

## Notches on The Stick

As we are relating only that part of the life of Burns associated more or less intimately with Jean Armour, there are many events of interest to be omitted. But we must advert to the humiliation he underwent in the atonement made before the Church for his sexual errors. The harshly offensive manner in which this penitential rite was administered vexed and wounded him needlessly—Father Auld "rubbing it in," if we may so speak,—and causing a bitterness of reflection in some of the poet's subsequent writings. It need be wonder of none that Burns took the attitude he did to the Scottish church of his day,—and especially to a certain branch of it. In fact, it could only be a rock of offence to such a spirit; and only an innate reverence saved him from a much deeper infidelity. Apart from all his personal grievances, the very creed and constitution of that church—in the bosom of which, nevertheless, so many excellent and eminent men have been nourished, and so virtuous a populace—was at that time calculated to awe, if not to terrify the weak and timid into subservience, and to revolt the stronger and more defiant,—a liberal class of the day, easily led by Burns. The character of some of the clergy played an antagonistic part. A spirit like Burns must needs abhor some of the dogmas of Calvinism, popularly represented as they then were; and we might expect to find him presenting in mocking parables such tenets as,—The damnation of infants and the virtuous heathen, and the limited and unconditional election of souls to salvation. The furious zeal of those 'who dealt damnation round the land' inspired his most caustic satire, and in convivial assemblies raised the most uproarious laughter. But more intolerable to us than any fiery preaching seem the clear cold and logical statements of the Westminster Assembly. Suppose we substitute, in the case of one of their articles, a more libertine and parabolic for their precise and legal style.

A certain invincible conqueror, having taken a city, determined to burn it, and put the inhabitants to exquisite and prolonged torture. He, however, declared his intention to make certain benevolent exceptions, not to be founded in any merit of character in the subjects of his clemency, or any petitions for mercy. That it might be known he is not the monster his enemies had represented him, he permitted a score of persons, who had regarded themselves as victims and had expected their doom, to appear before him with halts about their necks. Upon their entry to his presence he immediately released them, and, with expressions of the deepest and most joyful affection, elevated them to honor and to high estate. Are love and justice and reason not one, in Heaven and on Earth?

We come now to that era in the life of Burns the contemplation of which has always given us the highest pleasure; and which on the whole, we regard as the happiest, noblest, and most hopeful, the poet was even to know. He had outlined his domestic philosophy in four memorable lines:

"To make a happy fragile life  
For weans and wife—  
That's the true path and sublime  
Of human life;—"

and we honor him for heroic attempt to realize this in actual experience, though the struggle ended in a partial defeat. Well for him could a modicum of useful dullness,—the ballast of a nature like Wordsworth's—have been infused in him. The cup of his delight must needs be foaming at the brim, or lying insipid in the lees. He knew no middle course. Dullness was like lead upon his spirits, and if mirth and wit and wisdom were not at the flood, (putting aside all other distresses) then

"He could lie down like a tired child,  
And weep away this life of care,"

that had him chained, at once Fortune's pet and victim.

Yet, with some of the joy of his new-found love, and the light of his young fame about him, we follow him to Ellisland, on the Nith, where Lord Dalhousie has leased him a farm, and where, if he is to cherish a wife and bring up children, he must set about rearing a home. We see him here, as we see the flowers at dawn, and hear him as we hear the birds at sunrise. He treads the fields he can almost call his own, and accumulates rock and lime, and other materials, to build his cottage. What matters now that his own head is sheltered by a hovel, and that no smiling cook caters to his appetite, won from the fresh-turned mould and the caller air! He has come home to Nature again, back to love and song,—then wherefore

not to content? He has come back to the "gay green birk" and the blossoming Hawthorn, the wild brier rose, the fox-glove, the harebell, and the mountain daisy, he has loved so well;—back where he can hear again "the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of gray plover in an autumnal morning." We see him standing with the muse in the midst of his fair acres and around him the Whiteside birds are singing, and down below the green and woody bank the clear Nith waters go rippling on with a melody like that waking in his own heart. We see him mounted on horseback, thridding the dale, through which the river flows, to Dumfries; or speeding over the hills to Ayrshire, for a glimpse of Jean and the folks; or directing his plough along the furrowed slope; or working at his cottage, which stands at this day, in part the work of his hands; "or with a white sheet, containing his seed corn, slung across his shoulders, [striding with measured steps along his turned-up furrows, and scattering the grain in the earth;] or "pursuing the defaulters of the revenue among the hills and vales of Nithside, his roving eye wandering over the charms of nature, and muttering his wayward fancies as he moves along." His muse, long bound with the silken fetters of Edinburgh, was now liberated to sing a clearer, blither carol,—("O a' the sirs") a song one never hears but his heart leaps up, as Wordsworth declares his did when he beheld "a rainbow in the sky."

