

## CHAPTER XVIII - THE MUCKLEY

Every child in Thrums went to bed on the night before the Muckley hugging a pirlie, or, as the vulgar say, a money-box; and all the pirlies were ready for to-morrow, that is to say, the mouths of them had been widened with gully knives by owners now so skilful at the jerk which sends their contents to the floor that pirlies they were no longer.

"Disgorge!" was the universal cry, or, in the vernacular, "Out you come, you sweer deevils!"

Not a coin but had its history, not a boy who was unable to pick out his own among a hundred. The black one came from the 'Sosh, the bent lad he got for carrying in Ronny-On's sticks. Oh mighty me, sure as death he had nearly forgotten the one with the warts on it. Which to spend first? The goldy one? Na faags, it was ower ill to come by. The scartit one? No, no, it was a lucky. Well, then, the one found in the rat's hole? (That was a day!) Ay, dagont, ay, we'll make the first blatter with it.

It was Tommy's first Muckley, and the report that he had thirteen pence brought him many advisers about its best investment. Even Corp Shiach (five pence) suspended hostilities for this purpose. "Mind this," he said solemnly, "there's none o' the candies as sucks so long as Californy's Teuch and Tasty. Other kinds may be sweeter, but Teuch and Tasty lasts the longest, and what a grip it has! It pulls out your teeth!" Corp seemed to think that this was a recommendation.

"I'm nane sure o' Teuch and Tasty," Birkie said. "If you dinna keep a watch on it, it slips ower when you're swallowing your spittle."

"Then you should tie a string to it," suggested Tommy, who was thought more of from that hour.

Beware of Pickpockets! Had it not been for placards with this glorious announcement (it is the state's first printed acknowledgment that boys and girls form part of the body politic) you might have thought that the night before the Muckley was absurdly like other nights. Not a show had arrived, not a strange dog, no romantic figures were wandering the streets in search of lodgings, no stands had sprung up in the square. You could pass hours in pretending to fear that when the morning came there would be no fairyland. And all the time you knew.

About ten o'clock Ballingall's cat was observed washing its face, a deliberate attempt to bring on rain. It was immediately put to death.

Tommy and Elspeth had agreed to lie awake all night; if Tommy nipped Elspeth, Elspeth would nip Tommy. Other children had made the same arrangement, though the experienced ones were aware that it would fail. If it was true that all the witches were dead, then the streets of stands and shows and gaming-tables and shooting-galleries were erected by human hands, and it followed that were you to listen through the night you must hear the hammers. But always in the watches the god of the Muckley came unseen and glued your eyes, as if with Teuch and Tasty, and while you slept--Up you woke with a start. What was it you were to mind as soon as you woke? Listen! That's a drum beating! It's the Muckley! They are all here! It has begun! Oh, mighty, mighty, mighty, whaur's my breeks?

When Tommy, with Elspeth and Grizel, set off excitedly for the town, the country folk were already swarming in. The Monypenny road was thick with them, braw loons in blue bonnets with red bobs to them, tartan waistcoats, scarves of every color, woollen shirts as gay, and the strutting wearers in two minds--whether to take off the scarf to display the shirt, or hide the shirt and trust to the scarf. Came lassies, too, in wincey bodices they were like to burst through, and they were listening apprehensively as they ploughed onward for a tearing at the seams. There were red-headed lasses, yellow-chy-headed and black-headed, blue-shawled and red-shawled lasses; boots on every one of them, stockings almost as common, the skirt kilted up for the present, but down it should go when they were in the thick of things, and then it must take care of itself. All were solemn and sheepish as yet, but wait a bit.

The first-known face our three met was Corp. He was only able to sign to them, because Californy's specialty had already done its work and glued his teeth together. He was off to the smithy to be melted, but gave them to understand that though awkward it was glorious. Then came Birkie, who had sewn up the mouths of his pockets, all but a small slit in each, as a precaution against pickpockets, and was now at his own request being held upside down by the Haggerty-Taggertys on the chance that a halfpenny which had disappeared mysteriously might fall out. A more tragic figure was Francie Crabb (one and seven pence), who, like a mad,

mad thing, had taken all his money to the fair at once. In ten minutes he had bought fourteen musical instruments.

