Ian made the junior partner (ten years younger than the senior) aware that life follows life as wave follows wave. Even Bob, more merry of manner than Ian, gave both his father and his uncle sudden realisations, with an element of surprise in them, that he was no longer the irresponsible lad. His father was free of an old dread that he might make a mess of his life.

As for Robertson: perhaps a decade of tolerance towards Laidlaw had been formative. Apart from one or two little exhibitions of his private opinion of the man—one of which the whole staff had witnessed during the presentation of the revolver in its holster to the departing Jack Corbett—Dick had met his colleague's surliness with insouciance. But the staff of Simson's, as we know, was shaped by more than the life in the warehouse. Outside of it young Robertson had been suddenly and violently shaped. Every one had observed a change in him. Johnny Leng thought, at first, that he was putting on airs, but it was not that—as Leng soon realised.

Something had happened to Dick that has happened to many since the days of our first parents. Something had happened that, in many cases, has a lurking comic quality. Elders, noting the sign of it in juniors, are apt to smile slightly and await, still smiling, the recovery. Dick, however, did not resort to any of the stock phrases for those with his grief, phrases that cause the elderly and worldly-wise who are not derisive to retain exterior gravity though inwardly amused. To none did he declare that Woman and Perfidy were to him synonymous.

Even his father and mother had no detailed knowledge of what had happened to him. All they knew was that for years he had been paying attention, as they put it, to a certain beauty of their circle and that she married some one else. His father suspected that the young man would come home drunk—and he did not. His mother was prepared to console him when he came to ease his heart to her—and he sought no mother's knee. Even in the warehouse, where none knew of his devotion, or idolatry, the change was read by most as due to some woman.

"*Cherchez la femme*," said Laurie when Johnny Leng commented on Dick's new and strange manner.

Leng took the phrase from a certain angle and speculated as to whether Dick had been physically afflicted in dalliance with some loose lady. Watty Yule was none so sure that a woman was responsible for the change. Religious revival was again in the city, and Watty wondered if here was evidence of "conversion."

When five months later the girl of Dick's devotion and distress bore a son to her husband, his father and mother felt that they understood a little more. His devotion to her had been marked. It had been very sincere. The quality of it was such

that his agony—thinking of how she must have been in the midst of her other affair while accepting his worshipful wooing—was less one of pained pride than of utter disappointment. His mother still wished that he would talk out his heart to her. Alone, with no outpouring of confidences, he slowly recovered—but was a new Dick.

This new Dick was, it struck her one day, as she meditated on him, finer than the former one. He had winnowed some good out of his experience. She felt suddenly that he was a man and that—odd thought for a mother toward her son—if she ever wanted to ease her heart of some trouble, she could tell it to him.

The ebullient gaiety that had once made Mr. Bolton class him (along with Bob Simson) as "a bit of a lad," he had lost. In time, the staff accepted the new Dick—almost forgot what he had been like when he was still Dickie. He had a manner of conscious balance, of studied self-control. Punctilious, courteous, he gave the impression to the discerning of reserving something of himself to himself. Where once he would have been vehement in expression of an opinion he but offered an opinion and was unruffled if it was brushed aside. The ways of others were their own, to be accepted, but not, necessarily, imitated. He was the reverse of those whose eyes blaze and whose spines stiffen in debate—not that ever he had been as Sandy Bain of old, or Johnny Leng of that present. Johnny's erroneous view of him was that he was "so smooth over everything that you can see nothing matters a damn to him!" Johnny loved violent debate. But enough, perhaps, of the new head of the Fancy Goods in those changing days.

In the Production department no new assistant was installed. With the departure of Braid so soon after that of Maxwell and of Sandy Bain, Robert Simson began to feel lost in his own warehouse. His morning peregrinations lacked their old zest. He had reached a time of life when he would like the sun to stand still upon Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon—and they did not. There were the new faces of juniors. Those who had been juniors when Middleton was alive were department heads. Only Huntley remained of those who had been boys when he was a boy learning the departments.

He wanted something to do; so, every morning, after the distribution of the letters, he marched through to the Production and Costs department and worked there with Laidlaw over the orders that had to be translated into weaving terms for the mills, and the correspondence with the yarn firms. The Simsons had never been slave-drivers. No one was overworked in the Cochrane Street warehouse. By staying there daily till lunch-time, and not pausing to chat (there was no great impulse to chat with Laidlaw), he did as much as was necessary to compensate for the lack, there, of Dick. Laidlaw was given an increase of salary and was happier so than with a new helper constantly in his den with him.

There were still opportunities for chats with Gilmore. Robert had grown accustomed to the presence of Maitland in the counting-house during these. It was not necessary for the clerk to be out for him to pause there and discuss this and that with the cashier—though their chats were not as lengthy as in former days. When they talked of the Russo-Japanese war, he recalled, as if it were but a day or two back, talking to Andy Middleton in the old Wincey Department on the Sino-Japanese war, and heard again Andy's voice: "Can ye tell me, Mr. Robert, what way they call it in the papers *Sino-Japanese* instead of *China-Japanese*?" When the Russo-Japanese war was of the past, as the Sino-Japanese war, they discussed the election in the old habitual Gilmore-cum-Mr. Robert manner.

"A man at the club," said Robert, "was saying to me that we are far too greatly prone to put our crosses on the ballot papers thinking solely of our own businesses, and that we ought to consider which party is better for the country as a whole."

"Aye, all very well, Mr. Robert. I see what he meant," remarked Gilmore. "But if he were to follow up that thought he'd decide to vote for the party that would be better for the world at large, and that would be—er—a kind of, shall I say *extensio ad absurdam*—or something like that, for I have no Latin."

John Simson's prophecy regarding what would befall in South Africa (where Wem had been sacrificed, according to him, by imperialistic policy), if the Liberals got in, was fulfilled the year after they came into power. But his heart seemed as little in that attempt at righting a wrong as it had been in the excitement of the election. John Simson, in fact, was not well. In such wild sport as the office-boy had seen him engaged upon a decade away he could no longer take part. Two of those who had joined in that caper, by the way, had gone the way of all—Mackenzie, the yarn merchant, and Renfield the saltpetre man.

It was not only because Tom Bruce was growing up that John Simson seemed to him no longer a vast man. He had lost weight. He was not well.

"The boss is a sick man," they said to one another in Cochrane Street.

Robert told Tom Huntley that he had at last managed to prevail upon his brother to consult a doctor. The doctor commanded rest. John's heart was in a bad state and there were complications.

