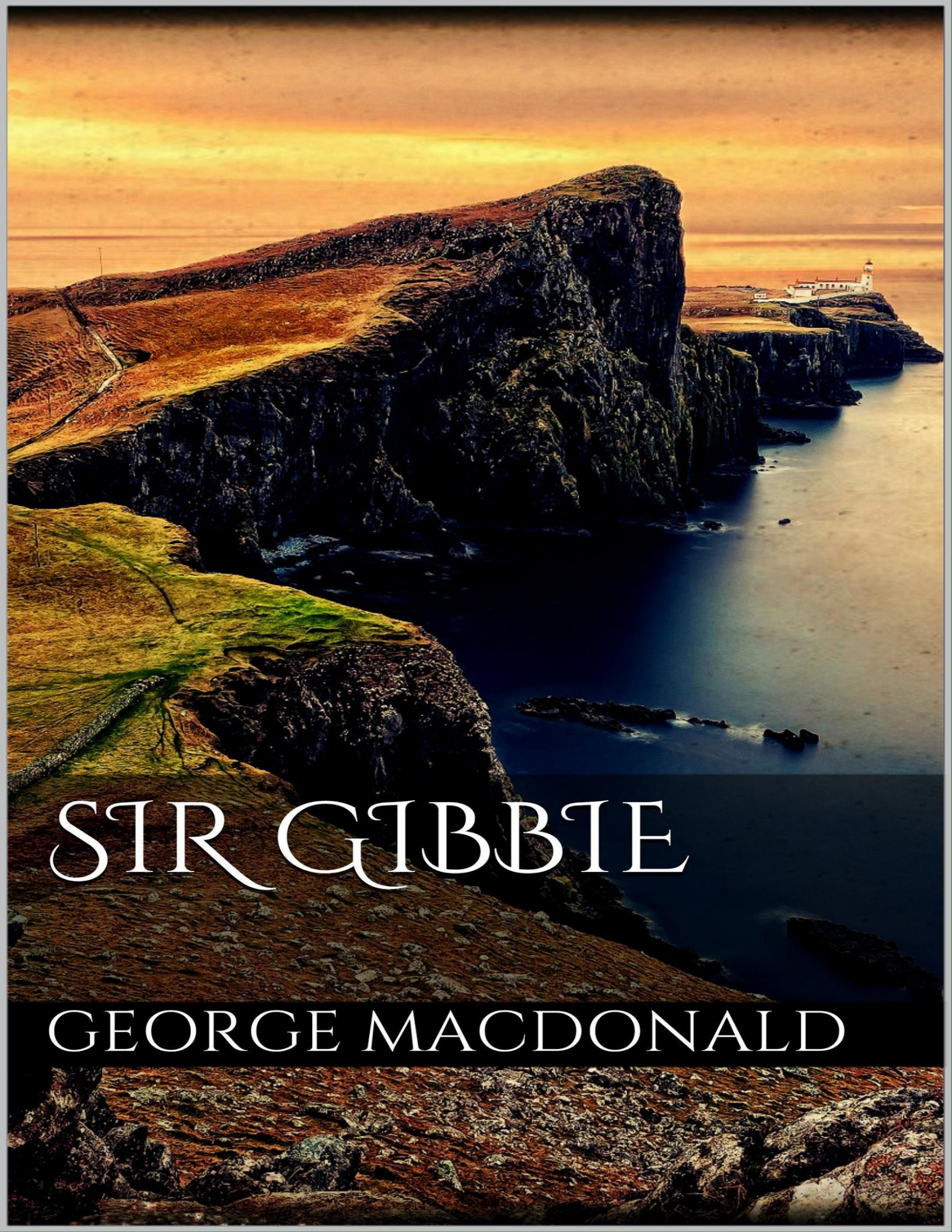
SIR GIBBIE
GEORGE MACDONALD

Sir Gibbie

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George MacDonald

CHAPTER I.

THE EARRING.

"Come oot o' the gutter, ye nickum!" cried, in harsh, half-masculine voice, a woman standing on the curbstone of a short, narrow, dirty lane, at right angles to an important thoroughfare, itself none of the widest or cleanest. She was dressed in dark petticoat and print wrapper. One of her shoes was down at the heel, and discovered a great hole in her stocking. Had her black hair been brushed and displayed, it would have revealed a thready glitter of grey, but all that was now visible of it was only two or three untidy tresses that dropped from under a cap of black net and green ribbons, which looked as if she had slept in it. Her face must have been handsome when it was young and fresh; but was now beginning to look tattooed, though whether the colour was from without or from within, it would have been hard to determine. Her black eyes looked resolute, almost fierce, above her straight, well-formed nose. Yet evidently circumstance clave fast to her. She had never risen above it, and was now plainly subjected to it. About thirty yards from her, on the farther side of the main street, and just opposite the mouth of the lane, a child, apparently about six, but in reality about eight, was down on his knees raking with both hands in the grey dirt of the kennel. At the woman's cry he lifted his head, ceased his search, raised himself, but without getting up, and looked at her. They were notable eyes out of which he looked—of such a deep blue were they, and having such long lashes;

but more notable far from their expression, the nature of which, although a certain witchery of confidence was at once discoverable, was not to be determined without the help of the whole face, whose diffused meaning seemed in them to deepen almost to speech. Whatever was at the heart of that expression, it was something that enticed question and might want investigation. The face as well as the eyes was lovely—not very clean, and not too regular for hope of a fine development, but chiefly remarkable from a general effect of something I can only call luminosity. The hair, which stuck out from his head in every direction, like a round fur cap, would have been of the red-gold kind, had it not been sunburned into a sort of human hay. An odd creature altogether the child appeared, as, shaking the gutter-drops from his little dirty hands, he gazed from his bare knees on the curbstone at the woman of rebuke. It was but for a moment. The next he was down, raking in the gutter again.