Yes, happy he was here, if poet such as he can ever be happy. Jean had come at autumn-tide, and their housekeeping was set up;—not, indeed, where and as he would have had it. He could not usher the "guid wife" with immediate haste into her destined home, with all his ardency of effort and his passionate expostulation with the contractor: "If ever you wished to deserve the blessing of him that was ready to perish; if ever you were in a situation that a little kindness would have rescued you from many evils; if ever you hope to find rest in future states of untried being, get these matters of mine ready." Doubtless the tame mechanic-tradesman, unused to rhetoric on common business occasions, heard these things with surprise; and certainly did not get the house ready before Jean and the frosts came. They must accordingly seek a temporary shelter. "About a mile below Ellisland," Chambers informs us, "there is a tract of ground which has once been encircled by the Nith, partly through natural channels and partly through an artificial trench. Here rises an old dismantled tower, with more modern buildings adjoining to it on two of its sides—the whole forming the farm buildings of The Isle; for such is the name of the place, still remained, although one of the ancient water courses is now only a rusty piece of ground. The place, which has an antiquated, and even somewhat romantic appearance, was the property of Mr. Newell, writer in Dumfries, whose family had lived in it during the summer, but only for a short time in consequence of a certain nocturnal sounds in the old tower having led to the belief that it was haunted. What added a little, or perhaps not a little to the eeriness of the spot, was that the old burying ground of Dunscore, containing the sepulchrs of the dreaded persecutor Grieson, of Lagg was in the immediate neighborhood. Such was the 'moated grange' to which the illustrious poet welcomed him; the mistress of his heart—the fascinating, never to be forgotten Jean Armour."

But at last their proper home was complete, and they entered it to set up their housekeeping. The children, hitherto occasion of their sorrow, are gathered about them, to become their joy, and had already begun to comfort them. Burns teaches them their catechism, and tries to be a good father to them, as he remembers one who once was such to him. Even

"The big ha-Bib'e, at his father's pride,"

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is sometimes opened, and used devoutly, as in that home where he was in place of an elder son after that sire had gone. Jenny Geddes, "the auld mare," will not need to carry him so often "over the Cumnock hills," for the lode-star that drew him to Ayrshire is in Nithsdale now. The "plenishing" has been transported thither; the servant lad and lass have come; Mrs. Danlop's marriage-gift, that "handsome four-posted bed" is set up, and the fire is kindled on the hearth. The new "biggin" being ready they take formal possession. On the day the new abode was to be christened, Burns, who "delighted to keep up the old-world freits or usages," bade Betty Smith, the servant, "take a bowl of salt, and place the family Bible on the top of it, and, bearing these, walk first into the new house and possess it," while he himself, with his wife on his arm, followed Betty and the Bible and the salt, and so entered their new abode."

But, even in this retirement, and amid the solitudes of his favorite country, great despair and disgusts came over him. Sometimes duchesses and lords and the elite of Edinburgh walked in his vision, and the mirth of glided tables rang in his ears. The closed gates of splendor stirred him to longing and provoked his pride. His sensitiveness was acute; a slight was grievous to him, and the thorn festered into black blood. Then the humble peasantry, of whom he came,—the "hardy sons of rustic soil," the sight of whose firesides, sending their blue-wreathed smoke into the quiet gloaming, filled his eyes with benignant tears and his heart with blessings,—dwindled in his sight to ignorant churls, unfit for his association. "The only things," he said, in some such mood, to Bengo, the engraver, "that are to be found in this country in any degree of perfection are stupidity and canting." What to them was Coila's laureate in comparison with the steady-going farmer, who attended to his fields and kept his accounts straight; who let was sail alone, and who stood by his kirk? "Prose," he declared, they only knew in graces and sermons, which they valued, plaiding webs, by the ell; while a poet and a rhinoceros 'suggested ideas equally distinct and agreeable.' Thus he felt the pain of his environment; he could not have in himself his sufficiency, nor subsist in comfort, like the stars and hills, without sympathy. Apart and alone he might feel and say,—

"It pleased the gods to give a poet birth,  
No favoring hand that comes of lofty race,  
No priestly unction nor the grant of kings,  
Can on me lay such lustre and such grace,  
Nor add such heritage;"

but back to the crowd again, and to the light of common day, his garland seemed to crumble; and if any one should say to him,—Is it not enough to be a poet? he will answer,—No, it is not enough! In some such mingled humor,—half in despair and half in scornful merriment,—he described himself as a fantastic composed by the very fiend of the odds and ends of creation, whose disreputable occupation is "Stringin' bladders up in rhyme  
For fools to sing."

But other troubles there were. The fact is his farming did not prosper; only poetry and the excise turned out well,—yet not sufficiently so. It seemed that Nature, having given him the harvest of eye and heart, had consistently denied him any other out of her fields;—for why should even a poet have everything? How hard, then is this rural existence to dignify and adorn! Horace and Cowley had tried and praised it;—yet they had never tried to dig out a living and pay rent from the wet clay of Ellisland. "Dr. Moore had mentioned the friendliness of husbandry to fancy, while he wished for him the prosperous union of the farmer and the poet. But Burns had neither Maecenas for a landlord nor Horace for a neighbor. However, he was charmed with the idea of singing compatriots about him, and gave the tribute of a glowing admiration to such small poets as his country then furnished. It seemed as if an astral lamp bowed to the tallow candle!