One afternoon in the year 1908, when John had been away from the warehouse for two weeks, Mr. Robert was chatting with Laurie, up in the Dress Goods' gallery. Somehow the subject of music cropped up (it generally did in talks with Laurie) and——

"I know what I wanted to ask you, Mr. Robert, in fact to show you. That reminds me. Just a minute," and Laurie hunted in his desk and educed a concert programme. "Do you ever go to these?" he inquired.

"Yes, I do sometimes."

"Do you know who that is?" and Laurie pointed to a name: Edward Middleton.

"He's the leader of that concert orchestra. He's the new leader they've got," said Robert, uncomprehending, for the fact was printed clearly enough on the programme.

"Yes; but I mean do you know who he is?"

"Well—er—well," began Robert, with that innocent puzzled expression that characterised him at times.

"It's old Andy Middleton's son," said Laurie. "The lad of the——" and as he ended, in a flash of understanding, Robert ended for and with him, so that they both brought the word out together, "——vee-o-lon."

"Extraordinary!" said Robert. "Extraordinary. One way and another, you know, we have been in touch with talent here," and he laughed.

After all, in all the shuffling of the pack and in all the changes he was not lost. Laurie understood that laugh. He had been one of those in the group round Peter Pringle on that day of, "Gents, oh, gents, where has the little jigger gone?" They laughed together.

"Pringle," said Robert.

"Pringle," said Laurie.

"And Danny Boy," said Robert.

"Oh, you have seen Danny Boy, have you?"

"Rather," replied Robert. "Two or three times."

"Same here, Mr. Robert. You know my wife is much more keen on light opera and so on. I met her at our Amateur Operatic Society. But even she," and he laughed again, "had to go twice to see, and hear, Danny Boy."

"He's great," said Robert.

"Oh, he's a scream."

The counting-house door opened. Mr. Gilmore appeared with his arm rigid before him. He forgot to lower it till he was in mid-warehouse. It was still out-thrust when he stopped at the Fancy Goods counter.

"Have you see Mr. Robert?" he asked Dick.

"Up in the Dress Goods."

"You are wanted on the phone, Mr. Robert," said Gilmore, staring up at him with anxiety showing in his bulbous eyes.

The phone-call was from Mrs. John Simson. Her husband was much worse and the doctor.... Robert lost some words ... thought that he and the boys should be there. The distress in her voice obliterated half of what she was trying to tell him.

"I'll come at once," said Robert.

"Yes, do."

Into the warehouse he hurried to find his nephews, Gilmore and Maitland both looking after him, as the door was sighing shut, with expression of anxiety, because of what they had overheard. They were still looking one to another seriously, though saying nothing, when footsteps sounded in the corridor.

"He hasna his hat if that's him," said Maitland. The office door opened and Robert trod across to his room, muttering, "Forgot my hat." He got it and came out into the counting-house again.

"I will not likely be back to-day," he said. "My brother seems to be pretty bad. I—good-day," and he was gone.

It was only a week later that those passing in Cochrane Street saw a card on the door which read:

Owing to the death of
Mr. JOHN SIMSON
These premises are closed
to-day.

CHAPTER XXIX

A BUYER FROM SOUTH AFRICA

About a month after that loss for the house of Simson, a former member of the staff, who had been ten years away, was drawing near to the small island lying off the coast of Europe: Jack Corbett, from South Africa.

The irks of his adolescence were over. Gone from his face was that look of discontent in subjugation that Johnny Leng tried to dispel of yore with jocular tales. No longer, having done something, did he question himself if it was something forbidden. It cannot truthfully be said that he had ever been, in any deep sense of the word, homesick. Yet, as land was washed into shape upon the mists ahead, there was an excitement in his heart and he was suddenly eager to be back in the northern parts of the island.

It was not, as so often in the ballads of the Scot abroad, or of the returning Scot, of the peat-smoke and the burns and the bens that he thought most ardently. A road like a loose ribbon laid across purple hillside and disappearing into birch wood, a tinker's wife on a promontory of heather, a tinker's son turning cartwheels, a tinker with a soldering-iron in his hand he remembered, also a haystack, spectral and alone, in a meagre field and shaggy highland cattle, too, on an unfenced road that was but two wheel-ruts through heather, or circumventing quaking bog. But more ardently did he remember an interior in Cochrane Street, Glasgow, pillars of iron and pillars of cloth, and counters at which young men and middle-aged men worked—the staff at Simson's.

Having arrived in Glasgow, he first visited Ruth, who had been married in his absence, and was living in the city. She had always been his favourite. There she was with two babies, one that could run about and talk, and another one at the spluttering stage. She was entirely immersed in her new life. Although there was a nurse for the children the whole house was as a nursery, a proud and flaunting nursery. On a chair in the hallway lay what Jack thought, at first, was a table-napkin that had been thrown there by some one who had absently-mindedly carried it so far when making transit from dining-room to drawing-room. In the drawing-room were similar napkins. Suddenly he realised they were part of the baby's property. Everywhere the baby's property was in evidence, upstairs and downstairs. It struck him as amusing.

When next day he went out to his old home, the greeting by his mother and his two sisters was very moving. They called him again their dear Jackie. As dinner came near an end, when coffee was put before them there were also, to Jack's amazement, cigarettes. Into a holder coloured like a barber's pole Ethel inserted one, puffed practised gusts through mouth and nostrils. Recalling the days when smoking was regarded there as a disgusting weakness of males only, forbidden indoors, to be indulged in only in the garden or the toolhouse, he wondered, when his sister said, "Have a cigarette, Jack?" if she remembered those ancient days.

Apart from the smoking, however, life seemed to be much as of old there. Still, he gathered, rose frequent occasion for rancour, displeasure over others. Considerable part of the table-conversation was regarding some one who, though she had been seen out walking, had not called on the Corbetts.

"If she is well enough to get out for a walk," declared Rachel, "she is able to come and see us."

That being carried unanimously and indignantly, she added, "I told her so. I said, 'If you're fit to be out for a walk, you can call on us—and I'm too proud to call on you if you don't come to see us.' What do you think, Jack?"

"I don't know of whom you are talking," he replied, in soothing accents, "but, no doubt, if you went to see her during her illness, she'll call on you when she feels like it—feels fit."

