(Copyrighted, 1895, by S. R. Crockett.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BOWER OF THE STAR.

We took our way immediately toward these wilds where we had been advised Auld Anton Lennox was hidden. He was stricken with great sickness and needed our ministrations. But in the wild country into which we were going was no provision for the upputting of young and delicate maids, specially such as were accustomed to the luxuries of the great house of Balmaghie.

The days were fine and dry and a fanning wind from the north blew in our faces as we went. It was near to the road end of the Duchrae, up which I had so often helped the cars (or sledges of wood with birch twigs for wheels) to drag the hay crop, that we met Roderick MacPherson, a Highland man servant of the laird of Balmaghie, riding a pony and leading other two. We knew them at once as those which for common were ridden by Kate and Maisie Lennox.

"Hey! whereaway, Roderick?" cried Wat, as soon as he set eyes on the cavalcade.

The fellow looked through his lowering thatch of eyebrow and grunted, but whether with stupidity or cunning it had been hard to say.

"Speak!" said Wat, threateningly. "You can understand well enough when they cry that it is porridge time."

"The leddies was tak' a ride," MacPherson answered, with a cock in his eye that angered Wat, whose temper indeed in these days was not of the most enduring.

"Where did you leave them?" cried Wat of Lochinvar.

"It was on a muir no frae a burnside; I was fair forget where!" said Roderick, with a look of the most dense stupidity.

Then I saw that the fellow had been commanded not to tell, so I said to Wat:

"Come on, Wat. Kate has ordered him not to tell us."

"This is a bonny like thing," said Wat, angrily, "that I canna truss him up and make him tell, only because I am riding with the hill folk. Oh, that I were a king's man of any sort for half an hour!"

For, indeed, it is the glory of the field folk, who have been blamed for many extremes and wild opinions, that though tortured and tormented themselves by the king's party, they used not torture upon their enemies, as in after times even the Whigs did, when, after the eighty-eight, it came to be their time to govern.

So we permitted the Highland tyke to go on his way. There is no need to go into the place and manner of our journeyings in such a well kenned country as the strath of the Kells, but after a time we betook ourselves to the broad of the moors and so held for the fastness of the central hills, where the poor hunted folk kept sanctuary.

We kept wide of the rough and tumbled country about the lochs of Neldricker and Enoch, because to our cost and detriment we knew that place was already much frequented by the ill-contriving gypsy people thereabout, that thought no more about taking the life of a godly person than of killing one of the long-wooled, white-faced mountain sheep which are the staple of these parts. So there was no need to run into more danger. We were in plenty already without that.

In a little while we found ourselves under the front of the Dungeon Hill, which is the wildest and most precipitous in all that country. They say that when it thunders all the lightnings of heaven join together to prey upon the rocks of the Dungeon. And, indeed, it looks like it, for most of the rocks there are rent and shattered, as though a giant had broken them and thrown them about in his play.

Beneath this wild and rocky place we took our way, till across the rounded head of the Hill of the Star we caught a glimpse of the dim country of hag and heather that lay beyond.

So we held up the prae that is called the Gadlach, where is the only road over the burn of Palscaig and up into the great wide valley through which runs the Elgin lane.

Wat and I had our precise information as to the cave in which lay the covenanter, Anton Lennox, so that, guiding ourselves by our marks, we held a straight course for the corner of the Black Hill of the Star, in which the hiding place was.

I give no nearer directions to the famous Cove Macatericks for the plainest reasons, for it is there to this day, and the herds ken it well. But who knows how soon the times may be troublous again, and the cove reassert its ancient safety. But all that I will say is that if you want to find Cove Macaterick, William Howatson, the herd of the Merrick,

I had a beauty out in a few minutes.

or John Macmillan, that dwells at Bongill in the Howe of Troot, can take you there if your legs be able to carry you, and you be neither outlaw nor king's soldier. And this word also, I say, that in the process of your long journeying you will find out this, that though any bairn may write a history, it takes a man to herd the Merrick.

So in good time we came to the place. It is half way up a clint of high rocks overlooking Loch Macaterick, and the place is bosky all about with bushes, both birk and self-sown mountain ash. The mouth of the cavern is quite hidden in the summer by the leaves, and in the winter by the mat of interlacing branches and ferns. Above there is a great diamond-shaped rock that ever threatens to come down and block the entrance to the cave. Which, indeed, it will do some day.

Wat and I crawled within the black mouth of the cavern one at a time till we came to a wider place, for the whole place is narrow and constricted. And there, on a pallet bed, very pale and far through, we found Auld Anton, who, when he saw us, turned his head and raised his hand by the wrist in greeting. His lips moved, but what he said we could not tell. So I crept back and made shift to get him a draught of water from a spring upon the hillside, that flowed past the mouth of the cave. The spring water always revived him, and he sat up, leaning heavily against me as he did so.

