

CHAPTER X

The first thing Andrew did on reaching Wheens was to write to his London landlady to send on his box with clothes by goods train; also his tobacco pouch, which he had left on the mantelpiece, and two pencils which she would find in the tea-caddy.

Then he went around to the manse.

The minister had great news for him.

The master of the Wheens Grammar School had died. Andrew had only to send in his testimonials, and the post was his.

The salary was 200 pounds per annum, with an assistant and the privilege of calling himself rector.

This settled, Andrew asked for Clarrie. He was humbler now than he had been, and in our disappointments we turn to woman for solace.

Clarrie had been working socks for him, and would have had them finished by this time had she known how to turn the heel.

It is his sweetheart a man should be particular about. Once he settles down it does not much matter whom he marries.

All this and much more the good old minister pointed out to Andrew. Then he left Clarrie and her lover together.

The winsome girl held one of the socks on her knee--who will chide her?--and a tear glistened in her eye.

Andrew was a good deal affected.

"Clarrie," he said softly, "will you be my wife?"

She clung to him in reply. He kissed her fondly.

"Clarrie, beloved," he said nervously, after a long pause, "how much are seven and thirteen?"

"Twenty-three," said Clarrie, putting up her mouth to his.

Andrew laughed a sad vacant laugh.

He felt that he would never understand a woman. But his fingers wandered through her tobacco-coloured hair.

He had a strange notion.

"Put your arms round my neck," he whispered.

Thus the old, old story was told once more.

A month afterwards the president of the Society for Doing Without received by post a box of bride-cake, adorned with the silver gilt which is also largely used for coffins.

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More than two years have passed since Andrew's marriage, and already the minister has two sweet grandchildren, in whom he renews his youth.

Except during school-hours their parents' married life is one long honeymoon.

Clarrie has put Lord Randolph Churchill's shoe into a glass case on the piano, and, as is only natural, Andrew is now a staunch Conservative.

Domesticated and repentant, he has renounced the devil and all her works.

Sometimes, when thinking of the past, the babble of his lovely babies jars upon him, and, still half-dreaming, he brings their heads close together.

At such a time all the anxious mother has to say is:

"Andrew!"

Then with a start he lays them gently in a heap on the floor, and, striding the room, soon regains his composure.

For Andrew has told Clarrie all the indiscretions of his life in London, and she has forgiven everything.

Ah, what will not a wife forgive!