Sudden grim silence and a stately elevation of heads caused him to hazard that they had not called on the lady of their annoyance during her illness. How queer it was to be back again to the niggling old life! But they all kissed him, not without emotion, when he left to return to his hotel. What a painful emotion was this! Was it possible, he asked himself, that he loved them and yet did not like them? In a mood of dejection he returned to the city's centre. He had business to attend to early in the morning.

A clear morning it was for that industrial city. Spaces of blue sky showed above George Square. He saw, crossing the square, the red tunic of some sort of guardian of the post office, a vivid splash in the portico. One or two motor-trucks hummed along among the horse-drawn lorries. Despite these trucks, evidence of a new era, there was a moment as of

mental aberration when he passed in at the entrance to Simson's. Ten years were cancelled for him.

The outer door was open because of the fine weather. Ahead of him, at the end of the corridor, was the door with the big panel of frosted glass in its upper part, crossed by three brass bars, already polished for that morning and brightly gleaming. In the midst of the frosted glass was the circle of clear glass to prevent collisions there of branging warehousemen, or load-bearing porters.

He raised a hand to thrust against these bars, ten years wiped out. Then, with a laugh to himself, he turned to left and stepped into the counting-house. Gilmore, beside his tall stool, was crooked as of old, over a ledger. Maitland was thrusting letters into a rack.

The cashier turned and looked at him, bowed, set down his pen and came in the old remembered manner stalking to the counter, raising his head inquiringly. Suddenly there was recognition.

"Well—well—well!" exclaimed Gilmore and, "Look who's here," said he to Maitland—who looked to see who was there and welcomed Corbett with no fuss, just a pleasant smile and a nod, as though a decade was no long time to him.

"So you're back again," he remarked.

Gilmore folded his arms, elbows upon the counter, and examined Jack, it seemed for a considerable time.

"Uh-hu!" he said, and again, "Uh-hu!" Then he asked, "What's brought you back?"

"I'm buying now."

Gilmore's eyebrows rose.

"Do you tell me so?" he said.

"Oh, yes."

Gilmore wagged his head.

"Well, well," he said. "Still with the same firm?"

"Yes. I've come instead of Mr. Vannan, this year."

"He's not dead, is he?"

"No, no. Hale and hearty."

"I just wondered. We've had changes here."

"Oh?"

"Aye, you'd be getting ready for your trip home when Mr. Simson was taken from us."

"Mr. Simson!"

"Aye. John. The boss. You'll find Mr. Robert in there, and Ian. Are you married?"

"No."

"Ian is engaged."

"Oh."

"Well, I'll tell them you're here."

Gilmore stepped to the door of the private room, tapped and opened. He thrust in his head.

"A buyer from South Africa," said he.

"Mr. Vannan?" asked Robert.

The cashier made no reply.

"Send him in," said Robert, "Come in, Mr. Vannan. Come——"

Jack Corbett entered the private room. How quaint! It was not for his month's salary he entered. Robert rose, staring, and Jack Corbett had full realisation that the world indeed had been rolling and the years passing, at sight of Ian there (though Gilmore had told him he was there), instead of the bearded boss.

Talk upon this and that being over, it was still the old warehouse into which he walked with Mr. Robert. There were the galleries. There were the counters. There were the pillars. There were the shafts of forenoon sunlight tilted between the glass roof and the floor.

"Do you know who this is?" Robert inquired of a tall and somewhat dandaical man at the central counter.

"Well, Jack," said Dick.

"Hello, Dick," said Jack.

The talk upon which they began was rendered difficult because of great bumping and clatter coming up from the old well. Mr. Robert had the manner as of apologising for it.

"We are putting in a new calendering plant below," he explained. "Ian, my nephew, thinks we should have one again, and I don't know but what he is right. The workmen are just installing it—with considerable din," he added.

He moved on beyond Robertson to go up into the old Flannelette and Wincey gallery with Jack.

"Let me see," he said, "was Andy alive when you left?"

"Yes, but I heard from Mr. Braid about his death."

"Oh, you did. We still have a few winceys, but the trade is practically——"

"Oh, yes," agreed Corbett in a definite man-of-the-world fashion that gave Robert a shock. "Winceys are moribund, moribund."

Robert looked sidewise at him as they mounted the steps.

"Doesn't seem to be anybody here," he said. "Leng is in charge of this department now. You remember Leng?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Jack, and laughed.

"We were rather troubled about not being able to give Yule the position, but—eager, you know, and willing, but——"

"Poor Watty. Decent little fellow."

Robert glanced again at the experienced man. Then suddenly from below—they had not heard his coming because of the clatter underfoot—appeared Watty Yule, tittuping up from mid-warehouse (not a bit changed, thought Corbett), same kind of tie, same sort of suit, same quaint smartness of carriage on observing a stranger with the boss. He walked quickly past them.

"He doesn't recognise you," remarked Robert.

Yes, there was no doubt about it—Watty was inefficient, thoroughly incompetent. He turned and bowed. He appeared to be waiting for an introduction.

"Yule remember me," said Corbett. "I got ahead of you there, Watty."

"Dear me! Dear, dear me!" exclaimed Watty. "Don't tell me it's Jack Corbett!"

"That's just what I am going to tell you," replied Jack, holding out his hand.

"Well, isn't this most astonishing?"

"Is Mr. Leng not in?" asked Robert.

"No, sir, he's out," said Yule. "On business," he added.

Robert frowned at him. What else but business would take him out?

"We'll walk on, then," he said. "Jack will be coming in to see us again, Yule."

"Thank you, sir."

They passed down from that gallery, and Laurie came running down the stairs on the other side to grab Corbett's hand.

"Just over on a visit?" he inquired.

"Yes, just a little visit. I'll be going back soon."

"You know, I'm dreadfully ashamed of myself, Jack, for not replying to your last letter," said Laurie.

"Last letters, you mean," Jack told him, "but I bear you no grudge." And then he inquired almost plaintively, "Are none of the old bosses here still?"

Robert raised an arm as though to place a hand upon his shoulder, and then quickly became reserved, unemotional.

"We'll go into the Shirtings," he said for reply.

They took the tangent across the warehouse in between the neat stacks. From the doorway of the Shirtings came voices that were new to Corbett, one calling and one responding in the old antiphony. Two young men, one doing gymnastics upon a pile of shirtings, and another bent over a table on which lay order forms, glanced round at their coming and continued.

"Mr. Huntley here?" asked Robert.

"In his office, sir."