Nevertheless, it was some time before he could speak. We looked at one another, and as we saw the condition of things in the cave it became very evident to us that the lasses Kate and Maisie had either wandered from the road or been detained in some way that was unknown to us. So Wat, being ever for instant action, proposed that he should go off and seek the lasses, and that I should bide and succor Auld Anton in his extremity.

I consented, and he instantly took his way with his sword and pistols and his gayly set bonnet, walking with that carriage which had been little else than a swagger in the old days, but was now no more than the air of well-set distinction which marked the man of ancient family and training.

So I was left alone with the father of the lass I loved. There is no use of denying it any longer. Indeed, the times were not such as to encourage any playing with love's misunderstandings. But I owned, as I sat with her father's head on my lap, that it was for Maisie Lennox's sake, and not for the sake of human kindness, that I was left here in the wilderness to nurse Anton Lennox of the Duchrae.

As soon as he could speak Anton began to tell me of his illness.

"I fell," he said, "from my pride of strength in one hour. The spirit of the Lord departed from me, and I became even as the mown grass that today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven."

He lay back and breathed quickly for a moment. I entreated him not to speak, but he put my words aside impatiently with his hand.

"I was fleeing with a few of the people from before the persecutors, and as we came over the hip of the Meaull of Garryhorn, the horsemen rode hotly behind us. Then suddenly there came upon me a dwam and a turning in my head, so that I cried to them to run on and leave me to my pursuers. But to this they would in no wise consent. 'We will carry you,' they said, 'and put you in some hole in the moss and cover you with heather.' So they designed, but the enemy being very close, got me no further than a little peat brow at the lane side down there. They laid me on a shelf and the bank came over me. Then I heard our people scattering and running in different directions, in order that they might draw the enemy away from me. So I lay still and waited for them to come and take me. And over me I heard the horses of the soldiers plunging. And one beast, as it gathered way for the spring over the burn, sent its hoof down through the black peat, and the stead of its hoof was on my bonnet's brim. Yet, according to the mercies of the Lord, it harmed me not. But the soldier fell off and hurt his head in the steel cap upon the other side, whereat he swore—which was a manifest judgment on him to tangle him yet deeper in the wrath of God."

So I abode in the cave with Anton, and we spoke of many things, but specially of the lassie that was near to my heart and the pearl of his soul. He told me sweet, simple things of her childhood that warmed me like wine.

As how that there came a day when, her mother being alive, she came in and said: "When I am a great girl and have bairns of my own, I shall let them stay all day in the gardens where the grosarts are, and never say 'You must not touch!'"

This Anton thought to be a thing wondrously sound and orthodox, and he saw in the child's word the stumbling stone of our mother Eve.

Day by day I tended him as gently as I could, till our provisions were spent. Then I took my pistol to go out on the hillside to see if I could shoot aught to eat. But because of my nervousness, or other cause, I could do nothing. Indeed, not so much as a whaup came near me on that great, wide hill.

I saw a hill fox rise and run. He was a great beast and very red and held his tail nobly behind him like a flag. But, hardly beset as we were, we could not have eaten fox, even had I been able to shoot him, which I was not.

The day passed slowly, the night came, and it went sore to my heart that I was able to do so little for one I loved. I saw that he would have mended readily enough if he had had the right nutriment, which it seemed far out of my power to obtain. Yet in the morning, when I went to the mouth of the cave, lo! there immediately to the right of me, on a bare place, were two great whaup eggs, broad and splashed with black. I never was gladder to see food. It was late for the whaups to be breeding, and, indeed, they had mostly left the moorland by that time; but, nevertheless, it was manifest that Providence had hidden some bird, perhaps disappointed of an earlier brood or late mated, to come and lay the eggs before our door.

I bade Anton take the eggs by the ancient process of sucking, which he made shift to do, and was very greatly strengthened thereby. So every morning so long as I remained there the wild bird laid an egg in the morning, which made the Covenanter's breakfast. This is but one of the daily marvels from the Lord which attended our progress. For when those that have been through the perilous time come together they recount these things to one another, and each has his tale of preservation and protection to tell.

But that minds me of a strange thing. Once during the little while when I companied with the Compellers, it was my hap to meet with roaring John Crichton, that rank persecutor. And what was my surprise to hear that all his talk ran upon certain providential dreams he had had in the night time, by which there was revealed to him the hiding place of many of the "fanatics," and even the very place pointed out to him in the dream where it would be most non-convenient to compass their ends. And this in due time he brought about, or said he did. But, for all that, I do not think that the company he was among set great store by his truthfulness, for after each wondrous story of adventure and second sight they would roar with laughter and say, "Well, done, Crichton! Tell us another one!"