The woman looked angry, and took a step forward; but the sound of a sharp imperative little bell behind her, made her turn at once, and re-enter the shop from which she had just issued, following a man whose pushing the door wider had set the bell ringing. Above the door was a small board, nearly square, upon which was painted in lead-colour on a black ground the words, "Licensed to sell beer, spirits, and tobacco to be drunk on the premises." There was no other sign. "Them 'at likes my whusky 'ill no aye be speerin' my name," said Mistress Croale. As the day went on she would have more and more customers, and in the evening on to midnight, her parlour would be well filled. Then she would be always at hand, and the spring of the bell would be turned aside from the impact of the opening door. Now the bell was needful to recall her from house affairs.

"The likin' 'at craturs his for clean dirt! He's been at it this hale half-hoor!" she murmured to herself as she poured from a black bottle into a pewter measure a gill of whisky

for the pale-faced toper who stood on the other side of the counter: far gone in consumption, he could not get through the forenoon without his morning. "I wad like," she went on, as she replaced the bottle without having spoken a word to her customer, whose departure was now announced with the same boisterous alacrity as his arrival by the shrill-toned bell—"I wad like, for's father's sake, honest man! to thraw Gibbie's lug. That likin' for dirt I canna fathom nor bide."

Meantime the boys attention seemed entirely absorbed in the gutter. Whatever vehicle passed before him, whatever footsteps behind, he never lifted his head, but went creeping slowly on his knees along the curb still searching down the flow of the sluggish, nearly motionless current.

It was a grey morning towards the close of autumn. The days began and ended with a fog, but often between, as golden a sunshine glorified the streets of the grey city as any that ripened purple grapes. To-day the mist had lasted longer than usual—had risen instead of dispersing; but now it was thinning, and at length, like a slow blossoming of the sky-flower, the sun came melting through the cloud. Between the gables of two houses, a ray fell upon the pavement and the gutter. It lay there a very type of purity, so pure that, rest where it might, it destroyed every shadow of defilement that sought to mingle with it.

Suddenly the boy made a dart upon all fours, and pounced like a creature of prey upon something in the kennel. He had found what he had been looking for so long. He sprang to his feet and bounded with it into the sun, rubbing it as he ran upon what he had for trousers, of which there was nothing below the knees but a few streamers, and nothing above the knees but the body of the garment, which had been—I will not say made for, but last worn by a boy three times his size. His feet, of course, were bare as well as his knees and legs. But though they were dirty, red, and rough, they were nicely shaped little legs, and the feet were

dainty.
The sunbeams he sought came down through the smoky air like a Jacob's ladder, and he stood at the foot of it like a little prodigal angel that wanted to go home again, but feared it was too much inclined for him to manage the ascent in the present condition of his wings. But all he did want was to see in the light of heaven what the gutter had yielded him. He held up his find in the radiance and regarded it admiringly. It was a little earring of amethyst-coloured glass, and in the sun looked lovely. The boy was in an ecstasy over it. He rubbed it on his sleeve, sucked it to clear it from the last of the gutter, and held it up once more in the sun, where, for a few blissful moments, he contemplated it speechless. He then caused it to disappear somewhere about his garments—I will not venture to say in a pocket—and ran off, his little bare feet sounding thud, thud, thud on the pavement, and the collar of his jacket sticking halfway up the back of his head, and threatening to rub it bare as he ran. Through street after street he sped—all built of granite, all with flagged footways, and all paved with granite blocks—a hard, severe city, not beautiful or stately with its thick, grey, sparkling walls, for the houses were not high, and the windows were small, yet in the better parts, nevertheless, handsome as well as massive and strong.
To the boy the great city was but a house of many rooms, all for his use, his sport, his life. He did not know much of what lay within the houses; but that only added the joy of mystery to possession: they were jewel-closets, treasure-caves, indeed, with secret fountains of life; and every street was a channel into which they overflowed.
It was in one of quite a third-rate sort that the urchin at length ceased his trot, and drew up at the door of a baker's shop—a divided door, opening in the middle by a latch of bright brass. But the child did not lift the latch—only raised himself on tiptoe by the help of its handle, to look through

the upper half of the door, which was of glass, into the beautiful shop. The floor was of flags, fresh sanded; the counter was of deal, scrubbed as white almost as flour; on the shelves were heaped the loaves of the morning's baking, along with a large store of scones and rolls and baps—the last, the best bread in the world—biscuits hard and soft, and those brown discs of delicate flaky piecrust, known as buns. And the smell that came through the very glass, it seemed to the child, was as that of the tree of life in the Paradise of which he had never heard. But most enticing of all to the eyes of the little wanderer of the street were the penny-loaves, hot smoking from the oven—which fact is our first window into the ordered nature of the child. For the main point which made them more attractive than all the rest to him was, that sometimes he did have a penny, and that a penny loaf was the largest thing that could be had for a penny in the shop. So that, lawless as he looked, the desires of the child were moderate, and his imagination wrought within the bounds of reason. But no one who has never been blessed with only a penny to spend and a mighty hunger behind it, can understand the interest with which he stood there and through the glass watched the bread, having no penny and only the hunger. There is at least one powerful bond, though it may not always awake sympathy, between mudlark and monarch—that of hunger. No one has yet written the poetry of hunger—has built up in verse its stairs of grand ascent—from such hunger as Gibbie's for a penny-loaf up—no, no, not to an alderman's feast; that is the way down the mouldy cellar-stair—but up the white marble scale to the hunger after righteousness whose very longings are bliss.

