

CHAPTER XLIV. - END OF THE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.

Out of the mist came the voice of Gavin, clear and strong--

"If you hear me, hold up your hands as a sign."

They heard, and none wondered at his voice crossing the chasm while theirs could not. When the mist cleared, they were seen to have done as he bade them. Many hands remained up for a time because the people did not remember to bring them down, so great was the awe that had fallen on all, as if the Lord was near.

Gavin took his watch from his pocket, and he said--

"I am to fling this to you. You will give it to Mr. Ogilvy, the schoolmaster, as a token of the love I bear him."

The watch was caught by James Langlands, and handed to Peter Tosh, the chief elderpresent.

"To Mr. Ogilvy," Gavin continued, "you will also give the chain. You will take it off my neck when you find the body.

"To each of my elders, and to Hendry Munn, kirk officer, and to my servant Jean, I leave a book, and they will go to my study and choose it for themselves.

"I also leave a book for Nanny Webster, and I charge you, Peter Tosh, to take it to her, though she be not a member of my church.

"The pictorial Bible with 'To my son on his sixth birthday' on it, I bequeath to Rob Dow. No, my mother will want to keep that. I give to Rob Dow my Bible with the brass clasp.

"It is my wish that every family in the congregation should have some little thing to remember me by. This you will tell my mother.

"To my successor I leave whatsoever of my papers he may think of any value to him, including all my notes on Revelation, of which I meant to make a book. I hope he will never sing the paraphrases.

"If Mr. Carfrae's health permits, you will ask him to preach the funeral sermon; but if he be too frail, then you will ask Mr. Trail, under whom I sat in Glasgow. The illustrated 'Pilgrim's Progress' on the drawers in my

bedroom belongs to Mr. Trail, and you will return it to him with my affection and compliments.

"I owe five shillings to Hendry Munn for mending my boots, and a smaller sum to Baxter, the mason. I have two pounds belonging to Rob Dow, who asked me to take charge of them for him. I owe no other man anything, and this you will bear in mind if Matthew Cargill, the flying stationer, again brings forward a claim for the price of Whiston's 'Josephus,' which I did not buy from him.

"Mr. Moncur, of Aberbrothick, had agreed to assist me at the Sacrament, and will doubtless still lend his services. Mr. Carfrae or Mr. Trail will take my place if my successor is not elected by that time. The Sacrament cups are in the vestry press, of which you will find the key beneath the clock in my parlor. The tokens are in the topmost drawer in my bedroom.

"The weekly prayer-meeting will be held as usual on Thursday at eight o'clock, and the elders will officiate.

"It is my wish that the news of my death be broken to my mother by Mr. Ogilvy, the schoolmaster, and by no other. You will say to him that this is my solemn request, and that I bid him discharge it without faltering and be of good cheer.

"But if Mr. Ogilvy be not now alive, the news of my death will be broken to my mother by my beloved wife. Last night I was married on the hill, over the tongs, but with the sanction of God, to her whom you call the Egyptian, and despite what has happened since then, of which you will soon have knowledge, I here solemnly declare that she is my wife, and you will seek for her at the Spittal or elsewhere till you find her, and you will tell her to go to my mother and remain with her always, for these are the commands of her husband."

It was then that Gavin paused, for Lord Rintoul had that to say to him which no longer could be kept back. All the women were crying sore, and also some men whose eyes had been dry at the coffin of their children.

"Now I ken," said Cruickshanks, who had been an atheist, "that it's only the fool wha' says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

Another said, "That's a man."

Another said, "That man has a religion to last him all through."

A fourth said, "Behold, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

A fifth said, "That's our minister. He's the minister o' the Auld Licht Kirk o' Thrums. Woe is me, we're to lose him."

Many cried, "Our hearts was set hard against him. O Lord, are you angry wi' your servants that you're taking him frae us just when we ken what he is?"

Gavin did not hear them, and again he spoke:

"My brethren, God is good. I have just learned that my wife is with my dear mother at the manse. I leave them in your care and in His."

No more he said of Babbie, for the island was become very small.

"The Lord calls me hence. It is only for a little time I have been with you, and now I am going away, and you will know me no more. Too great has been my pride because I was your minister, but He who sent me to labor among you is slow to wrath; and He ever bore in mind that you were my first charge. My people, I must say to you, 'Farewell.'"