After a day or two of lack of food, it came suddenly to me what a dumbhead I was to bide with an empty belly where at least there was plenty of fish near at hand. So I rose early from off my bed of heather tops and betook me down to the river edge. It is nothing but a burn that they call the Elgin Lane, a long, bare water, slow and peaty, but with some trout of size in it. Also from the broads of Loch Macaterick there came another burn with clearer water and much sand in the pools. There were trout in both, as one might see by stealing up to the edge of the brow and looking over quickly. But owing to the drouth there was water only in the pools, and often the smallest trickle of water beneath the stones.

I had a beauty out in a few moments, for so eager was I that I leaped into the burn just as I was, without so much as waiting to take off any garments. So in the pool there was a rushing and a chasing till I had him out on the grass, his speckled sides showing bonny on the heather as he tossed himself briskly from side to side. I followed the burn down to the fork of the water that flows from Loch Macaterick, and fished all the pools in this manner. By that time I had enough for three meals at least, or, perhaps, considering the poor state of our appetites, more than that. So I put those we should not want that day into a pretty little fish pond, which made a kind of backwater on one of the side burns springing down from the side of the Rig of the Star. And this was the beginning of the fish pond which continued to supply us all the time we abode there.

While I was in the river bottom it chanced that I looked up the great smooth slopes of the opposite hill, which is one of the range of G. Kells.

There was a little shagmy clump of trees on the bare side of it, and I could have sworn that among the trees I could see people stirring.

I could only think that the people there were wanderers like ourselves, or else spies sent out to keep an eye on the great valley betwen the Garryhorn hill and the Spear of the Merrick.

So I came back to the cave a little dashed in spirits, in spite of my great success with the trout. I said nothing about what I had seen to Auld Anton, for he was both weak and feverish, and, though certainly mending, not yet able to move out into the sunshine and lie among the bracken, a thing which would have done him much good on these still warm days.

But I made a fire with heather and the roots of ancient trees, which, in the strange wild desert, stick out of the peat at every step. There I roasted the trout, of which Anton Lennox ate heartily. I think they had more relish to a sick man's palate than whaup eggs, even though these came to him as it were in a miraculous manner, while I had guddled the trout with my boots and breeks on.

When the meal was over I bethought me that I should make an excuse and steal away over to the side of the meaull to see what it might be that was stirring on that great lonely braeface. For save the scraggy scrunt of rowan trees and birks that surrounds the cave, there was not a tree within sight till the woods at the upper end of Loch Doon began to take the sun.

I carefully charged my pistols and told Anton that I proposed to go out to shoot mountain hares or other victual that I could see.

He did not say a word to bid me stay, but only advised me to keep very close to the cave, for that once off the boscky face of the cliff there was no saying what hidden eyes might spy me out. For Lag, he said, was certainly lying in the hold at Garyhorn at that time, and Claverhouse himself was also in the country. Concerning this last I knew better than he, and was much desirous that we could get him well enough to move him further out of the reach of his formidable foes.

But I started when the heated haze of the afternoon was clearing with the first chill of even. The hills were casting shadows upon each other toward the Dungeon and Loch Enoor, where in the wildest and most rugged country many of the folk of the wilderness were in hiding.

I heard the gray crow croak and the

IMMEDIATELY ABOUT ME THERE BEGAN THE MOST AFFRIGHTING TURMOIL.

muckle corbie cry, "Glonk," somewhere over by the Slock of the Hooden. They had got a lamb to themselves or a dead sheep belike, but to me it sounded like the gloating of the dragoons over the some taken company of the poor wandering Presbyters. It seemed a strange thing for me, when I came to think of it now, that I, the son of the laird of Earlstoun, my mother that had been the lady thereof, and my brother Sandy that was now Earlstoun himself, should all be skipping and hiding, with the dragoons at our tail. Now this thought came not often to us who were born during the low estate of the Scottish kirk. But when it did come, the thought was bitter to us who had no sustaining memories of her former high estate, as God's kirk had been in Scotland from the year 1638 down to the weary coming of Charles Stuart and the down sitting of the drunken Parliament in the black year sixty.

But for all that I thought on these things as I went. I right carefully kept the cover of every heather bush, peat hag, great gray granite stone, and clump of bracken. So that in no long space, by making a wide circuit, I came to look down upon the little clump of trees where I had seen the figures moving as I guddled the trout for our dinner in the reaches of the Eglin lane.

Now there seemed to be a great quietness all about the place, and the scanty trees did not so much as wave a branch in the still air of the afternoon.