Behind the counter sat the baker's wife, a stout, fresh-coloured woman, looking rather dull, but simple and honest. She was knitting, and if not dreaming, at least dozing over her work, for she never saw the forehead and eyes which, like a young ascending moon, gazed at her over

the horizon of the opaque half of her door. There was no greed in those eyes—only much quiet interest. He did not want to get in; had to wait, and while waiting beguiled the time by beholding. He knew that Mysie, the baker's daughter, was at school, and that she would be home within half an hour. He had seen her with tear-filled eyes as she went, had learned from her the cause, and had in consequence unwittingly roused Mrs. Croale's anger, and braved it when aroused. But though he was waiting for her, such was the absorbing power of the spectacle before him that he never heard her approaching footsteps.

"Lat me in," said Mysie, with conscious dignity and a touch of indignation at being impeded on the very threshold of her father's shop.

The boy started and turned, but instead of moving out of the way, began searching in some mysterious receptacle hid in the recesses of his rags. A look of anxiety once appeared, but the same moment it vanished, and he held out in his hand the little drop of amethystine splendour. Mysie's face changed, and she clutched it eagerly.

"That's rale guid o' ye, wee Gibbie!" she cried. "Whaur did ye get it?"

He pointed to the kennel, and drew back from the door.

"I thank ye," she said heartily, and pressing down the thumbstall of the latch, went in.

"Wha's that ye're colloguin' wi', Mysie?" asked her mother, somewhat severely, but without lifting her eyes from her wires. "Ye maunna be speykin' to loons i' the street."

"It's only wee Gibbie, mither," answered the girl in a tone of confidence.

"Ou weel!" returned the mother, "he's no like the lave o' loons."

"But what had ye to say till him?" she resumed, as if afraid her leniency might be taken advantage of. "He's no fit company for the likes o' you, 'at his a father an' mither, an' a chop (shop). Ye maun hae little to say to sic rintheroot

laddies."
"Gibbie has a father, though they say he never hid nae mither," said the child.
"Troth, a fine father!" rejoined the mother, with a small scornful laugh. "Na, but he's something to mak mention o'! Sic a father, lassie, as it wad be tellin' him he had nane! What said ye till 'im?"
"I bit thankit 'im, 'cause I tint my drop as I gaed to the schuil i' the mornin', an' he fan't till me, an' was at the chopdoor waitin' to gie me't back. They say he's aye fin'in' things."
"He's a guid-hertit cratur!" said the mother,—"for ane, that is, 'at's been sae ill broucht up."
She rose, took from the shelf a large piece of bread, composed of many adhering penny-loaves, detached one, and went to the door.
"Here, Gibbie!" she cried as she opened it; "here's a fine piece to ye."
But no Gibbie was there. Up and down the street not a child was to be seen. A sandboy with a donkey cart was the sole human arrangement in it. The baker's wife drew back, shut the door and resumed her knitting.

CHAPTER II.

SIR GEORGE.

The sun was hot for an hour or two in the middle of the day, but even then in the shadow dwelt a cold breath—of the winter, or of death—of something that humanity felt unfriendly. To Gibbie, however, bare-legged, bare-footed, almost bare-bodied as he was, sun or shadow made small difference, except as one of the musical intervals of life that make the melody of existence. His bare feet knew the difference on the flags, and his heart recognized unconsciously the secret as it were of a meaning and a symbol, in the change from the one to the other, but he was almost as happy in the dull as in the bright day. Hardy through hardship, he knew nothing better than a constant good-humoured sparring with nature and circumstance for the privilege of being, enjoyed what came to him thoroughly, never mourned over what he had not, and, like the animals, was at peace. For the bliss of the animals lies in this, that, on their lower level, they shadow the bliss of those—few at any moment on the earth—who do not "look before and after, and pine for what is not," but live in the holy carelessness of the eternal now. Gibbie by no means belonged to the higher order, was as yet, indeed, not much better than a very blessed little animal.

To him the city was all a show. He knew many of the people—some of them who thought no small things of themselves—better than they would have chosen he or any one else should know them. He knew all the peripatetic vendors,

most of the bakers, most of the small grocers and tradespeople. Animal as he was, he was laying in a great stock for the time when he would be something more, for the time of reflection, whenever that might come. Chiefly, his experience was a wonderful provision for the future perception of character; for now he knew to a nicety how any one of his large acquaintance would behave to him in circumstances within the scope of that experience. If any such little vagabond rises in the scale of creation, he carries with him from the street an amount of material serving to the knowledge of human nature, human need, human aims, human relations in the business of life, such as hardly another can possess. Even the poet, greatly wise in virtue of his sympathy, will scarcely understand a given human condition so well as the man whose vital tentacles have been in contact with it for years.