Tommy and party had not yet reached the celebrated corner of the west town end where the stands began, but they were near it, and he stopped to give Grizel and Elspeth his final instructions: "(1) Keep your money in your purse, and your purse in your hand, and your hand in your pocket; (2) if you lose me, I'll give Shovel's whistle, and syne you maun squeeze and birse your way back to me."

Now then, are you ready? Bang! They were in it. Strike up, ye fiddlers; drums, break; tooters, fifers, at it for your lives; trumpets, blow; bagpipes, skirl; music-boxes, all together now--Tommy has arrived.

Even before he had seen Thrums, except with his mother's eye, Tommy knew that the wise begin the Muckley by measuring its extent. That the square and adjoining wynds would be crammed was a law of nature, but boyhood drew imaginary lines across the Roods, the west town end, the east town end, and the brae, and if the stands did not reach these there had been retrogression. Tommy found all well in two quarters, got a nasty shock on the brae, but medicine for it in the Roods; on the whole, yelled a hundred children, by way of greeting to each other, a better Muckley than ever.

From those who loved them best, the more notable Muckleys got distinctive names for convenience of reference. As shall be ostentatiously shown in its place, there was a Muckley called (and by Corp Shiach, too) after Tommy, but this, his first, was dubbed Sewster's Muckley, in honor of a seamstress who hanged herself that day in the Three-cornered Wood. Poor little sewster, she had known joyous Muckleys too, but now she was up in the Three-cornered Wood hanging herself, aged nineteen. I know nothing more of her, except that in her maiden days when she left the house her mother always came to the door to look proudly after her.

How to describe the scene, when owing to the throng a boy could only peer at it between legs or through the crook of a woman's arm? Shovel would have run up ploughmen to get his bird's-eye view, and he could have told Tommy what he saw, and Tommy could have made a picture of it in his mind, every figure ten feet high. But perhaps to be lost in it was best. You had but to dive and come up anywhere to find something amazing; you fell over a box of jumping-jacks into a new world.

Everyone to his taste. If you want Tommy's sentiments, here they are, condensed: "The shows surpass everything else on earth. Four streets of them in the square! The best is the menagerie, because there is the loudest roaring there. Kick the caravans and you increase the roaring. Admission, however, prohibitive (threepence). More economical to stand outside the show of the 'Mountain Maid and the Shepherd's Bride' and watch the merriman saying funny things to the monkey. Take care you don't get in front of the steps, else you will be pressed up by those behind and have to pay before you have decided that you want to go in. When you fling pennies at the Mountain Maid and the Shepherd's Bride they stop play-acting and scramble for them. Go in at night when there are drunk ploughmen to fling pennies. The Fat Wife with the Golden Locks lets you put your fingers in her arms, but that is soon over. 'The Slave-driver and his Victims.' Not worth the money; they are not bleeding. To Jerusalem and Back in a Jiffy. This is a swindle. You just keek through holes."

But Elspeth was of a different mind. She liked To Jerusalem and Back best, and gave the Slave-driver and his Victims a penny to be Christians. The only show she disliked was the wax-work, where was performed the "Tragedy of Tiffano and the Haughty Princess." Tiffano loved the woodman's daughter, and so he would not have the Haughty Princess, and so she got a magician to turn him into a pumpkin, and then she ate him. What distressed Elspeth was that Tiffano could never get to heaven now, and all the consolation Tommy, doing his best, could give her was, "He could go, no doubt he could go, but he would have to take the Haughty Princess wi' him, and he would be sweer to do that."

Grizel reflected: "If I had a whip like the one the Slave-driver has shouldn't I lash the boys who hoot my mamma! I wish I could turn boys into pumpkins. The Mountain Maid wore a beautiful muslin with gold lace, but she does not wash her neck."