Yet I saw as it were the waft of a jaypiet's wing among them as I came over the steep rocks of the Hooden's Slock, and went to ford the Gala Lane, which, like the other, was by the action of the long, dry year, sunken to no more than a chain of pools. But as I circled about and came behind the trees, there was as I say a great quiet. My heart went up and down like a man's hand at the flail in a barn. Yet for my unquiet there was no great apparent reason. It might be, indeed, that the enemies had lain a snare for me, and that I was already as good as setting out for the Grass Market, with the ladder and the rope before me, and the lad with the pyoted coat at my tail. And this was a sore thought to me, for we Gordons are not of a race that take hanging lightly. We never had more religion than we could carry with comfort, yet we always got our paiks for what little we had, on which side soever we might be. It is a strange thing that we always managed to come out undermost, whichever party was on top, and of this I cannot tell the reason. On the other hand, the Kennedies trimmed their sails to the breeze as it blew, and were ever on the wave's crest. But then they were Ayrshiremen. And Ayr, it is well kenned, aye beats Galloway till it comes to the deadly bellyful of fighting.

Thus I communed with myself, ever drawing nearer to the little clump of trees on the side of the Meaull, and murmuring good Protestant prayers as if they had been no more than Mary's beads all the time.

As I came to the little gairy above the trees I looked down, and from the verge of it saw the strangest contrivance. It was a hut beside a little runlet of water—a kind of bower with the sides of bog-oak stobs taken from the edges of the strands. The roof was daintily theeked with green rushes and withes bound about with heather. Hither also was mingled with the thatching rushes, so that from a little distance the structure seemed to be part of the heath. I lay and watched to see what curious birds had made such a bower in the Dark Days, for such carefulness was not the wont of us chiels of the covenant, and I could not think that any of the rough-riders after us would so have spent their time. An inn yard, a pint stoup, and a well cockered doxie were more to their liking than plaiting the bonnie heather into a puppet's house upon the hillside.

Even as I watched and waited, I saw one come out and go about the bower. It was a figure in woman's garments. I knew the form at the first sight. It was Kate McGhie of the Balmaghie. I had found our lost maids. So I gave a whistle that she knew with my bird call, such as every lad of the heather carried, from old Sandy Peden to young James Renwick. At the first sound of it she started as though she had been stung. At the second peep and whinny she came a little way on tiptoe. For I had whistled with a curious turn at the end, as Wat, my cousin, was wont to do. So she came a little further, and I could see her eyes looking about eagerly.

Then I stood up and came down the side of the gairy till she saw me. She gave a little cry and put her hands to her heart, for I think she had not expected to see me, but some other—Wat of Lochinvar, as I guess. But for all that she held out her hands as if she were glad to see me.

"Ye canna send us back noo!" she cried out before even I came near to her.

"Ye deserve to get soundly payed for this misdemeanor," I answered. "Did ye ever think of the sore hearts ye left behind ye?"

"Oh, my father," said Kate lightly; "he wad read his book, bless King Charlie, an' walk the avenue, and say 'Kate, Kate—deil's in the lassie! The daft hizzie has taen to the hill again."

"But will not he be angry?"

"Wha, Roger McGhie? Na, na; I bade Mally Lintwhite make him pottie-head, and gie him deuks aff the pond to his supper, stuffed wi' mushrooms, and atween that and his claret wine he will thrive brawly."

Then Kate McGhie seemed to remember something, and we went down the hillside among the stones.

"Bide ye there!" she commanded, halting me with her hand as John Graham halts a squadron. And I did as I was bidden, for Kate had most imperious ways with her.

She stole down quietly, stooped her head to raise the flap which made a curtain door for the bower, and went within. I watched with all my eyes, for I was eager to see Maisie Lennox, my dear comrade and gossip. In a little she came forth, but what a leap gave my heart when I saw how pale she looked. Her hand and arm were bandaged, and she leaned lightly on Kate's shoulder.

Do you wonder that my heart went out to her greatly, and that in a moment? I sprang down the nickle of stones as if they had been on a made road.

"Maisie, Maisie, wha has done this to ye, my lassie?" I cried, or something like that (for I do not mind the words very well). And with that she fell to the greeting; the lass that never grat whatever was wrong, so that I was beside myself to see her. And Kate McGhie pushed me forward by the shoulder, and made signs frowningly, which I could not understand. I thought I was to go away until Maisie had somewhat recovered herself.

Very obediently I made to do so, and was for stealing away when Kate stamped her foot and said suddenly, "If ye daur—!" So I abode where I was till it seemed to me that Maisie was about to fall, so I went to hold her up, and as soon as I did so Kate McGhie slipped out of sight. Now, I think she did this of intention, for when she conveyed me a little down the hill, where I went in the evening, she rallied me very sorely.

"Mau, William Gordon," she said, "I e'en thocht I wad hae to pit your arms about her and tell ye what to say. Ye must be a queer make o' men up aboot the Glenkins. I thank a merciful Providence that we hae anither kind o' them aboot the head end o' Balmaghie!"

But when she left us I needed no instruction, and with the best will in the world I fell to comforting Maisie; and though I put not down the matter of our discourse, which concerned only ourselves, I can vouch that speedily we were at one, and I sat on the gray bowder stones of the gairy and made much of her in another fashion than that of a comrade.