Then, for the first time, his voice faltered, and wanting--to go on he could not. "Let us read," he said, quickly, "in the Word of God in the fourteenth of Matthew, from the twenty-eighth verse."

He repeated these four verses:--

"And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.

"And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

"But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

"And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

After this Gavin's voice was again steady, and he said, "The sand- glass is almost run out. Dearly beloved, with what words shall I bid you good-by?"

Many thought that these were to be the words, for the mist parted, and they saw the island tremble and half of it sink.

"My people," said the voice behind the mist, "this is the text I leave with you: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust

doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.' That text I read in the flood, where the hand of God has written it. All the pound-notes in the world would not dam this torrent for a moment, so that we might pass over to you safely. Yet it is but a trickle of water, soon to be dried up. Verily, I say unto you, only a few hours ago the treasures of earth stood between you and this earl, and what are they now compared to this trickle of water? God only can turn rivers into a wilderness, and the water-springs into dry ground. Let His Word be a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path; may He be your refuge and your strength. Amen."

This amen he said quickly, thinking death was now come. He was seen to raise his hands, but whether to Heaven or involuntarily to protect his face as he fell none was sure, for the mist again filled the chasm. Then came a clap of stillness. No one breathed.

But the two men were not yet gone, and Gavin spoke once more.

"Let us sing in the twenty-third Psalm."

He himself raised the tune and so long as they heard Ms voice they sang--

"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want; He makes me down to lie In
pastures green; He leadeth me The quiet waters by.

"My soul He doth restore again; And me to walk doth make Within
the paths of righteousness Ev'n for His own name's sake.

"Yea, though I walk in Death's dark vale, Yet will I fear none ill; For
Thou art with me; and Thy rod And staff--"

But some had lost the power to sing in the first verse, and others at "Death's dark vale," and when one man found himself singing alone he stopped abruptly. This was because they no longer heard the minister.

"O Lord!" Peter Tosh cried, "lift the mist, for it's mair than we can bear."

The mist rose slowly, and those who had courage to look saw Gavin praying with the earl. Many could not look, and some of them did not even see Rob Dow jump.

For it was Dow, the man with the crushed leg, who saved Gavin's life, and flung away his own for it. Suddenly he was seen on the edge of the bank, holding one end of the improvised rope in his hand. As Tosh says--

"It all happened in the opening and shutting o' an eye. It's a queer thing to say, but though I prayed to God to take awa the mist, when He did raise it I couldna look. I shut my een tight, and held my arm afore my face, like ane feared o' being struck. Even when I daured to look, my arm was shaking so that I could see Rob both above it and below it. He was on the edge, crouching to leap. I didna see wha had haud o' the other end o' the rope. I heard the minister cry, 'No, Dow, no!' and it gae through me as quick as a stab that if Rob jumped he would knock them both into the water. But he did jump, and you ken how it was that he didna knock them off."

It was because he had no thought of saving his own life. He jumped, not at the island, now little bigger than the seat of a chair, but at the edge of it, into the foam, and with his arm outstretched. For a second the hand holding the rope was on the dot of land. Gavin tried to seize the hand; Rintoul clutched the rope. The earl and the minister were dragged together into safety, and both left the water senseless. Gavin was never again able to lift his left hand higher than his head. Dow's body was found next day near the school-house.

TALK OF A LITTLE MAID SINCE GROWN TALL,

My scholars have a game they call "The Little Minister," in which the boys allow the girls as a treat to join. Some of the characters in the real drama are omitted as of no importance--the dominie, for instance--and the two best fighters insist on being Dow and Gavin. I notice that the game is finished when Dow dives from a haystack, and Gavin and the earl are dragged to the top of it by a rope. Though there should be another scene, it is only a marriage, which the girls have, therefore, to go through without the help of the boys. This warns me that I have come to an end of my story for all except my little maid. In the days when she sat on my knee and listened it had no end, for after I told her how her father and mother were married a second time she would say, "And then I came, didn't I? Oh, tell me about me!" So it happened that when she was no higher than my staff she knew more than I could write in another book, and many a time she solemnly told me what I had told her, as--

"Would you like me to tell you a story? Well, it's about a minister, and the people wanted to be bad to him, and then there was a flood, and a flood is lochs falling instead of rain, and so of course he was nearly drowned, and he preached to them till they liked him again, and so they let him marry

her, and they like her awful too, and, just think! it was my father; and that's all. Now tell me about grandmother when father came home."

