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Kit Kennedy

BY S. R. CROCKETT.

CHAPTER XXIX.—(Cont'd.)

Heather Jock was on his way home from the uplands of Carsphairn, whither he had gone to peddle his besoms. Already he could smell the good smell of his native air, and as he was wont to say, pointing proudly to his donkey as one might put forward a favorite child, "As soon as ever Billy-O gets his nose by Snuffy point and the wind o' Whinnyligatte blows round the hip o' the Bannan, he's a different beast. It's grand air, that o' the muirlands. Fowk canna dee up there. There's naeboddy has died fairly, up among thae Carsphairn Hills, within the memory o' man."

"And how," someone would put in, "how is it that whiles we will see a funeral comin' doon frae that gate?"

Heather Jock would shake his head sagely, then nod a little knowing nod. "There's ways—aye, there's ways. Whiles fowk has leaved lang enuch. Whiles it's better that they should slip awa'! But that's no what ye wad caa deein'! Na! na! That's just what they caa in Carsphairn 'a kind providence!'"

Heather Jock was in good humor. He had no wife waiting for him at home. Billy-O would be the better of a rest—he himself of a pipe. Here was company ready to his hand under a commodious tree. So Heather Jock, a universally adaptive man, sat down beside the tramp.

"Will ye hae a draw, honest man?" he said. "No, ye're richt. No on an empty stamack! Stand still, Billy-O! I'll tak' aff your creels. Ye're mair trouble than twa wives that wilna' gree. I'll no say but ye are mair solid comfort too, though that's neither here nor there!"

The tramp watched the pedlar as he busied himself with his creels.

"Ise warrant, my lad, ye'll no be ony the waur o' a bit whang o' mutton ham. It's rare stuff, as I can tell ye, for this is nae braxy, but a ground auld yow (ewe). A rare snow-breaker, abune fifty year auld, they say she was. I gat it up at the Glenhead frae Mistress Mac Millan, and says she, 'Jock, that'll haud your teeth gaun tell ye win hame—that is, if ye hae guid teeth and they last out. We hae a' had a turn at Auld Granny, and the teeth in this hoose is a' dune!' she says."

"But I daresay ye'll no quarrel wi' it. They are awfu' particular fowk about their eatin' up in the Glen o' Trool. Kind fowk too. There was the guidwife o' the Trostan. She fair fleeced on me to bide wi' her. 'I wad hae gien ye a bed, and welcome, Jock,' says she, 'but there is a horse in it!' Terrible kind fowk they are up at the head end o' you glen. How are ye managing wi' the mutton ham—no that ill, I houp? Aye, man, I wish I had teeth like you. I declare to peace ye could tak' to stanebreakin' without a hammer. It's fair divertin' to watch ye!"

So Heather Jock plied the tramp

"Hello Daddy—don't forget my Wrigleys"



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ISSUE No. 26—25.

with provender and local information couched in the raciest form o' Scots, only spoken by the folk of the western uplands, where it is still free from the defilements of Glasgow Irish, and shines with a lustre undimmed by secondary education.

The tramp put a question. "Wha leaves up there, say ye?" cried Heather Jock "and what like fowk are they? Weel, I'll tell ye. Ye maun be a sore stranger no to ken, though. John Mac Walter leaves there, a decent man, and the name o' the bit farm is Loch Spellanderie. John wad gie ye a bed and your breakfast—that is, gin he wasna hadden doon wi' a wife. But to tell ye the truth, John, honest man, is o' nae mair accoot up at Loch Spellanderie than you or me—or as a yin might say, pair Billy-O!"

"O, she's a tairger, Mistress Mac Walter. She wadna gie ye ony mutton ham, though ye might hae a chance to get the shank bone on the side o' your head."

"Would they be kind, think you, to someone in service there?" asked the tramp.

"Ye needna think on't, my man!" said Heather Jock. "They keep nae man at Loch Spellanderie. A bit boy (Guid peety him!) and a sloop o' a lassie indoors to provide Mistress Mac Walter wi' employment for her hands and tongue. That's a' the service that they hae ony use for up at Loch Spellanderie."

Heather Jock was eyeing the tramp carefully.

"Ye hae seen trouble in your day," he said at length; "were ye seekin' wark? I think I can put you in the way o' some. I've see you white hoose on the hillside yonder? That's Rogerson's o' Cairnharrow. They are wantin' anorra man, for the guidman has a sair hand, and fowk are ill to get up here. I think ye might hae a chance, though ye dinna look verra strong—and mair like your bed than takin' on wi' farm wark."

"I hae been ill—very ill," acknowledged the tramp, "but I am better now."

"Fegs, I was thinkin' that, by the haun ye hae made o' the mutton ham. It's fair astonishin'! Honest Georgie Breerie himsel' couldnae bae beat ye!"