When Gibbie was not looking in at a shop-window, or turning on one heel to take in all at a sweep, he was oftenest seen trotting. Seldom he walked. A gentle trot was one of his natural modes of being. And though this day he had been on the trot all the sunshine through, nevertheless, when the sun was going down there was wee Gibbie upon the trot in the chilling and darkening streets. He had not had much to eat. He had been very near having a penny loaf. Half a cookie, which a stormy child had thrown away to ease his temper, had done further and perhaps better service in easing Gibbie's hunger. The green-grocer woman at the entrance of the court where his father lived, a good way down the same street in which he had found the lost earring, had given him a small yellow turnip—to Gibbie nearly as welcome as an apple. A fishwife from Finstone with a creel on her back, had given him all his hands could hold of the sea-weed called dulse, presumably not from its sweetness, although it is good eating. She had added to the gift a small crab, but that he had carried to the seashore and set free, because it was alive. These, the half-cookie,

the turnip, and the dulse, with the smell of the baker's bread, was all he had had. It had been rather one of his meagre days. But it is wonderful upon how little those rare natures capable of making the most of things will live and thrive. There is a great deal more to be got out of things than is generally got out of them, whether the thing be a chapter of the Bible or a yellow turnip, and the marvel is that those who use the most material should so often be those that show the least result in strength or character. A superstitious priest-ridden Catholic may, in the kingdom of heaven, be high beyond sight of one who counts himself the broadest of English churchmen. Truly Gibbie got no fat out of his food, but he got what was far better. What he carried —I can hardly say under or in, but along with those rags of his, was all muscle—small, but hard, and healthy, and knotting up like whipcord. There are all degrees of health in poverty as well as in riches, and Gibbie's health was splendid. His senses also were marvellously acute. I have already hinted at his gift for finding things. His eyes were sharp, quick, and roving, and then they went near the ground, he was such a little fellow. His success, however, not all these considerations could well account for, and he was regarded as born with a special luck in finding. I doubt if sufficient weight was given to the fact that, even when he was not so turning his mind it strayed in that direction, whence, if any object cast its reflected rays on his retina, those rays never failed to reach his mind also. On one occasion he picked up the pocket-book a gentleman had just dropped, and, in mingled fun and delight, was trying to put it in its owner's pocket unseen, when he collared him, and, had it not been for the testimony of a young woman who, coming behind, had seen the whole, would have handed him over to the police. After all, he remained in doubt, the thing seemed so incredible. He did give him a penny, however, which Gibbie at once spent upon a loaf.

It was not from any notions of honesty—he knew nothing about it—that he always did what he could to restore the things he found; the habit came from quite another cause. When he had no clue to the owner, he carried the thing found to his father, who generally let it lie a while, and at length, if it was of nature convertible, turned it into drink.

While Gibbie thus lived in the streets like a townsparrow—as like a human bird without storehouse or barn as boy could well be—the human father of him would all day be sitting in a certain dark court, as hard at work as an aching head and a bloodless system would afford. The said court was off the narrowest part of a long, poverty-stricken street, bearing a name of evil omen, for it was called the Widdiehill—the place of the gallows. It was entered by a low archway in the middle of an old house, around which yet clung a musty fame of departed grandeur and ancient note. In the court, against a wing of the same house, rose an outside stair, leading to the first floor; under the stair was a rickety wooden shed; and in the shed sat the father of Gibbie, and cobbled boots and shoes as long as, at this time of the year, the light lasted. Up that stair, and two more inside the house, he went to his lodging, for he slept in the garret. But when or how he got to bed, George Galbraith never knew, for then, invariably, he was drunk. In the morning, however, he always found himself in it—generally with an aching head, and always with a mingled disgust at and desire for drink. During the day, alas! the disgust departed, while the desire remained, and strengthened with the approach of evening. All day he worked with might and main, such might and main as he had—worked as if for his life, and all to procure the means of death. No one ever sought to treat him, and from no one would he accept drink. He was a man of such inborn honesty, that the usurping demon of a vile thirst had not even yet, at the age of forty, been able to cast it out. The last little glory-cloud of his origin was trailing behind him—

but yet it trailed. Doubtless it needs but time to make of a drunkard a thief, but not yet, even when longing was at the highest, would he have stolen a forgotten glass of whisky; and still, often in spite of sickness and aches innumerable, George laboured that he might have wherewith to make himself drunk honestly. Strange honesty! Wee Gibbie was his only child, but about him or his well-being he gave himself almost as little trouble as Gibbie caused him! Not that he was hard-hearted; if he had seen the child in want, he would, at the drunkest, have shared his whisky with him; if he had fancied him cold, he would have put his last garment upon him; but to his whisky-dimmed eyes the child scarcely seemed to want anything, and the thought never entered his mind that, while Gibbie always looked smiling and contented, his father did so little to make him so. He had at the same time a very low opinion of himself and his deservings, and justly, for his consciousness had dwindled into little more than a live thirst. He did not do well for himself, neither did men praise him; and he shamefully neglected his child; but in one respect, and that a most important one, he did well by his neighbours: he gave the best of work, and made the lowest of charges. In no other way was he for much good. And yet I would rather be that drunken cobbler than many a "fair professor," as Bunyan calls him. A grasping merchant ranks infinitely lower than such a drunken cobbler. Thank God, the Son of Man is the judge, and to him will we plead the cause of such—yea, and of worse than they—for He will do right. It may be well for drunkards that they are social outcasts, but is there no intercession to be made for them—no excuse to be pleaded? Alas! the poor wretches would storm the kingdom of peace by the inspiration of the enemy. Let us try to understand George Galbraith. His very existence the sense of a sunless, dreary, cold-winded desert, he was evermore confronted, in all his resolves after betterment, by the knowledge that with the first eager mouthful of the strange

