

# THE PORTENT.

A Story of the Inner Vision of the Highlanders Commonly Called the Second Sight.

By GEORGE MACDONALD.

## CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

I had not noticed till now, that the storm had risen to a very ecstasy of fury.

"They say, likewise, that the lady's hair is still growing; for, every time they see her, it is longer than before; and that now such is its length and the deonting speed of the hoarse, that it floats and streams out behind like one of those curved clouds, like a comet's tail, far up in the sky; only the cloud is white, and the hair dark as night. And they say it will go on growing till the Last Day, when the horse will fall and her hair will gather in; and the horse will fall, and the hair will twist, and twine, and wreath itself like a mist of throats about him, and bind him, and everything, but her. Then the body will rise, within it, face to face with him, animated by a fiend who, twining her arms around him, will drag him down to the bottomless pit.

"He need not think to take me, wizard as he is, with his disguise. I can see through them all. Duncan, my dear, when you suspect anything do not be too incredulous. This human demon is, of course, a wizard still, and knows how to make himself, as well as anything he touches, take quite a different appearance from the real one; only every appearance must bear some resemblance, however distant, to the natural form. What he is after, now, of course, I cannot tell; but you must keep a bold heart, and a firm and wary foot, as you go home to-night."

I showed some surprise. I do not doubt; and, perhaps, some fear as well; but I only said: "How do you know this, Margaret?"

"I can hardly tell you," she replied; "but I do know him. I think he hates me. Often, of a wild night, when there is moonlight enough by fits, I see him tearing around this little valley, just on the top edge—all round; the lady's hair and the horse's mane and tail driving far behind, and mingling, vaporous, with the snowy clouds. About he goes, in wild careering gallop, now lost as the moon goes in, then visible far around when she looks out again—an airy, pale-gray specter, which few eyes but mine could see; for, as far as I am aware, no one of the family but myself has ever possessed the double gift of seeing and hearing both. In this case I hear no sound, except now and then a clank from the broken shoe. But I did not mean to tell you that I had ever seen him. I am not a bit afraid of him. He cannot do more than he may. His power is limited; else ill enough would he work, the miscreant."

"But," said I, "what has all this, terrible as it is, to do with the fright you took at my telling you that I had heard the sound of the broken shoe? Surely you are not afraid of only a storm?"

"No, my boy; I fear no storm. But the fact is that the sound is seldom heard, and never, as far as I know, by any of the blood of that wicked man, without betokening some ill to one of the family, and most probably to the one who hears it—but I am not quite sure about that. Only some evil it does portend, although a long time may elapse before it shows itself; and I have a hope it may mean some one else than you."

"Do not wish that," I replied, "I know no one better able to bear it than I am; and I hope, whatever it may be, that I only shall have to meet it. It must surely be something serious to be so foretold; it can hardly be connected with my disappointment in being compelled to be a pedagogue instead of a soldier."

"Do not trouble yourself about that, Duncan," replied she. "A soldier you must be. The same day you told me of the clank of the broken horseshoe, I saw you return wounded from battle, and fall fainting from your horse in the street of a great city—only fainting, thank God! But I have particular reasons for being uneasy at your hearing that boddy sound. Can you tell me the day and hour of your birth?"

"No," I replied, "it seems very odd when I think of it, but I really do not know even the day."

"Nor anyone else, which is stranger still," she answered.

"How does that happen, nurse?"

"We were in terrible anxiety about your mother at the time. So ill was she, after you were just born, in a strange, unaccountable way, that you lay almost neglected for more than an hour. In the very act of giving birth to you, she seemed to the rest around her to be out of her mind, so wildly did she talk; but I knew better. I knew that she was fighting some evil power; and what power it was, I knew full well; for twice during her pains, I heard the click of the horseshoe. But no one could help her. After her delivery, she lay as if in a trance, neither dead nor at rest, but as if frozen to ice, and conscious of it all the while. Once more I heard the terrible sound of iron; and, at the moment your mother started from her trance, screaming, 'My child! my child!' We suddenly became aware that no one had attended to the child, and rushed to the place where he lay wrapped in a blanket. Uncovering him, we found him black in the face, and spotted with dark spots upon the throat. I thought he was dead; but, with great and almost hopeless pains, we succeeded in making him breathe, and he gradually recovered. But his mother continued dreadfully exhausted. It seemed as if she had spent her life for her child's defense and birth. That was you, Duncan, my dear."