"Weel, guid-day till ye—What did ye say your name was? Smith? Dod, I yince kenna a man o' the name o' Smith. Maybe he was some friend o' yours. It's no a common name here away—Smith. They's a' Mac Millans and Mac Quhirrs an' Mac Landsboroughs. Aye, man, and ye're a Smith. Weel, a heap o' decent fowk hae had queer ootlandish names in their day. And I daresay ye'll no be a penny the waur o' yours!"

And so with this farewell, uttered in all sincerity, Heather Jock took his way down the strath of Kells, and soon Billy-O was sniffing the fine Whinnyligatte air, and beginning to think how good it would be to get off creels and saddles and leathern bellybands and indulge in a long scratchy satisfactory roll among the heather.

The tramp sat awhile at the foot of the little loaning that wound its way from the main road up to the farm of Loch Spellanderie. He was thinking whether he should accept the advice Heather Jock had given him, or remain in a position of greater freedom, when he heard heavy footsteps coming down the avenue. He could not see the wearer of these weighty boots, but presently the black-pitched gate was opened, and a tall, dark-browed, masculine-looking woman came out with the swing of a grenadier. She caught sight of the tramp's grey coat and instantly stopped.

"Get awa oot o' here!" she cried, pointing to his little bundle, which lay on the grass beside him. "We want nae o' your kind here. There's thieves and useless reprobates enuch comin' intil a decent woman's hoose without gangrel vaigabonds sittin' on her verra doorstep. Aye, an' whaur gat ye that mutton ham? I missed yin the day before yesterday. I wish there was a polissman here. Tak' your ways up the road, my man, and look as sippy as ye can, or I'll set the dowgs after ye!"

The tramp said nothing, but rose to his feet, and pocketing his package and the affront together he went quietly up the road. The wrathful voice pursued him.

"Dinna let me see or hear o' you

In this countryside again, my man—you that hasna a ceevil word in your head an' a stolen mutton ham in your hand—gaun about the land burnin' ricks wi' your matches and abusing decent women wi' your black looks, vermin that ye are!"

And the mistress of Loch Spellanderie took her way with the consciousness of having done a worthy and eminently Christian action in thus ridding the bounds of so disreputable and even dangerous an element as the tramp in grey.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE NE'ER-DO-WELL.

A stormy voice broke the morning silence of the farmhouse of Loch Spellanderie some months thereafter.

"Kit Kennedy, ye are a lazy ne'er-do-weel, lyin' snorin' there in your bed on the back o' five o'clock. Think shame o' yourself!"

And Kit did.

He was informed on an average ten times a day that he was lazy, a skulker, a burden on the world, and especially on the household of his mothers sister-in-law, Mistress Mac Walter of Loch Spellanderie. So, being an easy-minded boy, and moderately cheerful, he accepted the fact, and shaped his life accordingly.

"Get up this instant, ye scoondrel!" came again the sharp voice. It was speaking from under three ply of blankets in the ceiled room beneath. That is why it seemed a trifle more muffled than usual. It even sounded kindly, but Kit Kennedy was not deceived. He knew better than that.

"Gin ye dinna be stirrin', I'll be up to ye wi' a stick!" cried Mistress Mac Walter.

It was a greyish, glimmering twilight when Kit Kennedy awoke. It seemed such a short time since he went to bed that he thought that surely his mistress had called him the night before. Kit was not surprised. She was capable of anything in the way of extracting work out of him.

The moon, getting old, and yawning in the middle as if tired of being out so late, set a crumbly horn past the edge of his little skylight. Her straggling pallid rays fell on something white on Kit's bed. He put out his hand, and it went into a cold wreath of snow up to the wrist.

"Ouch!" said Kit Kennedy.

"I'm comin' to ye," repeated his mistress, "ye lazy, pampered, guid-for-naething! Dinna think I canna hear ye grumblin' and speakin' ill words against your betters!"

Yet all he had said was "Ouch!"—in the circumstances, a somewhat natural remark.

Kit took the corner of the scanty coverlet, and, with a well-acquainted arm-sweep, sent the whole swirl of snow over the end of his bed, getting across the side at the same time himself. He did not complain. All he said, as he blew upon his hands and slapped them against his sides, was, "Michty, it'll be cauld at the turnip pits this mornin'!"

It had been snowing in the night since Kit lay down, and the snow had sifted in through the open tiles of the farmhouse of Loch Spellanderie. That was nothing. It often did that, but sometimes it rained, and that was worse. Yet Kit Kennedy did not much mind even that. He had a cunning arrangement in old umbrellas and corn-sacks that could beat the rain any day. Show, in his own words, he did not give a "buckie" for.