element, a rosy dawn would begin to flush the sky, a mist of green to cover the arid waste, a wind of song to ripple the air, and at length the misery of the day would vanish utterly, and the night throb with dreams. For George was by nature no common man. At heart he was a poet—weak enough, but capable of endless delight. The time had been when now and then he read a good book and dreamed noble dreams. Even yet the stuff of which such dreams are made, fluttered in particoloured rags about his life; and colour is colour even on a scarecrow.

He had had a good mother, and his father was a man of some character, both intellectually and socially. Now and then, it is too true, he had terrible bouts of drinking; but all the time between he was perfectly sober. He had given his son more than a fair education; and George, for his part, had trotted through the curriculum of Elphinstone College not altogether without distinction. But beyond this his father had entirely neglected his future, not even revealing to him the fact—of which, indeed, he was himself but dimly aware—that from wilful oversight on his part and design on that of others, his property had all but entirely slipped from his possession.

While his father was yet alive, George married the daughter of a small laird in a neighbouring county—a woman of some education, and great natural refinement. He took her home to the ancient family house in the city—the same in which he now occupied a garret, and under whose outer stair he now cobbled shoes. There, during his father's life, they lived in peace and tolerable comfort, though in a poor enough way. It was all, even then, that the wife could do to make both ends meet; nor would her relations, whom she had grievously offended by her marriage, afford her the smallest assistance. Even then, too, her husband was on the slippery incline; but as long as she lived she managed to keep him within the bounds of what is called respectability. She died, however, soon after

Gibbie was born; and then George began to lose himself altogether. The next year his father died, and creditors appeared who claimed everything. Mortgaged land and houses, with all upon and in them, were sold, and George left without a penny or any means of winning a livelihood, while already he had lost the reputation that might have introduced him to employment. For heavy work he was altogether unfit; and had it not been for a bottle companion —a merry, hard-drinking shoemaker—he would have died of starvation or sunk into beggary.

This man taught him his trade, and George was glad enough to work at it, both to deaden the stings of conscience and memory, and to procure the means of deadening them still further. But even here was something in the way of improvement, for hitherto he had applied himself to nothing, his being one of those dreamful natures capable of busy exertion for a time, but ready to collapse into disgust with every kind of effort.

How Gibbie had got thus far alive was a puzzle not a creature could have solved. It must have been by charity and ministration of more than one humble woman, but no one now claimed any particular interest in him—except Mrs. Croale, and hers was not very tender. It was a sad sight to some eyes to see him roving the streets, but an infinitely sadder sight was his father, even when bent over his work, with his hands and arms and knees going as if for very salvation. What thoughts might then be visiting his poor worn-out brain I cannot tell; but he looked the pale picture of misery. Doing his best to restore to service the nearly shapeless boots of carter or beggar, he was himself fast losing the very idea of his making, consumed heart and soul with a hellish thirst. For the thirst of the drunkard is even more of the soul than of the body. When the poor fellow sat with his drinking companions in Mistress Croale's parlour, seldom a flash broke from the reverie in which he seemed sunk, to show in what region of fancy his

spirit wandered, or to lighten the dulness that would not unfrequently invade that forecourt of hell. For even the damned must at times become aware of what they are, and then surely a terrible though momentary hush must fall upon the forsaken region. Yet those drinking companions would have missed George Galbraith, silent as he was, and but poorly responsive to the wit and humour of the rest; for he was always courteous, always ready to share what he had, never looking beyond the present tumbler—altogether a genial, kindly, honest nature. Sometimes, when two or three of them happened to meet elsewhere, they would fall to wondering why the silent man sought their company, seeing he both contributed so little to the hilarity of the evening, and seemed to derive so little enjoyment from it. But I believe their company was necessary as well as the drink to enable him to elude his conscience and feast with his imagination. Was it that he knew they also fought misery by investments in her bonds—that they also were of those who by Beelzebub would cast out Beelzebub—therefore felt at home, and with his own?

CHAPTER III.

MISTRESS CROALE.

The house at which they met had yet not a little character remaining. Mistress Croale had come in for a derived worthiness, in the memory, yet lingering about the place, of a worthy aunt deceased, and always encouraged in herself a vague idea of obligation to live up to it. Hence she had made it a rule to supply drink only so long as her customers kept decent—that is, so long as they did not quarrel aloud, and put her in danger of a visit from the police; tell such tales as offended her modesty; utter oaths of any peculiarly atrocious quality; or defame the Sabbath Day, the Kirk, or the Bible. On these terms, and so long as they paid for what they had, they might get as drunk as they pleased, without the smallest offence to Mistress Croale. But if the least unquestionable infringement of her rules occurred, she would pounce upon the shameless one with sudden and sharp reproof. I doubt not that, so doing, she cherished a hope of recommending herself above, and making deposits in view of a coming balance-sheet. The result for this life so far was, that, by these claims to respectability, she had gathered a clientele of douce, well-disposed drunkards, who rarely gave her any trouble so long as they were in the house though sometimes she had reason to be anxious about the fate of individuals of them after they left it.