"I was in constant attendance upon her. About a week after your birth, as near as I can guess, just in the gloaming, I heard yet again the awful clank—only once. Nothing followed till about midnight. Your mother slept, by the bedside. A horror fell upon me suddenly; though I neither saw nor heard anything. Your mother started from her sleep with a cry, which sounded as if it came from far away, out of a dream, and did not belong to this world. My blood curdled with fear. She sat up in bed, with wide, staring

eyes, and half-open, rigid lips, and, feeble as she was, thrust her hands straight out before her with great force, her hands open and lifted up, with the palms outward. The whole action was of one violently repelling another. She began to talk wildly, as she had done before you were born, but, though I seemed to hear and understand it all the time, I could not recall a word of it afterward. It was as if I had listened to it when half asleep. I attempted to soothe her, putting my arms around her, but she seemed quite unconscious of my presence, and my arms seemed powerless upon the fixed muscles of hers. Not that I tried to constrain her, for I knew that a battle was going on of some kind or other, and my interference might do awful mischief. I only tried to comfort and encourage her. All the time I was in a state of indescribable cold and suffering, whether more bodily or mental I could not tell. But at length I heard yet again the clink of the shoe. A sudden peace seemed to fall upon my mind—or was it a warm, odorless wind that filled the room? Your mother dropped her arms, and turned feebly toward her baby. She saw that she slept a blessed sleep. She smiled like a glorified spirit, and fell back exhausted on the pillow. I went to the other side of the room to get a cordial. When I returned to the bedside I saw at once that she was dead. Her face smiled still, with an expression of the uttermost bliss."

Nurse ceased, trembling as overborne by the recollection; and I was too much moved and averted to speak. At length, resumming the conversation she said: "You see it is no wonder, Duncan, my dear, if after all this I should find, when I wanted to fix the date of your birth, that I could not determine the day or the hour when it took place. All was confusion in my poor brain. But it was strange that no one else could, any more than I. One carried you across the room to lay you down, for I assisted at your birth, I happened to look up to the window. Then I saw what I did not forget, although I did not think of it again till many days after—a bright star was shining on the very tip of the thin crescent moon.

"Oh, then," said I, "it is possible to determine the day and the very hour when my birth took place?"

"See the good of book-learning!" replied she. "When you work it out, just let me know, my dear, that I may remember it."

"That I will."

Absorbed in the story I had heard, I took my way, as I thought, homeward. The whole country was well known to me. I should have said, before that night, that I could have gone home blindfold. Whether the lightning bewildered me and made me take a false turn, I cannot tell; for the hardest thing to understand, in intellect as well as moral mistakes, is—how we came to go wrong. But after wandering for some time plunged in meditation, and with no warning whatever of the presence of inimical powers, a brilliant lightning-flash showed me that at least I was not near home. The light was prolonged for a second or two by a slight electric pulsation, and by that distinguished a wide space of blackness on the ground in front of me. Once more wrapped in the folds of a thick darkness, I dared not move. Suddenly it occurred to me that the blackness was, and whither I had wandered. It was a huge quarry of great depth, long dissected, and half filled with water. I knew the place perfectly. A few more steps would have carried me over the brink. I stood still, waiting for the next flash, that I might be quite sure of the way I was about to take before I ventured to move. While I stood I fancied I heard a single hollow plunge in the black water far below. When the lightning came, I turned, and took my path in another direction.

After for walking for some time across the heath, I fell. The fall became a roll, and down a steep declivity I went, over and over, arriving at the bottom unharmed.

Another flash showed me where I was in the hollow valley, within a couple of hundred yards from nurse's cottage. I made my way towards it. There was no light in it, except the feeblest glow from the embers of her peat fire. "She is in bed," I said to myself, "and I will not disturb her." Yet something drew me toward the little window. I looked in. At first I could see nothing. At length as I kept gazing, I saw something indistinct in the darkness, like an outstretched human form.

By this time the storm had lulled. The moon had been up for some time, but had been quite concealed by tempestuous clouds. Now, however, these had begun to break up; and, while I stood looking into the cottage, they scattered away from the face of the moon, and a faint, vapory gleam of her light, entering the cottage through a window opposite that at which I stood, fell directly on the face of my old nurse, as she lay on her back, outstretched upon chairs, pale as death, and with her eyes closed. The light fell nowhere but on her face. A stranger to her habits would have thought she was dead; but she had so much of the appearance she had had on a former occasion, that I concluded at once that she was in one of her trances. But having often heard that persons in such a condition ought not to be disturbed, and feeling quite sure she knew best how to manage herself, I turned, though reluctantly, and left the lone cottage behind me in the night, with the deathlike woman lying motionless in the midst of it.

I found my way home without any further difficulty, and went to bed, where I soon fell asleep, thoroughly wearied more by the mental excitement I had been experiencing than by the amount of bodily exercise I had gone through.