Round the corner of a stack of shirtings Jack saw again that small office, and sitting on a stool within, wearing loosely a well-pressed suit as always he wore his clothes, bowler hat on the back of his head, Mr. Huntley—whom all the boys had always liked. His head turned as they drew near. He did not lay down his pen. He threw it on the desk. He slipped his haunch off the tilted stool. He did not say anything. He advanced chuckling. He held out a hand. His long, bony fingers crushed Jack's knuckles. When that painful grip was fully accomplished he laid his left hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"Quite the man, eh?" he remarked, turning to Mr. Robert.

He took his hand from Jack's shoulder and punched him on the chest, chuckled again, then was solemn.

"What brings you here?" he asked.

Jack took a pleasure in springing it upon him.

"I'm buying," he answered very definitely.

Huntley nodded to him.

"If you're buying," he said, "it is time I was retiring. What are you buying? Shirtings?"

"Oh, yes," replied Jack, laughing.

"Well, we have some of the best shirtings in Glasgow here. Who are you buying for?"

"Same house. Mr. Vannan isn't coming this year. He's taking things rather easier."

"You'd think a sea-voyage would be fine for him," said Huntley.

"He tells me," said Jack, "that he has made that trip so many times that he's lost count."

Robert tapped him on the shoulder.

"I'll leave you to have a chat with Mr. Huntley," he murmured. "Come into my room when you've finished."

"Who are still here?" asked Jack when the boss had gone, but at that moment Johnny Leng came hurriedly in, and with profanity welcomed him.

"Watty told me you were here," he cried out. "Hoo's a' wi' ye?"

"Oh, fine."

"It seems you went only yesterday. Did you get all my letters?"

"Did I get all your letters? I got one the first year I was out."

"Aye, that was all, I'm afraid," admitted Leng. "Are you married yet?"

"No. Are you?"

"No."

Not that Johnny Leng was exactly celibate. More precisely might it be said that, despite summer holiday escapades and others, he had managed to remain uncompromised.

"Laurie is. He's a father now. Did you ever notice how some of the married men are jealous of the bachelors? They're aye telling us we should get married. They hate to see us free and them tied up for good. Laurie will be at you, Jack, telling you to get married."

Tom Huntley turned aside and felt the quality of a piece of shirting that lay on the counter, ran a hand over it, expressionless.

"I'll see you again, then, before you go," said Leng.

"Oh, yes, yes."

"I'll run, then. I just came in when Watty telt me you were here to give ye the welcome."

"You haven't been downstairs yet, have you?" asked Huntley when Leng had gone.

"No."

"Pringle is still there—and Willie Scott's there, too."

"I must go down and see them."

"I'll come down wi' ye."

The years crumbled indeed as they left the Shirtings to cross the warehouse again, for Tom Huntley, with a quick movement, threw one side of his jacket backward, and laying a palm on the small of his back, walked loosely by Corbett's side. The old movement! The old mannerism! He pulled open the door into the despatching and receiving room.

"Go ahead," he directed.

The remembered smell of the place! The blown grain from the nosebags of horses in the court! And a new smell, the smell of petrol.

They descended side by side and stepped off smartly together into that indentation that young Bob had noticed on his return. The packing-press, the red-painted pillars, the fireplace, the long counter, worn, but glowing with a light from the strip of barred and frosted glass on the pavement level: all was as of old.

Pringle and Willie Scott were leaning over the counter together, turning the pages of an oblong book in which were kept

the records of their shipments. They both turned and looked at Huntley as he stopped beside them with the stranger. They thought at the moment that the stranger was one who had something to do with the men who were putting in the new calendering-plant, and that the head of the Shirtings was just affably showing him round the premises.

Then a light of recognition flashed in Peter's eyes. He held out his hand, he took Jack's and crushed it in his, working the arm up and down. Corbett bent forward. In a very thin whisper, he began, "Ma wee dug's deid, Ma puir wee thing...."

"Well, I'm damned! It's Jack Corbett!" ejaculated Willie Scott.

"Yes," said Huntley. "Yes. We have the whispering singing still, Jack. He hasna lost the gift. But we have new songs now. Here, that reminds me: Did ye ken that Danny has gone on the music-hall stage?"

"Did—I—ken?" echoed Corbett. "Did I not see him in Durban? Brought the house down. Specialised on his Scots stuff there. Brought the house down. Oh, wasn't he—isn't he—good!"

"Aye, he's certainly good."

"How long are ye hame for?" asked Pringle.

"A week or two."

"You're no' going to bide in Scotland?"

"No, no; I'll be going back."

"Goad, I wouldna like to leave it for ever," vowed Peter. "You must find changes here already."

"Yes, I've seen lots."

"Underground railway," Huntley remarked.

"And all the electric-cars," said Peter.

"Aye, and all the wee *Cluthas* gone off the river," said Willie.

"Are the *Cluthas* gone?" asked Jack.

"Oh, you can see a couple of them yet," Willie Scott told him, "but they're not for passengers. What they call the Clyde Trust owns them now—something to do with seeing that the boats dock properly, and all that sort of thing, keeping an eye on the river. It was a wonderful service—a penny all the way or any distance. I mind all the stops still: Victoria Brig, Glasgow Brig, Springfield Lane, Finnieston, Highland Lane, Govan, Meadowside, Sawmill Road, Linthouse, Whiteinch."

"Quite an auld ballad, that," declared Mr. Huntley, and looked at his watch. "Well, you'll be seeing him again," he promised them. "I'm taking him away now. I think it's about time you went up, Jack. It's getting near lunch-time, and Mr. Robert asked you to look in there, you know."

Thus it was that the new buyer from South Africa—feeling that one never knew what the future held—lunched with Robert Simson at his club, Ian accompanying them.

CHAPTER XXX

DANNY FOR CONSOLATION

Hardly could Jack Corbett have been back in Durban when George Laidlaw tendered his resignation.

Robert Simson accepted it with placidity, and if he felt astonishment gave no evidence of that. Those who were spoken of as the juniors in the days when Tommy Bruce, as office-boy, hurried out to call boss and billiard-players back to Cochrane Street, were growing up. Laidlaw was the least "junior" there, older by a year or two than Leng and Laurie.

He triumphed sufficiently over his notorious tendency to secrecy to explain that he was going to start up in business for himself—with a partner. Robert expressed formal regret at having to lose him, and expressed also the belief (with what air of confidence he could muster) that he was sure the whole staff would miss him. He had never cared for Laidlaw. Brought into closer contact with him after Dick Robertson had gone into the departments, he had tried his best to like the man, and failed.