Another peculiarity in her government was that she would rarely give drink to a woman. "Na, na," she would say, "what has a wuman to dee wi' strong drink! Lat the men

dee as they like, we canna help them." She made exception in behalf of her personal friends; and, for herself, was in the way of sipping—only sipping, privately, on account of her "trouble," she said—by which she meant some complaint, speaking of it as if it were generally known, although of the nature of it nobody had an idea. The truth was that, like her customers, she also was going down the hill, justifying to herself every step of her descent. Until lately, she had been in the way of going regularly to church, and she did go occasionally yet, and always took the yearly sacrament; but the only result seemed to be that she abounded the more in finding justifications, or, where they were not to be had, excuses, for all she did. Probably the stirring of her conscience made this the more necessary to her peace.

If the Lord were to appear in person amongst us, how much would the sight of him do for the sinners of our day? I am not sure that many like Mistress Croale would not go to him. She was not a bad woman, but slowly and surely growing worse.

That morning, as soon as the customer whose entrance had withdrawn her from her descent on Gibbie, had gulped down his dram, wiped his mouth with his blue cotton handkerchief, settled his face into the expression of a drink of water, gone demurely out, and crossed to the other side of the street, she would have returned to the charge, but was prevented by the immediately following entrance of the Rev. Clement Sclater—the minister of her parish, recently appointed. He was a man between young and middle-aged, an honest fellow, zealous to perform the duties of his office, but with notions of religion very beggarly. How could it be otherwise when he knew far more of what he called the Divine decrees than he did of his own heart, or the needs and miseries of human nature? At the moment, Mistress Croale was standing with her back to the door, reaching up

to replace the black bottle on its shelf, and did not see the man she heard enter.
"What's yer wull?" she said indifferently.
Mr. Sclater made no answer, waiting for her to turn and face him, which she did the sooner for his silence. Then she saw a man unknown to her, evidently, from his white neckcloth and funereal garments, a minister, standing solemn, with wide-spread legs, and round eyes of displeasure, expecting her attention.
"What's yer wull, sir?" she repeated, with more respect, but less cordiality than at first.
"If you ask my will," he replied, with some pomposity, for who that has just gained an object of ambition can be humble?—"it is that you shut up this whisky shop, and betake yourself to a more decent way of life in my parish."
"My certie! but ye're no blate (over-modest) to craw sae lood i' my hoose, an' that's a nearer fit nor a perris!" she cried, flaring up in wrath both at the nature and rudeness of the address. "Alloo me to tell ye, sir, ye're the first 'at ever daured threep my hoose was no a dacent ane."
"I said nothing about your house. It was your shop I spoke of," said the minister, not guiltless of subterfuge.
"An' what's my chop but my hoose? Haith! my hoose wad be o' fell sma' consideration wantin' the chop. Tak ye heed o' beirin' fause witness, sir."
"I said nothing, and know nothing, against yours more than any other shop for the sale of drink in my parish."
"The Lord's my shepherd! Wad ye even (compare) my hoose to Jock Thamson's or Jeemie Deuk's, baith i' this perris?"
"My good woman,—"
"Naither better nor waur nor my neepers," interrupted Mistress Croale, forgetting what she had just implied: "a body maun live."
"There are limits even to that most generally accepted of all principles," returned Mr. Sclater; "and I give you fair warning that I mean to do what I can to shut up all such

houses as yours in my parish. I tell you of it, not from the least hope that you will anticipate me by closing, but merely that no one may say I did anything in an underhand fashion."

The calmness with which he uttered the threat alarmed Mistress Croale. He might rouse unmerited suspicion, and cause her much trouble by vexatious complaint, even to the peril of her license. She must take heed, and not irritate her enemy. Instantly, therefore, she changed her tone to one of expostulation.

"It's a sair peety, doobtless," she said, "'at there sud be sae mony drouthie thrapples i' the kingdom, sir; but drouth maun drink, an' ye ken, sir, gien it war hauden frae them, they wad but see deils an' cut their throts."

"They're like to see deils ony gait er' lang," retorted the minister, relapsing into the vernacular for a moment.

"Ow, deed maybe, sir! but e'en the deils themsels war justifeed i' their objection to bein' committed to their ain company afore their time."

Mr. Sclater could not help smiling at the woman's readiness, and that was a point gained by her. An acquaintance with Scripture goes far with a Scotch ecclesiastic. Besides, the man had a redeeming sense of humour, though he did not know how to prize it, not believing it a gift of God.

"It's true, my woman," he answered. "Ay! it said something for them, deils 'at they war, 'at they preferred the swine. But even the swine cudna bide them!"

Encouraged by the condescension of the remark, but disinclined to follow the path of reflection it indicated, Mistress Croale ventured a little farther upon her own.