## CHAPTER III.

### HILTON HALL.

As my father accompanied me to the door, where the gig which was to carry me over the first stage of my journey was in waiting a large target of hide, well studded with brass nails, which had hung in the hall for time unknown—to me, at least—fell on the floor with a dull bang. My father started, but said nothing; and, as it seemed to me, rather pressed my departure than otherwise. I would have replaced the old piece of armor before I went, but he would not allow me to touch it, saying, with a grim smile: "Take that for an omen, my boy, that your armor must be worn over your conscience, and not over the body. Be

a man, Duncan, my boy. Fear nothing and do your duty."

A grasp of the hand was all the good bye I could make, and I was soon rattling away to meet the coach for Edinburgh and London.

I reached London in safety, and slept at the house of an old friend of my father, who treated me with great kindness and seemed altogether to take a liking to me. Before I left he held out a hope of being able, some day or other, to procure for me what I so much desired—a commission in the army.

After spending a day or two with him and seeing something of London, I climbed once more on the roof of the coach; and, late in the afternoon, was set down at the great gate of Hilton Hall. I walked up the broad avenue, through the final arch of which, as though a huge Gothic window, I saw the hall in the distance. Everything about me looked strange, rich and lovely. Accustomed to the scanty flowers and diminutive wood of my own country, what I now saw gave me a feeling of majestic plenty, which I can recall at will, but which I have never experienced again. Behind the trees which formed the avenue I saw a shrubbery, composed entirely of flowering plants, almost all unknown to me. Issuing from the avenue, I found myself amid open, wide, lawny spaces, in which the flowerbeds lay like islands of color. A statue on a pedestal, the only white thing in the surrounding green, caught my eye. I had scarcely seen any sculpture, and this, attracting my attention by a favorite contrast of color, retained by its own beauty. It was a Dryad, or some nymph of the woods, who had just glided from the solitude of the trees behind, and had sprung upon the pedestal to look wonderingly around her.

At the same moment, from the base of the pedestal rose a figure in white, graceful as the Dryad above, and neither running, nor appearing to walk quickly, yet fleet as a ghost, glided past me at a few paces distance, and, keeping in a straight line for the main entrance of the hall, entered by it and vanished.

I followed in the direction of the mansion, which was large, and of several styles and ages. One wing appeared especially ancient. It was neglected and out of repair, and had in consequence a desolate, almost sepulchral look; an expression heightened by the number of large cypresses which grew along its line. I went up to the central door and knocked. It was opened by a grave, elderly butler. I passed under its flat arch, as if into the midst of the waiting events of my story. For, as I glanced around the hall, my consciousness was suddenly arrested, if I may be allowed the expression, with a strange feeling—known to everyone, and yet so strange—that I had seen it before; that, in fact, I knew it perfectly. But what was yet more strange, and far more uncommon, was that, although the feeling with regard to the hall faded and vanished instantly, and although I could not in the least surmise the appearance of any of the regions into which I was about to be ushered, I yet followed the butler with a kind of irrefragable expectation of seeing something which I had seen before, and every room or passage in that mansion affected me, on entering it for the first time, with the same sensation of previous acquaintance which I had experienced with regard to the hall.

I was received by the housekeeper, a little, prim, benevolent old lady, with colorless face and antique headdress, who led me to the room prepared for me. To my surprise I found a large wood fire burning on the hearth; but the feeling of the place revealed at once the necessity for it; and, consequently, I needed to be informed that the room, which was upon the ground floor, and looked out upon a little, solitary, grassy and ivy-mantled court, had not been used for years, and therefore required to be thus prepared for an inmate. My bedroom was a few paces down a passage to the right.

Left alone I proceeded to make a more critical survey of the room. Its look of ancient mystery was to me incomparably more attractive, than any show of elegance or comfort could have been. It was large and low, paneled throughout in oak, black with age, and worn eaten in many parts—otherwise entire. Both of the windows looked into the court or yard before mentioned. All the heavier furniture of the room was likewise of black oak, but the chairs and couches were covered with faded tapestry and tarnished gilding, apparently the superannuated members of the general household of seats.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Catching a Glimpse.

Mr. Smalley, in the Fortnightly Review, gives an interesting explanation of the expression on Bismarck's face in the last portrait of him, painted by Lenbach, the great artist. This look is full of power and purpose, aflame with anger and resolve, "lightning in the eye and the mouth hard as iron."

So might he have looked thundering at an obstinate majority in the Reichstag, or trying to bend a hostile nation to his purpose.