Then she told me how that Kate and she had come away to seek for her father, because of the report that had come of his danger and illness, but that an accident had befallen them upon the way, and they had failed of their errand. What the accident was she would not tell me, saying that Kate McGhie would be fond enough to give me the story. Then they had built this bower by the burnside, where ever since they had remained safe and unmolested.

I asked how they got their provender.

"O," she said, "Hughie Kerr brings it over the hill from the howe of the Kells. We have had no want of good meal."

Then, when we had talked, and I had told her of her father and his welfare, I bethought me to urge her to bide where she was for that night at all events, and perhaps in the morning she might come over to see him. For I described, seeing that the place was no longer safe (if, indeed, the persecutors did not know where he was hid, which I believed not) to have him shifted as soon as he could bear the journey. But yet I was loath to do it, for there was no hold in all the high hill lands so safe as Cove Macaterick above the loch of that name.

When Kate McGhie came again to us she looked more approvingly at me than before, but indulgently, as one that passes an indifferent piece of work, which yet she herself could better have performed.

As soon as she came near I began to ask her of Maisie's accident and the cause of it.

"Has she not told you herself? I am not going to heat cauld porridge for you twa to sup," she said, in the merry way which never deserted her, for she was ever the most spirity wench in the world.

But when I had advertised her that she had not said a word about the matter, but on the contrary had referred me to herself, she made a pretty mouth and gave a little whistle.

"After all," she said, "we are not 'round the corner yet."

Then she began to tell me of their journeying in the night, after Pherson, the servingman, had left them.

"We cam' over the heather licht foot as hares," said Kate McGhie. "The stars were bonny above and a late moon was rising over the taps by Balmaclellan, and the thocht that I was oot on the heather hills set a canty fire in my breast.

"A' gaed richt till we cam' to the new brig across the Water o' Dee, that was biggit a year or two syne wi' the collections in the kirks. When we cam' to it we were liltin' careless on a sang, when oot o' the dark o' the far side steps a muckle cankersome lookin' man in a big cloak, an' stan's right in the mid o' the road.

"'Whaur gang ye sae late at nicht this road without the leave o' Mardrochat?' says he.

"'Sang,' says I. 'Wha's midden's this, and who's Mardrochat that his barn door cock crows sae croose on til't?'

"'For,' said Kate McGhie, looking at me, 'I hadna been learned at the Balmaghie to thole snash fra onybody.'"

At which I smiled, for well I knew Kate's reputation with her tongue.

"'This is Mardrochat's road, and by the king's command his business is to question all comers, but it's not ill gi'en words that he wad use wi' twa sic bonny lasses!' said the loon in cloak.

"'Dear sirs,' said I, 'fifty puddin's on a plate. Mardrochat maun be a braw lad. Is he the king's hangman? It's an honorable office nowadays, they tell me.'

"'Tell me whar ye ar gaun sae late,' says the ill-contriving chiel, 'an' maybes I'll convoy ye a bit o' the road. It shall never be said that Mardrochat left twa weel-faured lasses them-lane in the howe o' the nicht!'

"'Heighty-teighty,' I telled the man, 'oor coo's come hame, an' her tail's ahint her! Stand oot o' the road and let decent folks to their beds!'

"'There's nae beds bena the heather that gate!' said the man. And faith, there he was in the right. There were no beds except the wanderers' beds in the moss-hags that road for twenty lang Scot's miles.

"And all this time we were standing on the brig close to one another.

"'Let us by,' said I again.

"'Na,' said the long loon that had called himself Madrochat, and that I kenned for an ill-set informer that made his siller by carrying tales to Clavers and Lag, 'ye pass na this road. Ye maun e'en turn an' came wi' me!'

"And I think he would have come forward to put his hand upon us. But I made to get past him at one side, crying to Maisie to try the other, for I thought that the two of us were surely fit for any black thief of the kind to be found in the Glenkens.

"But as I was running by he grippit me with one hand and drew his bit windlestane of a sword wi' the other—drew it on a pair o' lassies, mind ye. Then what think ye! Your lit lass there, Missie Mim, she flew on him like a wullcat and catched the blade atween her fingers till she drew it oot o' his hand. Then she took it across her knee and garred it play snap like a rotten branch. Syne ower it gaed intil the water. And that was the way she got the cut on her hand, poor thing."

Then I gave a great shout and clasped Maisie in my arms, yet not harshly, lest she should be weak. I was so glad to hear testimony to her bravery.

"That is a better fashion," said Kate, like one that has a store of experience. Then she went on with her story, for she had more to tell. "But the loon was dour for a' the want o' his sword, and we micht no hae mastered him, but that he tried to trip us, and so got trapped himself. He fell so that the heid o' him took the wa' and fair dang him stupit. So we e'en gied him a bit hoise an' owe he gaed until the water—"

"Mercy on us!" I cried, "ye didna droon he man?"