Then there was a stirring on the floor, a creaking of the ancient joists. It was Kit putting on his clothes. He always knew where each article lay—dark or shine it made no matter to him. He had not an embarrassment of apparel. He had a suit for wearing—and his "other clothes." These latter were, however, now too small for him, and so he could not go to the kirk at Whinnyligatte. But his mistress had laid them aside for her son Tammas, a growing lad. She was a thoughtful, provident woman.

"Be gettin' doon the stair, my man, and look sippy," cried Mistress Mac Walter, as a parting shot, "and see carefully to the kye. It'll be as weel for ye."

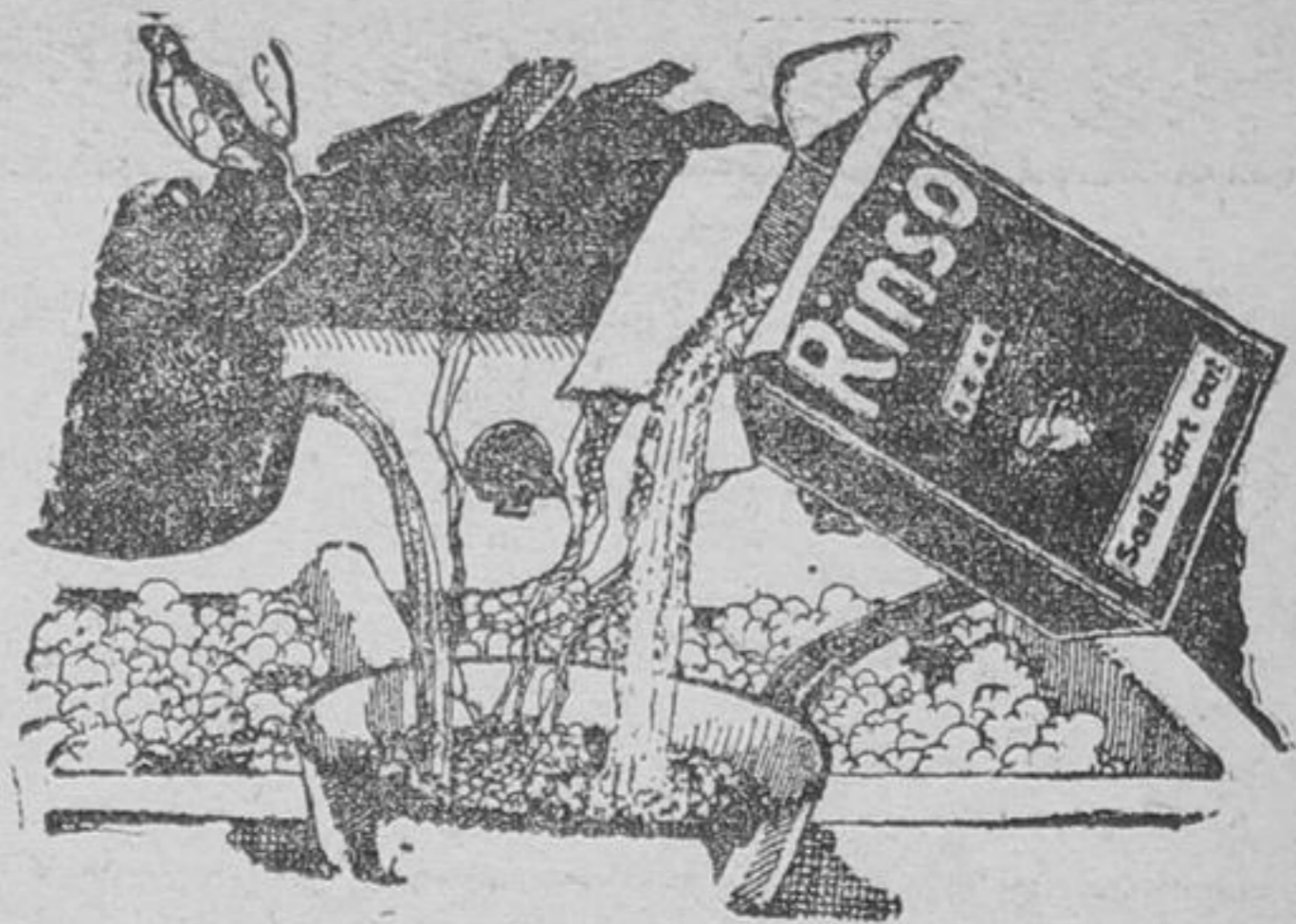
Kit had on his trousers by this time. His waistcoat followed. But before he put on his coat he knelt down to say his prayer. He had promised his mother to say it then. If he put on his coat he was apt to forget it, in his haste to get out of doors, where at least the beasts were friendly. So between his waistcoat and his coat he prayed. The angels were up at the time and they heard, and went and told One who hears prayer. They said that in a garret at a hill farm a boy was praying with his knees in snow-drift, a boy without father or mother near to help or listen to him.