I told her once again that Margaret never knew how nearly Gavin was driven from his kirk. For Margaret was as one who goes to bed in the daytime and wakes in it, and is not told that there has been a black night while she slept. She had seen her son leave the manse the idol of his people, and she saw them rejoicing as they brought him back. Of what occurred at the Jaws, as the spot where Dow had saved two lives is now called, she learned, but not that these Jaws snatched him and her from an ignominy more terrible than death, for she never knew that the people had meditated driving him from his kirk. This Thrums is bleak and perhaps forbidding, but there is a moment of the day when a setting sun dyes it pink, and the people are like their town. Thrums was never colder in times of snow than were his congregation to their minister when the Great Rain began, but his fortitude rekindled their hearts. He was an obstinate minister, and love had led him a dance, but in the hour of trial he had proved himself a man.

When Gavin reached the manse, and saw not only his mother but Babbie, he would have kissed them both; but Babbie could only say, "She does not know," and then run away crying. Gavin put his arm round his mother, and drew her into the parlor, where he told her who Babbie was. Now Margaret had begun to love Babbie already, and had prayed to see Gavin happily married; but it was a long time before she went upstairs to look for his wife and kiss her and bring her down. "Why was it a long time?" my little maid would ask, and I had to tell her to wait until she was old, and had a son, when she would find out for herself.

While Gavin and the earl were among the waters, two men were on their way to Mr. Carfrae's home, to ask him to return with them and preach the Auld Licht kirk of Thrums vacant; and he came, though now so done that he had to be wheeled about in a little coach. He came in sorrow, yet resolved to perform what was asked of him if it seemed God's will; but, instead of banishing Gavin, all he had to do was to remarry him and kirk him, both of which things he did, sitting in his coach, as many can tell. Lang Tammis spoke no more against Gavin, but he would not go to the marriage, and he insisted on resigning his eldership for a year and a day. I think he only once again spoke to Margaret. She was in the manse garden when he was passing, and she asked him if he would tell her now why he had been so agitated when he visited her on the day of the flood. He answered gruffly, "It's no business o' yours." Dr. McQueen was Gavin's best

man. He died long ago of scarlet fever. So severe was the epidemic that for a week he was never in bed. He attended fifty cases without suffering, but as soon as he had bent over Hendry Munn's youngest boys, who both had it, he said, "I'm smitted," and went home to die. You may be sure that Gavin proved a good friend to Micah Dow. I have the piece of slate on which Rob proved himself a good friend to Gavin; it was in his pocket when we found the body. Lord Rintoul returned to his English estates, and never revisited the Spittal. The last thing I heard of him was that he had been offered the Lord-Lieutenanship of a county, and had accepted it in a long letter, in which he began by pointing out his unworthiness. This undid him, for the Queen, or her councillors, thinking from his first page that he had declined the honor, read no further, and appointed another man. Waster Lunny is still alive, but has gone to another farm. Sanders Webster, in his gratitude, wanted Nanny to become an Auld Licht, but she refused, saying, "Mr. Dishart is worth a dozen o' Mr. Duthie, and I'm terrible fond o' Mrs. Dishart, but Established I was born and Established I'll remain till I'm carried out o' this housefeet foremost."

"But Nanny went to Heaven for all that," my little maid told me. "Jean says people can go to Heaven though they are not Auld Lichts, but she says it takes them all their time. Would you like me to tell you a story about my mother putting glass on the manse dike? Well, my mother and my father is very fond of each other, and once they was in the garden, and my father kissed my mother, and there was a woman watching them over the dike, and she cried out--something naughty."

"It was Tibbie Birse," I said, "and what she cried was, 'Mercy on us, that's the third time in half an hour!' So your mother, who heard her, was annoyed, and put glass on the wall."