"Droon him?" said Kate, "de'il a fear. You chiel is made for the tow. He'll droon nane. He was sitting on his hurdies in the shallows, up to his neck in the water, trying what banes war hale after his stramash.

"So," continued Kate, "we gaed oor roads in peace, and the chief sat still in the water, thrawin' his heid aboot and aboot like a turnspit as lang as we could see him."

Even so Kate McGhie told her tale, making my lass dearer to me with every word. Of Mardrochat the informer, who had made bold to meddle with them, I had heard many times. He had been a Covenanter of zeal and forwardness till, at a meeting of the societies, his real inner heart of evil was laid bare. Ever since which day in the wilds of Friarminion he had been a cunning, spying fox upon the track of the hill folk. But I knew how dangerous the man was, and liked it ill enough that the maids should have crossed him so early on their pilgrimage. I doubted not that it was from him that the original information had come which, being carried by Birsay and overheard in the house of Balmaghie, had sent us all hiving to the mountains.

Having bidden good e'en to the maids, as was severally due to them, I crossed over the Nick of the Gadlach and went whistling over the moor. I took a new road over the heather, and was just at the turning of the Eglin Lane and deep in the howe of the glen when I came on the strangest kind of cothouse. It was piled together of the rough bowder stones of the country, their edges undressed and gaping, the spaces between them filled with faggots of heather and plastered with stiff clay from the burnsides. The roof was of long branches of the fir trees buried in the moss and was thatched with heather. There was an opening in the middle from which a smoke arose. I heard a sound like singing from within—a sound that made my flesh creep.

I went to the door and with my knuckles knocked gently, as is our fashion in that part of the country, crying: "Are ye within, good wife?"

The strangest unearthly voice answered to me, as it were some one reading in the bible and laughing at the same time—a horrid thing to hear in that still place and so near the defenseless young lasses in the Bower of the Star.

"The waters of the Meribah—the waters of the Meribah—for they were bitter!" it cried in a kind of wail. "Come Ben, and hae some brose," and then the thing laughed.

I took courage to look within, and because it was dark I saw nothing. The whole interior was full of the smoor of reek, and strange things sped round and round, crossing each other and passing the door continually, like the staves and buckets of a water mill running around.

"Come awa', Ben," again commanded the voice, "Doon, Badrona. Peace, Grimalkin!" The command was addressed to a number of monstrous black cats, which had been speeding round the walls of the cot like mad things to the music of the unearthly crooning song which I had heard from within.

I stepped within and found a red peat fire upon the hearth and a black pot hanging over it. I looked about for the person who had addressed me. At first I could see him nowhere, but as my eyes grew accustomed to the light I saw the queerest being, the sight of whom made my heart grow cold and my hand steal to the little pocket bible, bound in two halves, that was in my pocket.

A small, square object was sat huddled up at the far side of the fire. Upon his head there was a turban, like those the travelers into the lands of the false prophet tell us of. But this turban was of black bull hide, and the beast's dull eyes looked out with a hellish suggestion. The figure was squat like a toad, and sitting thus sunk down upon itself. It seemed to be wholly destitute of feet and legs. But a great pair of hairy arms lay sometimes out upon the hearth and sometimes clawed together the fiery red peats, as though they had been casten and were being fitted upon the moss.

"Come awa, Ben. Ye are welcome, honest strangers," again said the thing of the uncanny look. "I am nane bonny, truth to tell, but I'm nocht to my mither. It's a braw thing that ye are no to meet wi' her the nicht. She has gane ower by to gather the Black Herb by the licht o' the aval mune. When the mune faas ower on his back like a sheep that canna rise, then is the time to gather the bonny wolf's bane, the deil's bit wi' the berries by the waterside that nane kens whaur to seek, an' the mandrake that cries like a murdered bairn when ye pu' it frae the moss. See ye here, there's three dead bairns aneath that hearthstane. I hae seen the banes. She didna pit me there, for the deil's wife has aye a warm side to the deil's bairn. Sit ye doon and bide a wee. It's braw an' heartsome to see a face at Willie's Shiel in the howe o' the Eglin."

After the first horrid surprise of coming in upon such a place I saw that the thing was human—an idiot, or natural as I judged, with a monstrous twisted body and strange voice like the crying of a night wind in a keyhole. But I thought it best to sit down on a seat as he bade me, and so I drew a creeple stool nearer to me carelessly with one hand.

"Na, dinna sit on that—that's a stool that naebody can sit on but my mither."

And when I looked at the thing in the red firelight, for it felt strange to my hand, lo! it was formed of three skulls set close together, and the legs of it were of men's leg bones.

Then I knew that I had chanced on the house of Corp-licht Kate, the witch wife of the Star, that for many years dwelt alone on the flowe of the Eglin, with only her idiot son with her.

"Na," said the object, "nane can sit on that creeple but the minnie o' me—Corp-licht Kate o' the Star. It's weel for me an' it's weel for you that my minnie's no here the nicht. But sit ye down and tak' your rest."

