

Literary Miscellany.

A LAY OF ABBEY ST. BATHAMS.

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In the very heart of the Lammemoor hills is situated the small village of St. Bathams. About the end of the last century the Rev. Mr. Skedd was its parish minister. He was not like some of the ministers of these days, who were called "dry sticks," but on the contrary was a most eloquent preacher in the pulpit, and out of it was famed far and near for his ready wit. On a time he met one of his male parishioners, when the following conversation took place: "Good morning, Thomas how are you this mornin' and how are all the folk at home?" To these questions Thomas replied, "We're just about the auld ordinar, sir, but something singular has happened in our house last night—my wife had twins!" to which Mr Skedd replied, "That's not singular, 'Thou'g'ht I had heard of it. Like other ministers of that period, Mr Skedd was very poorly paid for his ministerial services, and had to go to a large family upon a small income, and was obliged, for the purpose of making "ends meet," to manufacture on a small scale, baskets and potatoe tubs, which he sold by his wife to the farmers in the vicinity. Mr Skedd was in the habit of making one basket every week day, and he numbered the days of the week by the number of baskets he made. He was very absent-minded, and forgot that he had preached on a Thursday in a neighboring parish, and curious to relate his little daughter found him early on a Sabbath morning at work on the sixth crock. The outs and ins of this incident have been turned into rhyme to show that the best samples of the human race may fall into error:—

About the aughten hunder year, When meat and drink were scarce dear, When work was siller, the were scant, When folk were led to see for want, E'en folk that ance were hale weel off, Coud rarely buy a quarter loaf, But he content their gabs to crust, W' heel o' cheese or bannock crust, And as for beer to aid digestion, Was just a thought that he had question'd, Haul' they were glad to help themselves, W' halsome draughts frae nature's wells. The bairns that ance had brooks and braes Were dudy and as lean as crows. When mothers herd their wants and wishes Saut tears wad fall in empty dishes, The men, maist fock, were crown'd and worrit, And wish'd that they were dead and burrit. And e'en wad think that dool and care Cam' scowlin' in the very air!

In Abbey's auld romantic town, Where whittler comes rowin' doon, And lingers in her seaward race, As laith to leave so sweet a place; Green grows the grass, the woods low green, Nature ne'er made a fairer scene! In the auld manse, but in the manse, A preacher liv'd for monie a day; Weel versed was he in the Gospe' law, And heh! his stipe' wad be snud, And here it may as well be said, The preacher's name was Mr Skedd: This wife was somewhat cross and fretit, Gude faith; her barries were me-wee's pettit, And she'd a' the time becomin' lecture, And lauder them past a' conjecture.

As morn she said, "Now, Mr Skedd, It's just twal' years since we were wed, The bairn is sleepin' in the cradle, The auld manse has a' the time been wed, To pu' the rasps till middle day, Sae now gie up your meditation; And take a half-hour's recreation; Ye sit and read, ye sit and write, Ye'er drooned in thought frae morn to night, Your mind is ay on the rack, The mair I hear your catty cracks, Suppose we gang a'wa' the knowe, To where the birks and willows grow, The guidman ga's a catty laugh, And soon he ga's his hat and staff, 'Til past they ga'd w' cannie trudge, 'Til the bonnie hawthorn hedge, 'Til they came up the bank, 'Til they were waded in the willow rank, And then she look'd at her guidman, And said, "I was here our love began, And since, though aften sair and sick, I've kept the hand aye in the neck, And done my best in every shape To keep the house 'neath thatch and rape, But, now, my dear, you may depend, At last I've come to my wif's end; The meal's done, and what is worse, I've no an penny in my purse." He ga'e a kind o' vacant stare, And said, "We'll spend an hour in prayer, "Na, na," quo' she, "the proverb tells, 'The Lord helps them that help themselves; Just look at a' the willow wanders, If they were plac'd in nimble hands, Guidman! they're supple as the eels, And easy fashion'd into creels; And when ance made, I'm free to think 'They could be sold as quick as wink.' " "What, what," quo' he, "what's that you say?"

"I'm sure I could make one per day, "Enough," said she, "this afternoon The bairns will shed the willows doon;" Sae Mr Skedd and his guid dame Reversed their steps and trotted hame. "It wasna' lang ere outh o' wands Were plac'd in ministerial hands; We scarce took time to take his meals, And in sax days he made sax creels. As day the guid wife to him went, And cried, "Come, see what Heaven has sent." He gaz'd, then into raptures flew, His auld meal-ark was heapt fu'!