News of the resignation he communicated to Gilmore when Maitland was out.

"Do—you—tell—me—so?" said the cashier. He had to think it over for some moments before saying more, and then—"Well," he remarked, "this is the second astonishment from him. I might say the third—marriage, offspring, and starting up in business for himself. Between ourselves, Mr. Robert, I canna understand him getting either a wife or a business partner, and I feel," he added, "that it is a calamity that he has a bairn. Now that he's leaving us, I can say this: I have never known anybody so dour."

Robert made no response, facial or vocal, to that.

"Who will you have to take his place?" asked Gilmore.

"We'll wait till he's gone, I think. I've been doing the books with him recently, you know. You and Maitland both understand the handling of them."

Mr. Gilmore's eyes popped as with alarm. He might be eager enough on occasion, fair occasion, to indicate ways of cutting down expenses, but he and Maitland had enough to do without taking over charge of the production books that Laidlaw looked after. He was relieved by Mr. Robert's next speech.

"I think Tom Bruce might go in there. He's quick. He'll get on to it all in no time."

For some reason neither Robert nor Gilmore mentioned to any member of the staff that Laidlaw was leaving—their silence decreed, perhaps, in concession to Laidlaw's secretiveness. It was, at any rate, by that mutual silence, left to him to inform his fellows in the warehouse, and he did not do so till the day of his departure—the hour, the moment of his departure in fact.

On his last day there he came out of his den shortly before closing-time and slouched up to the Flannelettes.

"Is Mr. Leng not in?" he asked a new junior, who helped Watty there.

"He's gone for the day. Is it important?"

"No," said Laidlaw.

He walked down from the Flannelette gallery and up to the Dress Goods where Laurie was preparing to leave.

"Good-bye, Laurie," he said.

"What—er—I mean what do you mean?"

"I'm leaving to-day. Good-bye."

"Leaving?" repeated Laurie, holding out his hand.

"Yes."

Laidlaw turned and descended to the main-deck again, ignored Dick Robertson, slouched into the Shirtings. The assistants there were down in the basement. Tom Huntley was alone.

"I've just come to say good-bye," said George Laidlaw.

"What's the joke?" asked Huntley.

"No joke. I'm leaving."

"Why so sudden?"

"It's not sudden. I resigned a month ago."

Huntley was apparently unable to grasp that. He took off his hat. He put it carefully on his desk. He scratched his head at the back where there was a bald spot the circumference of a florin-piece.

"But—but, nobody knew! There's been no——" he was about to say there had been no talk of a presentation, and hesitated.

Laidlaw held out his hand, and Huntley took it dejectedly. It seemed to him all wrong that a man should leave the firm so, without a presentation—any man. There was no precedent for it. Even one who was not popular should have a presentation after years of acquaintanceship over business.

"I'm starting up for myself—with a partner," Laidlaw allowed himself to explain, perhaps in token of gratitude for Huntley's obvious upset.

"Oh. Oh, well, I wish you the best. Soft-goods, of course?"

"Carpets."

"Carpets!"

"Yes—carpets."

"Well, have you—er—have you any experience of carpets?"

"No. Good-bye, Huntley," and he held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Laidlaw," said Huntley and, perturbed by the thought that this departure was painfully unremarked, put his left hand on Laidlaw's shoulder. "Good-bye—and the best of luck."

The fellow was leaving. Tom walked to the Shirtings entrance beside him, clapped his shoulder there again, and there remained, hatless, while the swing door at the corridor's end flick-flicked to a standstill.

Juniors moved lively, to and fro, between the basement and the departments, the week's work done, and a month ended also, their pay in their pockets. They marched buoyantly out. They wondered why the elderly boss of the Shirtings was standing in his doorway making faces and gazing blindly before him.

"Not even an umbrella," he muttered.

He went into the counting-house. Gilmore was alone. Maitland had evidently gone for the day, for his hat was not on its peg. Huntley stared at the cashier, speechless.

"Aye, even so," Gilmore said, understanding that stare. "No suit-case. No razors. No hair-brushes. Nothing. Not a thing! Well, it's his own fault."

"Did he say good-bye to you?"

"Yes; when he came in for his cheque he said good-bye to Mr. Robert and young Ian, and then said to me, 'I may as well shake hands with you while I'm here.'"

"Did you know he was going before then?"

"Yes. I've known since he gave his resignation."

"You did not tell anybody."

"No—I left it to him. I thought it might perhaps be no more our business than his marriage."

"I see. Still, it does seem a pity that a fellow should leave the place for ever and——" he ended there, shaking his head, puckering his lips.

"I suppose so, but he's the dourest man I ever knew."

"I know. But, dammit, not even a walking-stick!" Then he did chuckle, though it was a melancholy chuckle.

When Tom Huntley retired, in the autumn of that year, there was a presentation ceremony. By request of Gilmore—at the joint requests of Robertson, Laurie, and Leng in the warehouse departments, and Bruce in Productions—Mr. Robert officiated. On Maxwell's retirement there had been speeches entirely cheerful, without strain, by Gilmore and Bain, Braid and John Simson, there on that occasion to make the presentation. For Maxwell, as for Henry Braid later, the parting gift had been a hunter's watch, inscribed with the dates of the recipient's service and his monogram. The farewell to Sandy Bain had been hilarious, Sandy—chiefly—making it so. Because of the villa, he had been given a mantel-clock, a bronze one—for his wedding clock, it was recalled, had been of the other sort. John had participated in that ceremony also. Though Braid had been a member of staff for fewer years than either of these, again had John conducted the rituals—cheerful rituals.

How he was to bring gaiety into a valedictory speech over Tom Huntley, Robert Simson could not think. Pondering over what to say, he discovered that he had known Huntley for much more than a quarter of a century. Musing so, he called himself to order sharply. "Good heavens!" he ejaculated. "I must not make it a funeral oration!" And he did not. He made all as merry as a wedding presentation. The gift, by decision of the staff, was a smoker's cabinet.

They could not hold this man by force. He said he was old, but if they tried to restrain him he would show his strength—and Robert said he would not like to wrestle with him. Thirty years ago he had wrestled with him, he might say, and had been thrown. He would be thrown again. Mr. Huntley was a fraud. He was only lazy, not getting old. He wanted to go and loaf and smoke—hence this gift, pandering to a lazy whim. That was how Robert's speech went; it was all nonsense, conveyed nothing of what he felt—unless, perhaps, in that aside about having once wrestled with the old fraud, thirty years ago.