Lastly, let Corp have his say: "I looked at the outside of the shows, but always landed back at Californy's stand. Sucking is better nor near anything. The Teuch and Tasty is stickier than ever. I have lost twa teeth. The Mountain Maid is biding all night at Tibbie Birse's, and I went in to see her. She had a bervie and a boiled egg to her tea. She likes her eggs saft wi' a lick of butter in them. The Fat Wife is the one I like best. She's biding wi' Shilpit Kaytherine on the Tanage Brae. She weighs Jeems and Kaytherine and the sma' black swine. She had an ingin to her

tea. The Slave-driver's a fushinless body. One o' the Victims gives him his licks. They a' bide in the caravan. You can stand on the wheel and keek in. They had herrings wi' the rans to their tea. I cut a hole in Jerusalem and Back, and there was no Jerusalem there. The man as ocht Jerusalem greets because the Fair Circassian winna take him. He is biding a' night wi' Blinder. He likes a dram in his tea."

Elsbeth's money lasted till four o'clock. For Aaron, almost the only man in Thrums who shunned the revels that day, she bought a gingerbread house; and the miraculous powder which must be taken on a sixpence was to make Blinder see again, but unfortunately he forgot about putting it on the sixpence. And of course there was something for a certain boy. Grizel had completed her purchases by five o'clock, when Tommy was still heavy with threepence halfpenny. They included a fluffy pink shawl, she did not say for whom, but the Painted Lady wore it afterwards, and for herself another doll.

"But that doll's leg is broken," Tommy pointed out.

"That was why I bought it," she said warmly, "I feel so sorry for it, the darling," and she carried it carefully so that the poor thing might suffer as little pain as possible.

Twice they rushed home for hasty meals, and were back so quickly that Tommy's shadow strained a muscle in turning with him. Night came on, and from a hundred strings stretched along stands and shows there now hung thousands of long tin things like trumpets. One burning paper could set a dozen of these ablaze, and no sooner were they lit than a wind that had been biding its time rushed in like the merriman, making the lamps swing on their strings, so that the flaring lights embraced, and from a distance Thrums seemed to be on fire.

Even Grizel was willing to hold Tommy's hand now, and the three could only move this way and that as the roaring crowd carried them. They were not looking at the Muckley, they were part of it, and at last Thrums was all Tommy's fancy had painted it. This intoxicated him, so that he had to scream at intervals, "We're here, Elspeth, I tell you, we're here!" and he became pugnacious and asked youths twice his size whether they denied that he was here, and if so, would they come on. In this frenzy he was seen by Miss Ailie, who had stolen out in a veil to look for Gavinia, but just as she was about to reprove him, dreadful men asked her was she in search of a lad, whereupon she fled home and barred the door,

and later in the evening warned Gavinia, through the key-hole, taking her for a roystering blade, that there were policemen in the house, to which the astounding reply of Gavinia, then aged twelve, was, "No sic luck."

With the darkness, too, crept into the Muckley certain devils in the color of the night who spoke thickly and rolled braw lads in the mire, and egged on friends to fight and cast lewd thoughts into the minds of the women. At first the men had been bashful swains. To the women's "Gie me my faring, Jock," they had replied, "Wait, Jean, till I'm fee'd," but by night most had got their arles, with a dram above it, and he who could only guffaw at Jean a few hours ago had her round the waist now, and still an arm free for rough play with other kimmers. The Jeans were as boisterous as the Jocks, giving them leer for leer, running from them with a giggle, waiting to be caught and rudely kissed. Grand, patient, long-suffering fellows these men were, up at five, summer and winter, foddering their horses, maybe hours before there would be food for themselves, miserably paid, housed like cattle, and when the rheumatism seized them, liable to be flung aside like a broken graip. As hard was the life of the women: coarse food, chaff beds, damp clothes, their portion; their sweethearts in the service of masters who were reluctant to fee a married man. Is it to be wondered that these lads who could be faithful unto death drank soddenly on their one free day, that these girls, starved of opportunities for womanliness, of which they could make as much as the finest lady, sometimes woke after a Muckley to wish that they might wake no more? Our three brushed shoulders with the devils that had been let loose, but hardly saw them; they heard them, but did not understand their tongue. The eight-o'clock bell had rung long since, and though the racket was as great as ever, it was only because every reveller left now made the noise of two. Mothers were out fishing for their bairns. The Haggerty-Taggertys had straggled home hoarse as crows; every one of them went to bed that night with a stocking round his throat. Of Monypenny boys, Tommy could find none in the square but Corp, who, with another tooth missing, had been going about since six o'clock with his pockets hanging out, as a sign that all was over. An awkward silence had fallen on the trio; the reason, that Tommy had only threepence left and the smallest of them cost threepence. The reference of course is to the wondrous gold-paper packets of sweets (not unlike crackers in appearance) which are only seen at the Muckley, and are what every girl claims of her lad or lads. Now, Tommy had vowed to

Elsbeth--But he had also said to Grizel--In short, how could he buy for both with threepence?