At autumn morn afore the dawning, And 'fore the cocks began a-cawin', He rais'd his head frae aff the pillow, And soon began to twist the willow; And on that morn he aft did say, "Where there's a will there's aye a way." Now Mrs Skedd, when she arose, Sae fill'd the bickers fu' o' brose; And then she said to daughter Jean, Gae, wipe the cob-wes frae your een, And seek your collyer in the study, And tell him that his breakfast's ready, The lassie ran w' a' her might, But oh! she gat an unco fright, She stood transfix'd w' fear and awe, And scarce a single breath could draw. Her eyes seem'd as they'd burst their spheres, Till delug'd w' a flood o' tears, And then she spoke in word of woe, "Fayther, this is the Sabbath day!" The creel fell down among his knees, His wis came back by slow degrees; He rose and said, "Ye little dees, This week I've only fixt creels made," Then she cried out, "Auld Nick will tak' us, Thursday ye preach'd at Lockermacrus!" He plac'd his hand upon her head, He look'd like one whose life had fled; Oh, 'twas a mournfu' sight to see

MIRK ABBEY.

CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued.)

Besides, the fairest, purest creature up on earth was she, and she took all things for pure. Not that there was much against her either, except that I loved good liquor, besides, I only drank for pleasure then, and now— But let that be. Well, we were married. We lived with the old couple at the cottage, as Lucy wished, partly for her sake, partly, as I have often thought since then, for mice—that I might be kept out of bad company, such as there was plenty of at Bleamouth at that time—poachers, smugglers and idlers of all sorts. But this was done too late. I have said that the law and I fell out at that time, and I was bound by the law, say I, which rich men make for the poor to perform to break. I never poached after I married, but before that time I shot a hare or two; and once—but months ago—there had been a fray with keepers, and I had killed my gun, and struck my hardest, like the rest. There had been broken bones on both sides, but the matter had blown over, as I thought, when all of a sudden I received certain news that I was marked for one of the offenders, and that men were coming to take me from my Lucy's arms to jail. I told her this, for I had kept nothing from her all along, and I know that she had counsel'd me to be honest, and to be honest to her, and she would never have married such a man as me; but I forgot, in my selfish roughness, that it is one thing to be brave in things that concern one's self, and another to be able to bear to see others suffer. "Ah, Heaven!" exclaimed she, "but this will kill my father! To have his honest house seized by men in search of felons, and to see his daughter's husband with eyes upon him—that will be his death, I know!" The auld wife said so likewise.

"They were right, I think, for when we came to break the thing to him, and warn him of what might happen, although all was said by men in search of felons, and to soften the consequences that might come of it, he raved like one distracted. 'Let him leave my cottage!' cried he; 'he has worked mischief enough already; he has robbed me of my daughter's love, and he would take from me my good name. Let him leave this honest roof!' But were he gone, I must go, father," replied Lucy, with her arms about the old man's neck; and in the end he was brought to see that it must be so. So I changed my name to that of Derrick, which I bear now, and fled from home to a great seaport, and there, on board an emigrant ship bound for the other side of the world, took passage for my wife and myself, but for her parents. It was agreed that all were to begin life again in a strange land, so that I, too, might begin at once more with that fair start which I had lost in my own country. Thus the poor old man and his wife were torn from the comfortable home which they had sheltered for half a century, and were forced in their old age to cross the seas. No, not to cross them, to woe to Heaven they might have suffered so to do! It was ordained that I, who had thus far caused their wretchedness, should also be the means of their death. A most terrible storm overtook us at midnight, and we were all shipwrecked on the English land, and in the midst of it our vessel sprang a leak. I knew that I had a brave woman for my wife, but then I found she was a heroine; I knew my Lucy was good as she was fair, but then she proved she was an angel. There were men on board who were seaweed and water, and she had a heart that was going to heaven with all she loved (for she always thought the best of every one), and therefore death had no terrors for her. But I—I felt myself a murderer. I did what I could to save the two old people, and got them into the only boat that left the ship; but I had not parted from us twice its length, before it capsized before our eyes.

Lucy had refused to leave me, and when the vessel began to sink, I lashed her to a spar, and then myself; and so for a little time we floated. But the great waves drench'd us through and through, and dashed upon us as the sea was breaking, and I heard the "spar was not large enough for both our weights, which sank it too low in the water; and so I secretly unloosed the cords that fastened me, and clambered to my Lucy's side, and kissed her cold wet cheek, and whispered: "Farewell, Lucy!"