The departure of Huntley left Mr. Robert subdued. Tom was the last of them all out there who had ever played the gummy-backed envelope trick on him, and on whom he had played it. The warehouse was a changed place. He became more markedly solicitous about Gilmore's health. It worried him to hear the cashier's bronchial cough beginning sooner than usual that year.

"Yes, I seem to have my winter cough, as the doctor calls it, almost all the year round now," Gilmore admitted.

On one of these foggy days in Glasgow—a day of pea-soup hue—when detonators went off constantly on the tangle of railway lines coming in to the various city termini, and when, crossing Glasgow Bridge, one could hear, faintly borne from down-river, the lowing of steamer sirens, Robert felt somewhat troubled on going into the office because of a little incident.

"I'm afraid we'll need a light," observed Gilmore. He felt in a jacket-pocket, clapped another, and hearing the rattle of a match-box drew it forth. Then, with a "Tut-tut!" of annoyance at himself, he stepped to the wall and switched on the electric light.

Was it age or absent-mindedness? The cashier, Robert considered, was many years his senior. He had never shown any marked absent-mindedness apart from that quaint way he had, when going into the warehouse, after having pushed the door open, of forgetting to drop his hand and advancing as though giving the ancient Roman salutation to the staff there.

Sooner or later it would come to it, Robert realised: Gilmore would retire. Man of figures that he was, he had made some fairly good investments with his savings.

Mr. Robert, as a matter of fact, was sitting in his room rather lugubrious one day, meditating on that matter when there came the two gentle taps he knew so well that he called, "Come in, Mr. Gilmore." Mr. Gilmore entered and closed the door. Robert looked at his face. So it was coming!

"That second porter, Mr. Robert," began Gilmore, "would like to see you. He has come up to give his resignation."

"Oh," said Robert, and smiled cheerfully.

His apparent pleasure at the news astonished the cashier.

"He said he would like to see you personally to give it, sir."

"Surely, surely. Ask him to come in."

Willie Scott had put on a collar and tie for that day.

"Mr. Gilmore has telt you, sir," he said, "but I thought I would just like to give it you myself, personal, for I've been in your employment a long while now, sir."

"Yes, quite a long time, Scott." He was puzzled as to what the man might be going to do. "So you're—you're—are you finding the loads too heavy nowadays?"

"Oh, no, sir. I'm starting a wee shop."

"A shop!"

"Yes, sir. I've always had the notion to be my own master. No offence, sir, you know. Not that I haven't been happy here. No offence, sir."

"No, no, I quite understand that, Scott. What are you starting up in?"

"Selling newspapers, sir. It's a wee, narrow kind of a place, just a narrow slit of a shop, but I'll have all the evening papers, and the morning papers, and the weekly papers, and I'm making arrangements to have tobacco and cigarettes as well. And my boss downstairs has made a suggestion to me to have a spayciality, so that folk would ken the shop by the spayciality."

"And what is this speciality to be?" asked Robert.

"Puzzles. I'm going to have puzzles. Ye ken they wire puzzles."

"Wire puzzles?" inquired Robert, puzzled.

"Aye, you know, sir. You must have seen the bairns playing with them. Some of them are like a couple of wee toasters fastened together."

"Oh, I know, I know. We used to play with them when we were boys at school. And some like very involved key-rings."

"That's the things, sir. And I'll have bools and peeries. But the rale spayciality will be books on conjuring and legerdemain. That was Peter Pringle's idea and I think it's a good one."

"Yes, I think it's very good indeed and I wish you every success. Where is your shop going to be?"

"Down in Argyle Street. They're making a lot of alterations there, taking out an auld flight of stairs, narrow stairs, at one place, and putting in new broad stairs close by. This shop of mines runs back quite a good way, but it's just the breadth of where the auld stairs went up."

Stretching out an arm on either side, and crooking his wrists, he made small slicing motions in air with his fingers to indicate the approximate breadth of his shop.

"I see," said Robert. "I believe I know the place."

He did not know all about the place. He did not know that in the year when this record opened, this narrative of the staff

at Simson's, Tommy Bruce—office-boy then—sent out by Maxwell upon an emergency call, had dashed up these stairs, pushed open a door to the sound of clicking billiard balls, and ordered back to business Dick Robertson, Bob Simson, Jack Corbett and Johnny Leng. But he knew enough of his staff—he had them enough in his heart—to feel depressed even at the departure of one whose life was lived chiefly below-stairs, one who would stand aside, albeit with a load upon his shoulder, on seeing him coming, to give him passageway.

When the inevitable befell and Gilmore—with whom he had discussed many matters, from international boat-races to international wars—retired, he was glad that an old member of the staff was again appearing in Glasgow. After dinner, on the evening of the day when the cashier handed in his resignation, Robert Simson hied him off to the Gaiety to see Danny Boy once again.

CHAPTER XXXI

FULL CIRCLE

We began in the eighteen-nineties, and that last chapter was 1908. We know that, because of an entry in Robert's handwriting in the Employee's Book opposite Gilmore's name: "Retired—1908." And here is 1909, as we know from the conversation of Ian and Bob, the grandsons of the first John Simson, Manufacturer, Cochrane Street, across the table in the private room there.

Before settling down fairly to concentrate on business, they were talking of how the English Channel had been successfully flown in an aeroplane.

"Yes, it's quite an achievement," concluded Bob.

"Yes, indeed," agreed John the Third. (He had, by the way, ceased to sign his letters *Ian*, had returned to the use of his Christian name, signing them *John*.) "Well, business, business—must get to business."

On the table before him lay a row of envelopes, all neatly slit open in readiness for his attention. That was the first duty of the day for the office-boy—slitting the envelopes. When Mr. Gilmore left, and Maitland took a right-about turn and four strides across the counting-house to sit on the vacated-stool, a new invoice-clerk came to sit on Maitland's. An office-boy was then again installed—a youthful relative of the Mackenzies. (Mr. Mackenzie may have been forgotten. He was one of the group of elders that a former office-boy came upon one day, in hilarious relaxation, in a room of the dignified Exchange.) His people wanted him "to learn soft-goods." He was beginning, in the more ancient way, in the counting-house, in charge of the paper-cutter, the stamps, and the petty-cash.

As Ian—John—withdrew letter by letter he bulged open the envelopes to make sure they contained no other enclosures, then crushed them in his fist and dropped them into the waste-paper basket. In due course, as of old, four stacks of correspondence stood side by side on mid-table and, a little apart, were two lesser ones. They represented the day's work in Simson's, Cochrane Street. These were the letters for Mr. Robertson, Mr. Laurie, Mr. Leng, Mr. Nairn, Mr. Bruce, and Mr. Maitland.