I rose to flee, but the monstrous figure by the red fire waved me down. And I believe that as I looked at him he seemed to swell and glow with a kind of brightness like the moon through mist. He waved his arms, and immediately about me there began the most affrighting turmoil. Black forms that had been crouching in the corners came out and began to circle round us, as it were, skimming round the house breast high, without ever touching the floor or the walls. They seemed like a black and monstrous army of cats, all flying in mid-air, screeching and caterwauling as at a witch's festival. I began to wonder if the foul, human-headed, toad-like thing that squatted by the fire were the black master of witches himself, to whom, for my sins, I had been delivered in the flesh before my time.

But with a wave of his hand, the idiot stilled the turmoil, and the flitting demons came to the ground as a dozen or so of cats, black and horrid, with arched tails and fiery eyes—as wild to look at as though they had wandered in from the moor. They retreated into the dark corners of the room, whence we could hear them purring and spitting, and see their fiery eyes set on us in a circle out of the gloom, which was black as night everywhere, save immediately about the fire.

"I am nae deil, though ye think it, and the folk says it," said the idiot, fixing his eyes on me. "Some says the daddie o' me is the deil, and some says Mardrochat, I kenna. Ye can ask my mither gin she like. I never speered her mysel'. Ye'll hae a sup o' my parritch. I wad advise ye to hae nocht to do wi' my mither's parritch. Heard ye ever o' the hefter o' the Star?"

I told him no, and sat down to see what might happen in this strange abode so near to the two places where dwelled those whom I loved—the Bower of the Star and the Cave of Macaterick. But I loosened my sword and felt that the grip of my pistols came easy to my hand.

"Be nae feared o' puir Gash Jamie o' the Star Sheiling; he's as honest as he is ugly. But keep wide a' the mither o' him, gin ye wad escape the chiding of the channering worm."

The natural seemed to read the fears of my heart before I knew them myself.

"Na, ye'll no dee like the hefter o' the Star. He was an ill loon, him; he wadna let my mither be when he cam to heft hogs in the mid of the year. He sat on a hill tap to watch that his sheep didna break dykes. But ken ye what my mither did? She gaed oot to him wi' a wee drop kale broo. Tak' ye nane o' my mither's kale broo. They are no canny. But the hefter, silly body, took mair o' them than he was the better o'. He took them down in a bit hollow to be oot o' the wind, and he manned it to crawl back to his watcher's hill tap. But there the silly feckless loon died like a troot on the bank. He didna like my mither's broo. Na, they didna gree well wi' him!"

And Gash Jamie went on yawning and grumbling, while I sat and stared at him, and the ugly grimalkins in the dark corner stared at me with shining eyes, and I wished myself well out of it all.

"An' ken ye what my mither said when the next hefter cam to see after his sheep on the hill?"

I shook my head.

"She said, 'Watna spree it wad be gin this yin were to die as weel!' That was what my mither said."

"And did he die?" I asked.

Gash Jamie moved his shoulders and made a kind of nicheering laugh to himself, like a young horse neighing for its corn.

"Na, he was ower cunning for my minnie, hinn. He wadna bide here, and when my minnie gaed to him with the guid kale broo and the braxy cooming amang it, says the second hefter, 'I'm no that hungry the day, mistress; I'll gie the hookies craws a drap drink o't!'

"And so he did, and as fast as the craws got twa fills o' their nebs, they keeled ower on their backs, drew in their taes three times, cried kraigh and tumbled heels up, as stiff as Methusala! Curious, was it na? She is a wonnerfu' woman, my mither!"

The thunder which had been forming all through the heat of the afternoon began to roar far away by Loch Doon, and as the place and the talk did not conduce to pleasant thoughts, I rose to go.

"What's your hurry?" cried Gash Jamie, swinging himself 'round to my side of the fire, lifting himself on his hands like a man that has no feet. "My minnie will no be here till the mornin', and then we'll hae company belike. For she's gane to warn Mardrochat to send the sodgers to the twa runaway lasses up at the bit bourooch on the Maeull o' Garryhorn."

"To bring the soldiers," I said, for the words made me suddenly afraid.

"Aye," said the natural, looking cunningly at me," an' Gash Jamie wad hae telled the bits o' lassies to, but he's ower gruesome a tyke to be welcome guest in lady's bower. But Jamie wishes the lassies no harm. They are clever, well basked hizzies!"

"I wonder if there are any more wanderers in hiding hereabouts," said I, thinking in my transparent guile to find out whether the Cove Macaterick were also known.

"Na, na, nane nearer than the Caldons in the Howe o' Troot. There's some o' Peden's folk there that my mither has put her spite on, but nane nearer."