But this is not the explanation of his expression. Prince Bismarck loves singing birds and hates the crows, their enemies. One day he was walking with Herr Lenbach in the woods, and caught sight of a member of this detestable tribe.

His sudden glance of anger arrested the attention of the artist, who, as soon as he got home, transferred it to canvas. Thus it was not the affairs of nations which were responsible for the look; not the obstinacy of his countrymen nor the antagonism of the French which will send the great chancellor's features down to posterity clothed in tragedy.

It was simply the fact that he caught sight of an insignificant bird who has no reverence for the sweet singers of the feathered world.

Seeing by Night.

Nocturnal creatures assume night activity for some other reason than that they cannot see by day, or that they see better by night. The bat sees admirably in the brightest sunlight, as any one knows who has ever teased one by poking a stick at it. It will open its mouth and make an angry grab at the stick when it is not near it by several inches. Prof. Bolles says it is the same with the owl. They see perfectly in bright sunlight and better at night than most creatures.—Mechan's Monthly.

# GRAND OLD PARTY.

THAT PREPOSTEROUS NICARAGUA SCHEME.

Nothing Can Excuse a Man Who Votes for It in the Present Condition of Affairs—This Is Not a Banker's Government—Carlisle "Not in It."

The Nicaragua Job.

Really, the Nicaragua canal jobbers at Washington are losing some of their fine artistic qualities in the management of a boom. They should not have sent out one day a report that the British aggressive policy at Bluefields was with a view to obtaining future control of the canal territory, and permitted it to be followed next morning by an announcement that the Nicaragua canal bills would be pushed earnestly this winter. The juxtaposition of these two accounts was too evident a disclosure of their relation to the same fashioning hand. A few months ago we had a dispatch telling us that agents had embarked for England to dispose of the priceless Nicaragua concession, and that America was about to lose it forever; followed by a gentle hint that action at the coming session might yet save us this boom. Then we had a cable message to the effect that English capitalists were hungry for the investment, with another suggestion that we could still head them off. And now the Bluefields difficulty has been "worked" by the same skillful hands of the third house at Washington, which has the interest of the Nicaragua scheme so close at heart.

Is it possible that any representatives of the people can be so unfaithful to their trust as to dare commit this government to this wild and extravagant scheme? The St. Paul Pioneer Press sees cause for alarm in the fact that the Nicaragua job has obtained so large a hold upon the press of different parts of the country, attacking it through alleged local interest and through the weakness of the American imagination for big projects. We have been obliged to borrow \$100,000,000 during the last year to pay ordinary expenses. There is no immediate prospect that we will be on a paying basis for some time to come. We are now trying vainly to adjust our affairs with the Pacific railroads that were subsidized for private profit. Yet in this condition of the treasury, and with this warning example before us, we are asked to put from \$70,000,000 upwards in a similar scheme. And this preposterous project, which is agitated principally by a band of "promoters," who expect to sneak \$7,000,000 or \$10,000,000 out of the boodle through a purchase of the worthless possessions of the bankrupt canal company, actually has its warm advocates and defenders in both houses.

Nothing can excuse a man who votes for the Nicaragua job in the present condition of affairs. If this country concludes that it needs a canal across the isthmus had enough to build and pay for it, we have not a word to say. We do not believe that it does; but if such a straight business proposition were offered and adopted, we should think it proper even if we believed it to be an unwise expenditure. But to go again, under any conditions that may be framed, into the business of giving the government's guarantee to the bonds of a private corporation is simply unpardonable. It ought to be an offense against the laws to suggest such a thing. To play into the hands of the speculators who have managed the Nicaragua company's affairs into bankruptcy, and are now planning to get some juicy pickings from the remains, and to do all this when the treasury is short of receipts and without resources, is little short of a crime. The Nicaragua business ought to get its final black eye this winter.

Feelings Deeply Stirred.

Mr. Cleveland comes to the defense of his pet pension bureau with perhaps the most ponderous sentence in the message. He says: "The accusation that an effort to detect pension frauds is evidence of unfriendliness toward our worthy veterans and a denial of their claims to the generosity of the government, suggests an unfortunate indifference to the commission of any offense which has for its motive the securing of a pension and indicates a willingness to be blind to the existence of mean and treacherous crimes which play upon demagogic fears and make sport of the patriotic impulses of a grateful people." If the length of the period is any measure of the depths to which Mr. Cleveland is stirred, it is to be presumed that some of the current criticisms of his pension course have struck home.—Detroit Tribune.

Arid Lands to the State.