"I think that's all right," said John the Third.

"Bring them in?" inquired brother Robert. John nodded.

Bob jabbed a finger against a small bell-push in the wall and there was a sound in the counting-house as of a sudden bee. The door opened and the office-boy stepped smartly in.

"We're ready," said John Simson.

"Yes, sir," answered the boy, grinning and bowing.

Ian and Bob looked one to the other when that ex-schoolboy had gone, looked one to the other, and quietly chortled.

"That face always makes me smile," said John.

"Same here," replied Robert. "Funny to think that in years to come he'll be an important Glasgow body perhaps. The other day I was coming along from the club and I saw him in Ingram Street with two of his young friends, just such others. They were amusing themselves by shouting "Hie!" after men ahead of them on the pavement and then all turning their heads and looking back as if the shout had come from somebody behind them. One of these days some crusty person will nab our office-boy and give him a thick ear. I noticed that he dropped one friend at Knox's and the other cut across into Moir's old place in Glassford Street—soft-goods' manufacturers all," and he laughed.

"Damned if I don't like the warehouses," declared John.

"Same here."

"Yes, they are——" a knock sounded, interrupting him. "Come in!"

The first of the department-heads had arrived. The old life was still going on with only the change of a bell-push and an electric-light-switch from the life that John the Second had known, and only the change of a bell-push, an electric-light-switch and a telephone from the life that John the First had known there.

The departmental letters having been discussed and distributed, Robert picked up the two remaining sheaves and went into the counting-house.

"For you, Maitland," said he, dropping one sheaf on the cashier's desk, and went on his way through the warehouse to discuss the other with Bruce.

That done, he loitered slowly back. He glanced down the well and saw the calender-man and the prentice calender-boy at work over the new plant that his brother had decided to establish shortly after he left the departments and went into the private room to help Uncle Robert there.

With Laurie he had a little talk upon more than business, up in the gallery facing the one in which his uncle used to listen to Andy Middleton talking of wars and of Lennox's cough—of Robert Owen, his social ideals and disappointments, of the pamphlets of Henry George, of Free Trade and Protection, of how the lad was progressing with his *vee-o-lon*.

Laurie had come on a wonderful idea when attending a cinema-exhibition the night before.

"You know, Mr. Robert," said he, "I got a queer thought there. Of course the cinema is not exactly new. I can remember when we had the bioscope in between turns at the music-halls. They had one the last time I went to see Danny Boy. But these all-picture houses give me a wonderful idea."

"And what is it, Arthur?"

"If only there could be some way of—well—the only way I can describe it is of having moving voices as well as moving pictures. I don't mean just gramophones playing while a film is being run off. They wouldn't fit. I mean some vocal equivalent to the moving picture, a vocal accompaniment, synchronising. As the picture is run off, the voices would run off." He waved a hand in happy descriptive undulations before him.

"That's quite an idea," said Bob.

"We could have all the musical comedies at the cinema-house! Think of it—singing pictures!"

"It would be wonderful," replied Robert, laughing at Laurie's infectious enthusiasm over the notion, and moved on.

Down on the main-deck he delayed a while, watching Robertson and his assistants at the long counter. He smiled, a private smile, remembering days on which—"learning the business"—he had found opportunities to steal an hour from business for billiards with Robertson. Dick, thought he, was a good man for entertaining. He had, markedly, the quality known as poise. It was one that Bob admired and one that, in his own opinion of himself, he lacked. During the distant days of his amusing exile in Assiniboia (long and long ago they seemed) he had met men of whom Robertson, the grown man, reminded him. Odd, he considered, watching the general manager at work, that this well-groomed boss of the Fancy Goods should recall to his mind a long, lean, unruffled horse-breaker of the prairies. Assiniboia, as a name of a Canadian province, existed no longer. He had seen in a paper that *Assiniboia* had been wiped out on the maps, and *South Saskatchewan* substituted. It seemed fitting. That was of the past. He had always liked Robertson—from the days when they had been together in that room where cheerful Tom Bruce had succeeded cheerless George Laidlaw.

He strolled up into the Flannelettes to chat with Johnny Leng. What a vulgar little fellow Mr. Leng was! Not that vulgarity was any impediment, for Robert, to liking him. Johnny had at last got married and was immensely conscious of the cleverness of his small son, aged five months. He had to give Mr. Robert examples of that cleverness. When opportunity came for a word on matters apart from business, Mr. Leng of the Flannelettes was clearly more impressed that morning by the brilliance of his baby than by Bleriot's cross-Channel flight.

Descending the steps at that gallery's end, where once upon a time, as he could recall, there had been a few stacks of winceys for response to occasional requests, the junior partner walked into the Shirtings.

Nairn was very busy. The entrance of Bob apparently bothered him, confused him. A good man, Nairn, but highly strung and prone to spend more nervous energy over a task than most would spend—or so it always seemed to Robert. Certain

similarities in disposition he had noticed in Nairn of Shirtings and Bruce of Production, both eager of nature, though Bruce would often see only the comic side of an occasion when Nairn would see the pathetic as well. The head packer, Peter Pringle, and the two porters—they had two again—were all there with their sheets spread on the floor, building up loads of shirtings to swing to their shoulders and carry downstairs. He just glanced in and departed, realising that he fussed them by his presence. When he returned to the private room John was getting ready to go out.

"There you are," said he. "I think I'd better push off. I've one of my bally meetings to attend to before lunch. Taking part in civic affairs gnaws into a fellow's time."

"Righto!"

John the Third walked through the office.

"I've got a meeting," he said to Maitland, "and I won't be able to get back until after lunch. I expect my wife to call in for me this afternoon. If she should by any chance get here before I come you might ask her to make herself comfortable and at home in there."

"Very good, Mr. Simson."

Maitland, the cashier, wanted to see Robert about some office work, and, when discussion of that was satisfactorily over, he waited a moment.

"How is your Uncle Robert, sir?" he inquired.

"Wonderful, Maitland, thank you, wonderful. I had dinner with him last night. I don't think he's fretting much under the doctor's orders to abstain from all but occasional visits in here when he's homesick for the place. It is always, nevertheless, 'Well, how's the wareus?' when I see him. But he's all right. He's very happy over a new picture he's just bought—by a Glasgow man. Yes, he's fine."