"Ye see, sir," she said, "as lang's there's whusky, it wull tak the throt-ro'd. It's the naitral w'y o' 't, ye see, to rin doon, an' it's no mainner o' use gangin' again natur. Sae, allooin' the thing maun be, ye'll hae till alloo likewise, an' it's a trouth I'm tellin' ye, sir, 'at it's o' nae sma' consequence to

the toon 'at the drucken craturs sud fill themsels wi' dacency—an' that's what I see till. Gang na to the magistrate, sir; but as sune's ye hae gotten testimony—guid testimony though, sir—'at there's been disorder or immorawlity i' my hoose, come ye to me, an' I'll gie ye my han' to paper on't this meenute, 'at I'll gie up my chop, an' lea' yer perris—an' may ye sune get a better i' my place. Sir, I'm like a mither to the puir bodies! An' gin ye drive them to Jock Thamson's, or Jeemie Deuk's, it'll be just like—savin' the word, I dinna inten' 't for sweirin', guid kens!—I say it'll just be dammin' them afore their time, like the puir deils. Hech! but it'll come sune eneuch, an' they're muckle to be peetied!"

"And when those victims of your vile ministrations," said the clergyman, again mounting his wooden horse, and setting it rocking, "find themselves where there will be no whisky to refresh them, where do you think you will be, Mistress Croale?"

"Whaur the Lord wulls," answered the woman. "Whaur that may be, I confess I'm whiles laith to think. Only gien I was you, Maister Sclater, I wad think twise afore I made ill waur."

"But hear me, Mistress Croale: it's not your besotted customers only I have to care for. Your soul is as precious in my sight as any of which I shall have to render an account."

"As Mistress Bonniman's, for enstance?" suggested Mrs. Croale, interrogatively, and with just the least trace of pawkiness in the tone.

The city, large as it was, was yet not large enough to prevent a portion of the private affairs of individuals from coming to be treated as public property, and Mrs. Bonniman was a handsome and rich young widow, the rumour of whose acceptableness to Mr. Sclater had reached Mistress Croale's ear before ever she had seen the minister himself. An unmistakable shadow of confusion crossed his countenance; whereupon with consideration

both for herself and him, the woman made haste to go on, as if she had but chosen her instance at merest random.
"Na, na, sir! what my sowl may be in the eyes o' my Maker, I hae ill tellin'," she said, "but dinna ye threip upo' me 'at it's o' the same vailue i' your eyes as the sowl o' sic a fine bonny, winsome leddy as yon. In trouth," she added, and shook her head mournfully, "I haena had sae mony preevileeges; an' maybe it'll be seen till, an' me passed ower a wheen easier nor some fowk."
"I wouldn't have you build too much upon that, Mistress Croale," said Mr. Sclater, glad to follow the talk down another turning, but considerably more afraid of rousing the woman than he had been before.
The remark drove her behind the categorical stockade of her religious merits.
"I pey my w'y," she said, with modest firmness. "I put my penny, and whiles my saxpence, intil the plate at the door when I gang to the kirk—an' I was jist thinkin' I wad win there the morn's nicht at farest, whan I turnt an' saw ye stan'in there, sir; an' little I thoucht—but that's neither here nor there, I'm thinkin'. I tell as feow lees as I can; I never sweir, nor tak the name o' the Lord in vain, anger me 'at likes; I sell naething but the best whusky; I never hae but broth to my denner upo' the Lord's day, an' broth canna brak the Sawbath, simmerin' awa' upo' the bar o' the grate, an' haudin' no lass frae the kirk; I confess, gien ye wull be speirin', 'at I dinna read my buik sae aften as maybe I sud; but, 'deed, sir, tho' I says't 'at sud haud my tongue, ye hae waur folk i' yer perris nor Benjie Croale's widow; an' gien ye wunna hae a drap to weet yer ain whustle for the holy wark ye hae afore ye the morn's mornin', I maun gang an' mak my bed, for the lass is laid up wi' a bealt thoom, an' I maunna lat a' thing gang to dirt an' green bree; though I'm sure it's rale kin' o' ye to come to luik efter me, an' that's mair nor Maister Rennie, honest gentleman, ever did me the fawvour o', a' the time he ministered the perris. I haena

an ill name wi' them 'at kens me, sir; that I can say wi' a clean conscience; an' ye may ken me weel gien ye wull. An' there's jist ae thing mair, sir: I gie ye my Bible-word, 'at never, gien I saw sign o' repentance or turnin' upo' ane o' them 'at pits their legs 'aneth my table—Wad ye luik intil the parlour, sir? No!—as I was sayin', never did I, sin' I keepit hoose, an' never wad I set mysel' to quench the smokin' flax; I wad hae no man's deith, sowl or body, lie at my door."

"Well, well, Mistress Croale," said the minister, somewhat dazed by the cataract he had brought upon his brain, and rather perplexed what to say in reply with any hope of reaching her, "I don't doubt a word of what you tell me; but you know works cannot save us; our best righteousness is but as filthy rags."

"It's weel I ken that, Mr. Sclater. An' I'm sure I'll be glaid to see ye, sir, ony time ye wad dee me the fawvour to luik in as ye're passin' by. It'll be none to yer shame, sir, for mine's an honest hoose."

"I'll do that, Mistress Croale," answered the minister, glad to escape. "But mind," he added, "I don't give up my point for all that; and I hope you will think over what I have been saying to you—and that seriously."

With these words he left the shop rather hurriedly, in evident dread of a reply.