Grizel, as the stranger, ought to get--But he knew Elspeth too well to believe that she would dry her eyes with that.

Elsbeth being his sister--But he had promised Grizel, and she had been so ill brought up that she said nasty things when you broke your word.

The gold packet was bought. That is it sticking out of Tommy's inside pocket. The girls saw it and knew what was troubling him, but not a word was spoken now between the three. They set off for home self-consciously, Tommy the least agitated on the whole, because he need not make up his mind for another ten minutes. But he wished Grizel would not look at him sideways and then rock her arms in irritation. They passed many merry-makers homeward bound, many of them following a tortuous course, for the Scottish toper gives way first in the legs, the Southron in the other extremity, and thus between them could be constructed a man wholly sober and another as drunk as Chloe. But though the highway clattered with many feet, not a soul was in the double dykes, and at the easy end of that formidable path Grizel came to a determined stop.

"Good-night," she said, with such a disdainful glance at Tommy.

He had not made up his mind yet, but he saw that it must be done now, and to take a decisive step was always agony to him, though once taken it ceased to trouble. To dodge it for another moment he said, weakly: "Let's--let's sit down a whiley on the dyke."

But Grizel, while coveting the packet, because she had never got a present in her life, would not shilly-shally.

"Are you to give it to Elspeth?" she asked, with the horrid directness that is so trying to an intellect like Tommy's.

"N-no," he said.

"To Grizel?" cried Elspeth.

"N-no," he said again.

It was an undignified moment for a great boy, but the providence that watched over Tommy until it tired of him came to his aid in the nick of

time. It took the form of the Painted Lady, who appeared suddenly out of the gloom of the Double Dykes. Two of the children jumped, and the third clenched her little fists to defend her mamma if Tommy cast a word at her. But he did not; his mouth remained foolishly open. The Painted Lady had been talking cheerfully to herself, but she drew back apprehensively, with a look of appeal on her face, and then--and then Tommy "saw a way." He handed her the gold packet, "It's to you," he said, "it's--it's your Muckley!"

For a moment she was afraid to take it, but when she knew that this sweet boy's gift was genuine, she fondled it and was greatly flattered, and dropped him the quaintest courtesy and then looked defiantly at Grizel. But Grizel did not take it from her. Instead, she flung her arms impulsively round Tommy's neck, she was so glad, glad, glad.

As Tommy and Elspeth walked away to their home, Elspeth could hear him breathing heavily, and occasionally he gave her a furtive glance.

"Grizel needna have done that," she said, sharply.

"No," replied Tommy.

"But it was noble of you," she continued, squeezing his hand, "to give it to the Painted Lady. Did you mean to give it to her a' the time?"

"Oh, Elspeth!"

"But did you?"

"Oh, Elspeth!"

"That's no you greeting, is it?" she asked, softly.

"I'm near the greeting," he said truthfully, "but I'm no sure what about." His sympathy was so easily aroused that he sometimes cried without exactly knowing why.

"It's because you're so good," Elspeth told him; but presently she said, with a complete change of voice, "No, Grizel needna have done that."

"It was a shameful thing to do," Tommy agreed, shaking his head. "But she did it!" he added triumphantly; "you saw her do it, Elspeth!"

"But you didna like it?" Elspeth asked, in terror.



"No, of course I didna like it, but--"

"But what, Tommy?"

"But I liked her to like it," he admitted, and by and by he began to laugh hysterically. "I'm no sure what I'm laughing at," he said, "but I think it's at mysel'." He may have laughed at himself before, but this Muckley is memorable as the occasion on which he first caught himself doing it. The joke grew with the years, until sometimes he laughed in his most emotional moments, suddenly seeing himself in his true light. But it had become a bitter laugh by that time.