"But it's me that is telling you the story. You are sure you don't know it? Well, they asked father to take the glass away, and he wouldn't; but he once preached at mother for having a white feather in her bonnet, and another time he preached at her for being too fond of him. Jean told me. That's all."

No one seeing Babbie going to church demurely on Gavin's arm could guess her history. Sometimes I wonder whether the desire to be a gypsy again ever comes over her for a mad hour, and whether, if so, Gavin takes such measures to cure her as he threatened in Caddam Wood. I suppose not; but here is another story:

"When I ask mother to tell me about her once being a gypsy she says I am a bad 'quisitive little girl, and to put on my hat and come with her to the

prayer-meeting; and when I asked father to let me see mother's gypsy frock he made me learn Psalm forty-eight by heart. But once I see'd it, and it was a long time ago, as long as a week ago. Micah Dow gave me rowans to put in my hair, and I like Micah because he calls me Miss, and so I woke in my bed because there was noises, and I ran down to the parlor, and there was my mother in her gypsy frock, and my rowans was in her hair, and my father was kissing her, and when they saw me they jumped; and that's all."

"Would you like me to tell you another story? It is about a little girl. Well, there was once a minister and his wife, and they hadn't no little girls, but just little boys, and God was sorry for them, so He put a little girl in a cabbage in the garden, and when they found her they were glad. Would you like me to tell you who the little girl was? Well, it was me, and, ugh! I was awful cold in the cabbage. Do you like that story?"

"Yes; I like it best of all the stories I know."

"So do I like it, too. Couldn't nobody help loving me, 'cause I'm so nice? Why am I so fearful nice?"

"Because you are like your grandmother."

"It was clever of my father to know when he found me in the cabbage that my name was Margaret. Are you sorry grandmother is dead?"

"I am glad your mother and father were so good to her and made her so happy."

"Are you happy?"

"Yes."

"But when I am happy I laugh."

"I am old, you see, and you are young."

"I am nearly six. Did you love grandmother? Then why did you never come to see her? Did grandmother know you was here? Why not? Why didn't I not know about you till after grandmother died?"

"I'll tell you when you are big."

"Shall I be big enough when I am six?"

"No, not till your eighteenth birthday."

"But birthdays comes so slow. Will they come quicker when I am big?"

"Much quicker."

On her sixth birthday Micah Dow drove my little maid to the school-house in the doctor's gig, and she crept beneath the table and whispered--

"Grandfather!"

"Father told me to call you that if I liked, and I like," she said when I had taken her upon my knee. "I know why you kissed me just now. It was because I looked like grandmother. Why do you kiss me when I look like her?"

"Who told you I did that?"

"Nobody didn't tell me. I just found out. I loved grandmother too. She told me all the stories she knew."

"Did she ever tell you a story about a black dog?"

"No. Did she know one?"

"Yes, she knew it,"

"Perhaps she had forgotten it?"

"No, she remembered it."

"Tell it to me."

"Not till you are eighteen."

"But will you not be dead when I am eighteen? When you go to Heaven, will you see grandmother?"

"Yes."

"Will she be glad to see you?"

My little maid's eighteenth birthday has come, and I am still in Thrums, which I love, though it is beautiful to none, perhaps, save to the very done, who lean on their staves and look long at it, having nothing else to do till they die. I have lived to rejoice in the happiness of Gavin and Babbie: and if at times I have suddenly had to turn away my head after looking upon them in their home surrounded by their children, it was but a moment's envy that I could not help. Margaret never knew of the dominie in the glen. They wanted to tell her of me, but I would not have it. She has been long gone from this world; but sweet memories of her still grow, like honeysuckle, up

the white walls of the manse, smiling in at the parlor window and beckoning from the door, and for some filling all the air with fragrance. It was not she who raised the barrier between her and me, but God Himself; and to those who maintain otherwise, I say they do not understand the purity of a woman's soul. During the years she was lost to me her face ever came between me and ungenerous thoughts; and now I can say, all that is carnal in me is my own, and all that is good I got from her. Only one bitterness remains. When I found Gavin in the rain, when I was fighting my way through the flood, when I saw how the hearts of the people were turned against him--above all, when I found Whamond in the manse--I cried to God, making promises to Him, if He would spare the lad for Margaret's sake, and He spared him; but these promises I have not kept.

THE END