The thunder and lightning was just coming on as I passed the ring of cats in the outer darkness of the hut, and I looked out. "Good night to ye, Jamie," said I, "and thank ye kindly for your crack and the warming I hae gotten afore the fire!"

"Guid e'en to yoursel', bonnie laddie, an' a guid journey to ye. It's gaun to be a coorse nicht, and Jamie maun gang awa ower the heather to see gin his mither can win the road hame!"

I went out and the whole night was empty. The great basin of the hollow palms of the hills was filled with an eery leme of flame, flickering up, as it seemed, from the ground.

I took my way with as great strides as I could compass to the bower under the trees. The thunder rolled continuously about and about. At times it seemed far away, but at different places as though many peals were running races one with the other. Then the lightning flickered, and keen little arrows sped till the whole sky twanged like a harp.

It seemed a hundred miles to the shieling on the hill, and when I came near I was astonished and greatly affrighted to hear the sound of voices, and one at least of them the voice of a man. A strange fear came over me; hardly, I think, the fear of the king's men.

"I hae brocht my silver spune," said a voice that went to my heart. "I brocht my silver spune. Gin I hae to gang to the heather for the Covenant, at least I shall gang as a lady."

It was my mother's voice, and I ran down to her, falling into her arms and bidding her to be quiet in the same breath.

(To be Continued.)

CIRCULARS AND TESTIMONIALS FREE

WASTING DISEASES WEAKEN WONDERfully because they weaken you slowly, gradually. Do not allow this waste of body to make you a poor, flabby, immature man. Health, strength and vigor is for you whether you be rich or poor. The Great Hudyan is to be had only from the Hudson Medical Institute. This wonderful discovery was made by the specialists of the old famous Hudson Medical Institute. It is the strongest and most powerful vitalizer made. It is so powerful that it is simply wonderful how harmless it is. You can get it from nowhere but from the Hudson Medical Institute. Write for circulars and testimonials.

This extraordinary Rejuvenator is the most wonderful discovery of the age. It has been endorsed by the leading scientific men of Europe and America.

HUDYAN is purely vegetable.

HUDYAN stops prematureness of the discharge in twenty days. Cures **LOST MANHOOD**, constipation, dizziness, falling sensations, nervous twitching of the eyes and other parts.

Strengthens, invigorates and tones the entire system. It is as cheap as any other remedy.

HUDYAN cures debility, nervousness, emissions, and develops and restores weak organs. Pains in the back, losses by day or night stopped quickly. Over 2,000 private indorsements.

Prematureness means impotency in the first stage. It is a symptom of seminal weakness and barrenness. It can be stopped in twenty days by the use of Hudyan. Hudyan costs no more than any other remedy.

Send for circulars and testimonials.

TAINTED BLOOD—Impure blood due to serious private disorders carries myriads of sore-producing germs. Then comes sore throat, pimples, copper colored spots, ulcers in mouth, old sores and falling hair. You can save a trip to Hot Springs by writing for "Blood Book" to the old physicians of the

HUDSON MEDICAL INSTITUTE,
Stockton, Market and Ellis Sts.,
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

THE MILD POWER CURES.

DR. HUMPHREYS' HOMOEPATHIC SPECIFICS ARE SCIENTIFICALLY AND CAREFULLY PREPARED REMEDIES, USED FOR NEARLY HALF A CENTURY BY THE PEOPLE WITH ENTIRE SUCCESS.

NO.	SPECIFIC FOR	
1	Fevers, Congestions, Inflammations	.....
2	Worms, Worm Fever, Worm Colic	.....
3	Teething, Colic, Crying, Wakefulness	....
4	Diarrhea, of Children or Adults	.....
7	Coughs, Colds, Bronchitis	.....
8	Neuralgia, Toothache, Faceache	.....
9	Headaches, Sick Headaches Vertigo	.....
10	Dyspepsia, Billiousness, Constipation	.....
11	Suppressed or Painful Periods	.....
12	Whites, Too Profuse Periods	.....
13	Croup, Laryngitis, Hoarseness	.....
14	Salt Rheum, Erysipelas, Eruptions	.....
15	Rheumatism, Rheumatic Pains	.....
16	Malaria, Chills, Fever and Ague	.....
19	Catarrh, Influenza, Cold in the Head	.....
20	Whooping Cough	.....
27	Kidney Disease	.....
28	Nervous Debility	.....
30	Urinary Weakness	.....
34	Sore Throat, Quinsy, Diphtheria	.....

77, ROSE COLD, HAY FEVER.

Sold by druggists or sent prepaid on receipt of price, 25c, or 5 for $1 (may be assorted) except 28 $1 size only. DR. HUMPHREYS' MANUAL, Enlarged and Revised) MAILED FREE. HUMPHREYS' MED. CO., 111 and 115 William St., New York.

BLOOD POISON

A SPECIALTY Primary, Secondary or Tertiary Syphilis permanently cured in 15 to 35 days. You can be treated at home for the same