The Transmississippi congress did a good thing when it adopted a resolution in favor of a grant of the arid lands to the several states in which they are situated. It is along that line that the true solution of the irrigation problem lies. To each state should be left the regulation of the distribution of water, but that would not be done if the reclamation of the land should be intrusted to the national government. Congress would insist upon enacting laws governing the distribution of water if it incurred the expense of building reservoirs and digging ditches. Congress would be incapable of legislating intelligently concerning irrigation, for a great majority of its members never would have the requisite information concerning irrigation methods and difficulties.—Denver Republican.

A Saving on Seeds.

Secretary of Agriculture Morton promises to save about \$160,000 a year to the government by discontinu-

ing the distribution of seeds to farmers. The Republicans will save much more than that by distributing to their respective homes a lot of Democratic "seeds" who draw salaries in the several departments without rendering any compensating services therefor.—Cincinnati Times-Star.

Not a Banker's Government.

Mr. Cleveland has used his facilities for studying the temper of the American people to little advantage if he believes they will consent that the banking interests shall be put in charge of the country's welfare. The Baltimore plan is a dangerous proposition from whatever standpoint it is considered. With the sole power to create and destroy money the banks would very soon virtually be the government. The banks are institutions organized for private gain. In their place they are not only a great convenience but they are a necessity.

This does not argue, however, that the interests of the general public and the very government itself should be delegated to them. Should they be given authority to expand and contract the currency of the country at will the only interest they would naturally look to would be that of the earning power of money in the money market. The people's interest lies in the earning power of commodities which are taken in exchange for money.

The tendency of recent events has been to centralize power in the money dealers, but the time is not yet ripe for the delivery of our freedom to any set of money makers, and through them to Wall street and still beyond that to the gold monopolists of England. That is what the adoption of the Baltimore plan would amount to.

Mr. Cleveland would not only give the banks the power contemplated by the national bankers' convention, but he would take away the responsibility of the general government altogether. In short, he would put the money world against all other interests and let each side take care of itself, with the weapons all on one side. He would make the banks mutually protective, so far as the currency of each was concerned, but in reality his plan would leave the depositor as the only real guarantor of the bank's solvency. The depositor is compelled to take enough chances now. He will not go into this new partnership if he can help himself.

In truth, there is no feature of the plan that will commend it to the favorable consideration of any other class than those engaged in money dealing.—Kansas City Journal.

Ame tea in China.

England takes care of her subjects, no matter how humble, no matter where they may be. And the man who seeks the protection of the English flag, whether citizen or alien, finds security under its folds so long as he shows himself worthy of such succor. With a blush of shame we must confess that the United States has never exercised her power to defend the rights of her citizens in other lands, and as for the people of other countries who have sought protection under the American flag, they have, as a rule, relied upon a weak if not a broken reed. We are very plucky at home, but abroad we lack spirit.

Mr. Julian Ralph, writing to Harper's Weekly from Shanghai, repeats the story of two Japanese students, who, hounded down by the Chinese, were deluded into seeking protection under the flag of an American consul-general, Mr. Jernigan, at Shanghai. To the credit of our consul let it be said, he tried to save these poor youths. He telegraphed our minister at Peking, and would have appealed to Mr. Gresham had diplomatic etiquette permitted it. But Washington heard of it, and Gresham telegraphed the consul-general to surrender at once the young men who had sought the protection of our flag.

The Japanese students were surrendered and subjected for three days to the most horrible tortures, till death put an end to their sufferings. England would have sent her whole fleet to Chinese waters rather than surrender these men to the savage and worse than brutal enemy. Once the American was a power in the Orient. Now he is being despised. Mr. Cleveland has much to answer for, but not the least crime of his cowardly administration is his becoming a party to the murder of these two young men.—New York Advertiser.

Doubly Impossible.

A Boston paper characterizes as "foolish" the charge that Secretary Carlisle is using the patronage of his department with a view to advancing his presidential chances. The Boston paper is right. Mr. Carlisle will be aware that no Democrat can be elected to the presidency next time, and if such a thing were possible he knows that his failure as the head of the treasury department would put him out of the race.

Cats and Democrats.

Scientists are trying to ascertain by practical experiments and by photographs how it is that a cat invariably lights on its feet. The Democratic party is anxiously awaiting the result of the investigation so that it may profit by it. The last time it fell it was with a dull, sickening thud.—

Grover's Fame.


It looks now as though Grover Cleveland would rumble down the centuries as the only man that ever insisted upon being president and secretary of the treasury at the same time. The effort does not amount to greatness, but is regarded as a fairly good imitation of it.

He Likes It.

Mr. Andrew Carnegie thinks the country's currency system is all right. It appears to have worked very well in the case of Mr. Andrew Carnegie,

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