Here the speaker paused, and covered his face with his hands; and he was deeply moved. For near a minute, neither spoke. Then the man resumed: "I slipped into the sea, and struck out aimlessly enough, but with the instinct of a swimmer. Fool that I was, to wish to live! Again he paused, but this time, to mutter execration. "As you did not part from me, and unselfish love suffice to save her?" asked the listener tenderly.

"No, lady. She was drowned. I never expected otherwise in such a sea. The whole ship's company were lost, except myself. When nearly spent, I came upon a huge piece of wreck, and held on to it till daylight, when I found myself at sea. I was nearer Heaven at that time than I have ever been since, and I ought to have perished then, when all which made life precious, had already gone; it had been better far better to have died with her than to live without her. But I did live. After two days and three nights of hunger and thirst, a vessel picked me up, a sudden mias of rags, half-dead and half-mad. They nursed me and made me well—it was a cruel kindness—and after many days, was able to tell them what had happened. "Ay, then," said they, "the pilot was right, who came to us off Bleamouth. It was the "North Star" that went to pieces in the storm; you are the sole survivor, man, of all on board. Nothing came on shore that night, or could have come on such a coast as that, save spars and corpses."

There was silence for a minute's space; the strong man's chest labored in vain to give him breath for utterance; in vain his horny hand dashed his big tears from his brown cheeks; they still rained on.

"Alas, poor man!" said my Lady, in a broken and pitiful voice, "I feel for you from my very soul. And when you found your three weeks' bride was dead—I think you said you had married her but three weeks—what then became of you?" "What matters?" asked the man, half angrily. "It mattered nothing even to me. The vessel took me—it was all one to me whether she was bound—to New South Wales. And in the New World I did indeed begin a new life—but it was a far worse one in the old. I was reckless, hopeless already, and I was not long in becoming a godless. When that is said, a man's

history is the same, wherever he lives, whatever he does, and however he ends."

He slumped his foot upon the ground, as though he would keep down some rising demon, and his voice once more resumed its hoarseness it had exchanged for something almost plaintive throughout his story. "Ralph, Ralph," began my Lady reprovingly, and touching his rough sailor's sleeve with her gloved hand— "And how the deuce should you know my name is Ralph," interrupted the other in blank amazement. "My maid, Mary Foster, told me it was Ralph," returned my Lady calmly. "Did she? Well, that's no reason why you should call me by it. However, since you seem to feel an unexpected interest in your humble servant, I will make bold to ask a favor of you." His manner was rough and defiant as ever now, like that of a sturdy vagrant soliciting alms of a defenceless woman.

"You are angry with yourself," said my Lady quietly, "for having given way to feelings that do you credit; that is a base sort of regret indeed. You are not the yourself that I have affected a sympathy which I did not feel, but you do not succeed. I cannot but be interested in one who, with all his faults, has in the hour of death and danger behaved nobly, and who, I feel assured, has the seeds of good in him yet, despite his wild and despairing talk."

"No, woman, I have not," returned the man with vehemence. "Dismiss that from your mind at once, Ralph Derrick is no hypocrite, whatever he is, and he tells you which such as you understand. I do not know why I have spoken to you as I have done just now—some springs of feeling that I had deemed were quite dried up flowed at your voice as they have done these thirty years—but don't imagine that I'm half-hearted. I am not a bad fellow when I'm sober, and not put out; but then I'm of my very nature a bad fellow. Your son, Sir Richard, has put me out, for one. I should be sorry for him if he and I had much to do with one another. But there, you need not turn so pale; for your sake—and for Master Walker's sake—who has got my eyes, and look, and voice, God bless him—Sir Richard is not me; albeit I have let fly a bullet before now at men who have wronged me less than he has done—an insolent young scamp! It was a man like him, one of your landowners, forsooth, whose persecution drove me from my native shore, and down to my wife and the child I had just put out. Your son, Sir Richard, has put me out, for one. I should be sorry for him if he and I had much to do with one another. But there, you need not turn so pale; for your sake—and for Master Walker's sake—who has got my eyes, and look, and voice, God bless him—Sir Richard is not me; albeit I have let fly a bullet before now at men who have wronged me less than he has done—an insolent young scamp! It was a man like him, one of your landowners, forsooth, whose persecution drove me from my native shore, and down to my wife and the child I had just put out. Your son, Sir Richard, has put me out, for one. I should be sorry for him if he and I had much to do with one another. 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