"Ye lazy guid-for-naething! Gin ye are no doon the stairs in three meenits, no a drap o' porridge or a sup o' milk shall ye get this day!"

So Kit got on his feet, and made a queer little shuffling noise on the floor with them, to induce his mistress to think that he was bestirring himself. So that is the way he had to finish his prayers—on his feet, shuffling and dancing a breakdown.

NURSES

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The angels saw and smiled. But they took it up and up, just the same as if Kit Kennedy had been praying in church with the best. All save one, who dropped above the garret to drop something that might have been a pearl and might have been a tear. Then he also went within the Inner Court, and told that which he had seen.

But to Kit's mind there was nothing to grumble about. He was pleased if any one was. His clogs did not let in the snow. His coat was rough but warm. If any one was well off, and knew it, it was Kit Kennedy.

So he came downstairs, if stairs they could be called that were but the broken rounds of a stable ladder. His mistress heard him.

"Keep awa' frae the kitchen, ye thievin' loon! There's nocht there for ye—takin' the bairns' meat afore they're up!"

But Kit was not hungry, which, in the circumstances, was as well. Mistress Mac Walter had caught him red-handed on one occasion. He was taking a bit of hard oatcake out of the basket of "farles" which swung from the black, smoked beam in the corner. Kit had cause to remember the occasion. Ever since she had cast it up to him. She was a master hand at "casting up," as her husband knew. But Kit was used to it, and he did not care. A thick stick was all he cared for, and that only for three minutes; but he minded when Mistress Mac Walter abused his mother.

Kit Kennedy made for the front door, direct from the foot of the ladder. Mrs. Mac Walter raised herself on one elbow in bed to assure herself that he did not go into the kitchen after all. She heard the click of the bolt shot back, and the stir of the dogs as Tweed and Tyke rose from the fireside to follow him. There was still a little red ash gleaming between the bars, and Kit would dearly have liked to go in and thaw out his toes on the still warm hearthstone. But he knew that his task-mistress was listening. He was twelve now, and big for his age, so he wasted no pity on himself, but opened the door and went out. Self-pity is bad at any time. It is fatal at twelve.

At the door one of the dogs stopped, sniffed the keen, frosty air, turned quietly and went back to the hearthstone. That was Tweed. But Tyke was already out rolling in the snow when Kit Kennedy shut the door.

Then his mistress went to sleep. She knew how Kit Kennedy did his work, and that there would be no cause to complain. But she meant to complain all the same. Was he not a lazy, deceitful hound, an encumbrance, and an interloper among her bairns?

(To be continued.)

Elsie and the Oyster.

Oysters, like olives, are an acquired taste, and a taste that some persons never acquire. There are many, says Mr. E. E. Whiting, who sympathize with the oft-quoted woman who said: "I'm glad I don't like oysters, because if I liked 'em I'd eat 'em, and I hate 'em." There are many also who will feel akin in spirit with the little girl who was making her first appearance at a home dinner at which there were grown-up guests.

The first course was oysters on the half shell. Her mother observed approvingly the placidity and exemplary demeanor of her daughter, and thought to remove some of the solemnity and

restraint of the occasion by letting the child into the joys of the dinner. So she said:

"Would Elsie like a nice oyster?"

Elsie looked doubtful, but dutifully opened her timid mouth, and mother popped an oyster into it. Elsie closed her lips, and the mother turned her attention to her guests and her oysters. She got to the last oyster on her plate and then remembered her child, whose silence and sustained good manners continued to make a most delightful impression. So she turned to the child and asked: "Would Elsie like another nice oyster?"

A look of anguish came into the face of the patient little girl. She gently and cautiously parted her lips just far enough to reply: "I don't 'ant 'is 'un!"

Minard's Liniment for Backache.

Sentence Sermons.

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—Freedom if you break the chains of your own enslaving habits.
—Influence if you will confine your statements to the facts.
—"Drag" with the boss if you boost more for the business.
—Help in bad times if you have been dependable in good times.
—Friends if you are willing to take time to make them.
—Sympathy from the community if you waste no pity on yourself.

Ominous.

Jones had lost his fourth wife, but it was not long before it was understood that he had picked out his fifth, who was some thirty years Bill's junior. One day a friend met him and said:

"Well, Bill, I suppose getting married comes natural to you by this time, doesn't it?"

"Well," said Bill, after due reflection, "this fifth marriage ain't going to seem so natural. Parson Beggs is off on a trip, and he's never failed to tie the knot for me. I said to Mary that I didn't think it would feel like a wedding without Parson Beggs; but she said it was her turn to choose, and that she meant to start off with that young minister that has just come to town, and that if he did well she'd stick to him. She didn't explain what she meant, but it sounded ominous to me."

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