A friend points out to us a paragraph, illustrating the diversity of the views that may be taken of the Scottish poet, even by brother poets:

"Now while Burns is the topic for so much discussion, the following diverse opinions elicited long ago by Aubrey de Vere and printed in the new Tennyson memoir will be read with interest: 'Read the exquisite songs of Burns,' Tennyson once besought De Vere, 'in shape each of them has the perfection of the berry, in light, the radiance of the dew-drop; you forget for its sake those stupid things, his serious pieces.' On the same day Mr. De Vere met Wordsworth, who praised Burns as a great genius who had brought poetry back to nature, adding: 'Of course, I refer to his serious efforts, such as 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'—those foolish little amatory songs of his one has to for-

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get.' This story of contrariety was told by Mr. De Vere that evening to Sir Henry Taylor, whose comment was: 'Burns's exquisite songs and Burns's serious efforts are to be alike tedious and disagreeable reading.'

We cannot suppose the above to be the serious utterances of real, deliberate opinion,—so diverse, not to say perverse, some of them are; but whimsical expressions of men in adverse moods, who in such cases say extraordinary things. If we made any exception to this view of the case it would be that of Sir Henry Taylor, in whom there is a savor of malignancy. As to Wordsworth, the singular moodiness of his criticism is matter of frequent remark. On one occasion, provoked, perhaps, by the essayist's warmth [of] expression toward the dramatist, he made the declaration to Lamb—and made it [to his cost—that he could write like Shakespeare if he had the mind. We would not, however, infer from such a remark] his real estimate of Shakespeare.

PASTOR FELIX.

### THE GRAND DUCHESS'S DOLLS.

The President's Rich Gifts to the Russian Duchess.

When President Faure of France went to Russia lately to cement his country's alliance with the tsar, he neglected no means of obtaining favor at the Russian court. He courted the friendship of the rising as well as the risen generation by taking as a present, some wonderful talking dolls to the Grand Duchess Olga, the eldest of the tsar's two little girls.

They were, of course, phonographic dolls and though their form and exquisite dressing were the work of French art, they owed their ability to talk and sing to America, where Mr. Edison, the inventor of the phonograph, was born and lives. One of the dolls was a little girl, dressed in white muslin, with a waist of blue, "surreal" silk. She was in a box, and when the box was opened the little Grand Duchess Olga, who is now two years old, was astonished to see the doll pop up and to hear it say, in perfectly clear French, a language which the little grand duchess learns as early as she does Russian.

"Good day, my little mama! What a nice dream I've had! I dreamed that you brought me a pretty doll, that laughed and sang, just as I do!"

After this, the doll began to sing, and went through with 'Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre,' which is the French equivalent for the song that we call, 'For George's a jolly good fellow,' and also two other French songs, 'Ah! mon beau chateau,' and 'Le petit tambour.'

The other two dolls were more remarkable for their costumes than for their talking, though they, too, could speak. One was dressed as a fashionable grown-up lady, in a costume of pale blue silk, sprinkled over with rosebuds, a hat covered with rich ornaments, and a green velvet mantel trimmed with swan's-down, and she carried a white umbrella. These were far from being all this fashionable young lady's clothes. She had a wardrobe in which were a street costume and a ball toilet. Her talk consisted of phrases appropriate to a lady of society.

The third doll was a peasant, and she was the most interesting of the three. She had a wardrobe containing several of the costumes worn by peasant women in France.

Concerning this doll a dreadful political question arose. Diplomats and statesmen were called upon to discuss the gowns of a doll! For one of the costumes made for this pretty creature was the dress worn by the peasant women of Alsace and Lorraine—and the portions of those provinces, too, which are now a part of the German empire. The statesmen decided that this would not do at all, since it might have a tendency to indicate that at the Russian court Alsace and Lorraine were regarded as rightfully still a part of France.

So the little peasant doll was robbed of

her Alsatian costume, and left with only those of Normandy and Brittany.

It will not be strange if, with these beautiful dolls of French nationality, the Grand Duchess Olga grows up with a decidedly soft spot in her heart for France.

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Those who aspire to true manhood and womanhood are the men and women who take the precaution to banish the very first symptoms of disease. That tired feeling you experience from day to day; that nervous headache you dread so much; that "can't sleep" condition that makes you weak and wretched; the pains in side and back indicating kidney disease; the sharp twinges of rheumatism and neuralgia that make life a misery; that constipated habit that is sending poison into your life blood—all these varied symptoms lead to disease and death unless they are banished.

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For the Public.

Where did you get your information? asked the editor of the yellow journal. 'From the butler,' answered the reporter. 'It would never do to quote the butler, would it?' mused the editor. 'You'd better merely say that we have it on the highest authority.'

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