Mistress Croale turned to the shelves behind her, took again the bottle she had replaced, poured out a large half-glass of whisky, and tossed it off. She had been compelled to think and talk of things unpleasant, and it had put her, as she said, a' in a trim'le. She was but one of the many who get the fuel of their life in at the wrong door, their comfort from the world-side of the universe. I cannot tell whether Mr. Sclater or she was the farther from the central heat. The woman had the advantage in this, that she had to expend all her force on mere self-justification, and had no energy left for vain-glory. It was with a sad sigh she set

about the work of the house. Nor would it have comforted her much to assure her that hers was a better defence than any distiller in the country could make. Even the whisky itself gave her little relief; it seemed to scald both stomach and conscience, and she vowed never to take it again. But alas! this time is never the time for self-denial; it is always the next time. Abstinence is so much more pleasant to contemplate upon the other side of indulgence! Yet the struggles after betterment that many a drunkard has made in vain, would, had his aim been high enough, have saved his soul from death, and turned the charnel of his life into a temple. Abject as he is, foiled and despised, such a one may not yet be half so contemptible as many a so-counted respectable member of society, who looks down on him from a height too lofty even for scorn. It is not the first and the last only, of whom many will have to change places; but those as well that come everywhere between.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PARLOUR.

The day went on, and went out, its short autumnal brightness quenched in a chilly fog. All along the Widdiehill, the gas was alight in the low-browed dingy shops. To the well-to-do citizen hastening home to the topmost business of the day, his dinner, these looked the abodes of unlovely poverty and mean struggle. Even to those behind their counters, in their back parlours, and in their rooms above, everything about them looked common, to most of them, save the owners, wearisome. But to yon pale-faced student, gliding in the glow of his red gown, through the grey mist back to his lodging, and peeping in at every open door as he passes, they are so full of mystery, that gladly would he yield all he has gathered from books, for one genuine glance of insight into the vital movement of the hearts and households of which those open shops are the sole outward and visible signs. Each house is to him a nest of human birds, over which brood the eternal wings of love and purpose. Only such different birds are hatched from the same nest! And what a nest was then the city itself!—with its university, its schools, its churches, its hospitals, its missions; its homes, its lodging-houses, its hotels, its drinking shops, its houses viler still; its factories, its ships, its great steamers; and the same humanity busy in all!—here the sickly lady walking in the panoply of love unharmed through the horrors of vicious suffering; there the strong mother cursing her own child along half a street

with an intensity and vileness of execration unheard elsewhere! The will of the brooding spirit must be a grand one, indeed, to enclose so much of what cannot be its will, and turn all to its purpose of eternal good! Our knowledge of humanity, how much more our knowledge of the Father of it, is moving as yet but in the first elements.

In his shed under the stair it had been dark for some time—too dark for work, that is, and George Galbraith had lighted a candle: he never felt at liberty to leave off so long as a man was recognizable in the street by daylight. But now at last, with a sigh of relief, he rose. The hour of his redemption was come, the moment of it at hand. Outwardly calm, he was within eager as a lover to reach Lucky Croale's back parlour. His hand trembled with expectation as he laid from it the awl, took from between his knees the great boot on the toe of which he had been stitching a patch, lifted the yoke of his leather apron over his head, and threw it aside. With one hasty glance around, as if he feared some enemy lurking near to prevent his escape, he caught up a hat which looked as if it had been brushed with grease, pulled it on his head with both hands, stepped out quickly, closed the door behind him, turned the key, left it in the lock, and made straight for his earthly paradise—but with chastened step. All Mistress Croale's customers made a point of looking decent in the street—strove, in their very consciousness, to carry the expression of being on their way to their tea, not their toddy—or if their toddy, then not that they desired it, but merely that it was their custom always of an afternoon: man had no choice—he must fill space, he must occupy himself; and if so, why not Mistress Croale's the place, and the consumption of whisky the occupation? But alas for their would-be seeming indifference! Everybody in the lane, almost in the Widdiehill, knew every one of them, and knew him for what he was; knew that every drop of toddy he drank was to him as to a miser his counted sovereign; knew that, as the hart

for the water-brooks, so thirsted his soul ever after another tumbler; that he made haste to swallow the last drops of the present, that he might behold the plenitude of the next steaming before him; that, like the miser, he always understated the amount of the treasure he had secured, because the less he acknowledged, the more he thought he could claim.

George was a tall man, of good figure, loosened and bowed. His face was well favoured, but not a little wronged by the beard and dirt of a week, through which it gloomed haggard and white. Beneath his projecting black brows, his eyes gleamed doubtful, as a wood-fire where white ash dims the glow. He looked neither to right nor left, but walked on with moveless dull gaze, noting nothing.

"Yon's his ain warst enemy," said the kindly grocer-wife, as he passed her door.

"Ay," responded her customer, who kept a shop near by for old furniture, or anything that had been already once possessed—"ay, I daursay. But eh! to see that puir negleckit bairn o' his rin scoorin' aboot the toon yon gait—wi' little o' a jacket but the collar, an' naething o' the breeks but the doup—eh, wuman! it maks a mither's hert sair to luik upo' 't. It's a providence 'at his mither's weel awa' an' canna see't; it wad gar her turn in her grave."

George was the first arrival at Mistress Croale's that night. He opened the door of the shop like a thief, and glided softly into the dim parlour, where the candles were not yet lit. There was light enough, however, from the busy little fire in the grate to show the clean sanded floor which it crossed with flickering shadows, the coloured prints and cases of stuffed birds on the walls, the full-rigged barque suspended from the centre of the ceiling, and, chief of all shows of heaven or earth, the black bottle on the table, with the tumblers, each holding its ladle, and its wine glass turned bottom upwards. Nor must I omit a part without which the rest could not have been a whole—the kettle of