"That's splendid, that's fine," Maitland echoed. "Thank you, I'll attend to this, Mr. Robert." And he closed the door.

Robert looked at his watch: A quarter to twelve. Everything was going well. No cogs were slipping. He drew open a drawer in which he kept his cigarettes and, having lit one, he absently took out the old *Employee's Book* that also lived in that drawer.

He ran a finger across the label, on which was written in a slightly faded Italianate script, *Employees*. Even the corners of the label were not sticking up, flush and firm to the cover. Perhaps it had not been gummed on again since the days of his grandfather. Good gum they always had in the office and in the warehouse. He smiled, remembering some of the uses to which gum had been put at times when he was a youngster in the departments. He supposed the new youngsters out there would still be playing the old tricks, considering what he had seen of the office-boy's idea of fun in Ingram Street.

He turned the pages, noted the various handwritings. There was an alteration of address here and there. These were usually in Gilmore's calligraphy. (Most methodical man, old Gilmore had been. His Uncle Robert thought the world of him.) There was an alteration, for example, opposite Peter Pringle's name. So the packer had moved once upon a time from the region by Gallowgate to Govanhill. He wondered if the old cashier had ever perused these Remarks. If he had—no matter. As his father had often said, Mr. Gilmore was very much of a confidential servant. Maitland, he considered, was of the same type. He would not mind letting Maitland know his private affairs. Good man, Maitland. Somehow always made him think of a farmer in his Sunday best, and very clean-shaven for the day, who had drifted into town.

He turned the pages of the book. In his grand-father's writing, the writing of his earlier period (for John the First's handwriting had changed with the years and with rheumatism in his joints) he read of Alexander Bain: "Very eager. Liked by buyers. Almost impudent, but amusing. Difficult to tell when he has had a drink or not. Seems slightly inebriated all the time, even when inconceivable he has had liquor." He remembered Sandy Bain well. Memory of him brought a smile.

Walter Fenwick, calender-man—name and address were in Gilmore's writing. In his uncle's hand was this statement: "Died. One of the finest men it has ever been my privilege to meet. R.S." That name had been in the papers again recently, the case of Walter Fenwick recalled because of another of the same sort that was being discussed in the correspondence columns of the morning and evening papers. He remembered how Fenwick's pitiable story had disturbed

his mother. Thinking of her, he wondered if ever she heard the full reason for his banishment for a while, as small boys are ordered to stand in a corner facing the wall. And so he was led to thoughts of that gay damsel dubbed "baggage" by his father. Where was she now? How old, if alive, would she be? She was, he fancied, older than he by a year or two. He hoped life had not been too dismal for her. But she was of the past, like Assiniboia.

This book in his hand, he considered, was almost in a way like the fabled Book of the Day of Judgment. The warehouse in Cochrane Street was the world in little. People came and passed. Of some the book observed that they had been married on a certain day. Of some it made a comment on character. It remarked "retired" or "drowned" or "died," and gave the date, "went to Arizona," "went to South Africa," or "went to New Zealand." They came—and they went.

What was this in the column opposite Walter Yule? "Discharged"—"Reinstated." When had that happened? Why, yes, it was while he was away. His brother had told him about it. Dad had been ragged then. Poor Watty! A decent little fellow, but hardly to be entrusted with charge of a department. Smiling, he uncapped his pen and wrote his first remark in the book: "Married." For Watty Yule had at last married his girl of the conversazione. The date—the day's date—of the wedding Bob could not remember. Month and year would suffice. How radiantly, how cherubically Watty had received, with the best wishes of all the staff at Simson's, Clock B, the clock of the dancing cherubs! Yes, a very decent little fellow, though not highly competent; but he did not write that remark in the book—just, "Married," and the month and year.

The only names in that book of those who still remained in the warehouse from the day when we first opened the door and took the odour of soft-goods into our lungs were: Richard Robertson, Arthur Laurie, John Leng, Norman Nairn, Peter Pringle, Walter Yule, Thomas Bruce, Duncan Maitland.

As Robert pored over the pages a sound that had been increasing in volume outside was intensified so greatly that it intruded on his meditation. It broke at first into his reverie as the sound of a homing tide. He put the book down and gave ear.

There were the honkings of cars, the clash and tread of horses, but the sound that was growing more marked was of footsteps. Just the thickness of the glass away, hidden by the lower green of it, people were passing, quick-stepping most of them, a few loitering. He glanced at his watch. Ten minutes past twelve. That sound was of the warehousemen of these parts of the city going to lunch, free for an hour.

Out in the office Maitland had paused over his ledgers and, leaning sidewise against his high desk, was looking out, looking up over the green strip at the warehouse fronts across the street. Along a cornice there was a row of the city pigeons. They looked like diminutive gargoyles. Suddenly in a unanimous movement they dropped, they swooped, opening their wings, and swerved down towards the street, a swift dazzle of blue.

Maitland, his mouth slightly open, tap-tapped a tune with the handle of his pen upon his teeth, thinking, or dreaming. The city pigeons he loved, hardly knowing why. Never would he have told any one that he liked to see them. The crumbs from his lunch-sandwiches he usually strewed out in the back court for them and for the sparrows.

He heard the smack of a drawer being shut in the private room and the creak of a chair in there as the junior partner rose. He ceased tapping the nameless tune upon his teeth and turned back to his tomes.

Mr. Robert stepped into the office with his hat on.

"It's not a bad day," he remarked, pausing there.

"A fine day," Maitland agreed.

"Uh-huh. Well——" Robert stepped to the door. "I'll be back after lunch," he said.

"Very good, Mr. Robert."

THE END

Transcriber's Note

Printer's punctuation errors corrected.

Printer's spelling errors addressed.

Page 13 'intrument' to 'instrument'
'the instrument of his son's devotion'

Page 111 'litle' to 'little'
'gave that little bow of his'

Page 123 Duplicate 'he' removed.
'Danny decided he must keep moving.'

Page 164 'asistants' to 'assistants'
'and his two assistants'

Page 164 'jookery-pockery' to 'jookery-pokery'
Research shows 'pokery' to be the most common spelling'

Page 277 'ignominous' to 'ignominious'
'humiliating, ignominious occasion.'

Page 315 'caligraphy' to 'calligraphy'
'in Gilmore's calligraphy'

Several instances of 'veeolon' altered to agree with the
more common 'vee-o-lon'.

[End of *The Staff at Simson's* by Frederick Niven]