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JOHN DUNCAN
WEAVER AND BOTANIST

John Slater

JOHN DUNCAN

WEAVER AND BOTANIST

"The noble silent men scattered here and there each in his department; whom no Morning Newspaper makes mention of! They are the salt of the earth. A country that has none or few of these is in a bad way."

CARLYLE.

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John Duncan

In his 72nd Year.

THE LIFE
OF
JOHN DUNCAN
SCOTCH
WEAVER AND BOTANIST

WITH SKETCHES OF HIS FRIENDS
AND
NOTICES OF THE TIMES

BY
WILLIAM JOLLY, F.R.S.E., F.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "ROBERT BURNS AT MOSSGIEL," ETC.
EDITOR OF "EDUCATION: ITS PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE AS
DEVELOPED BY GEORGE COMBE"

WITH ETCHED PORTRAIT

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P R E F A C E.

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THIS is the simple tale of the aged botanical weaver of whom some account was given in "Good Words" of 1878, since reprinted, in 1880, in H. A. Page's "Leaders of Men." His pitiful case, when he was compelled to fall on the parish through no fault of his, was also brought before the country by the author in January, 1881. The appeal then made was generously responded to by spontaneous contributions from admirers in all parts, including Her Majesty the Queen; general interest was roused in the man; his case was advocated by the press, not excepting our highest journals; and accounts of him appeared in various places, notably in *Nature*, which warmly espoused his claims and gathered subscriptions.

The more the author inquired into John Duncan's story, the more did he perceive that, in many respects, it was remarkable, and in several, unique. It revealed a man of pronounced individuality, full of striking and admirable elements, exhibiting great natural ability, high moral character, singular independence, self-helpfulness and modesty, pure-hearted love of Science, and enthusiastic devotion to its study amidst no ordinary disabilities and hardships, during a long life of nearly ninety years, such

as would add another worthy name to the long roll of honourable examples of "the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties ;" all combined with circumstances of uncommon interest and picturesqueness, arising from varied experiences, rare capacity for the highest friendship, peculiar modes of study, Spartan eccentricity of life, and deepest joy under most unlikely conditions. It was strongly felt that the whole formed a noteworthy chapter in "the simple annals of the poor," of plain living, high thinking, and earnest working, that would be capable of exercising a strong influence for good, intellectual and moral ; and of recalling us, amidst our growing elaborateness and luxury, to the essential simplicities of happy life, and the blissfulness of higher pursuits, so apt to be crushed out in the too absorbing struggle for bread, pelf and position.

Hence the present book.

The work would have been incomplete if it had not contained sketches of his numerous friends, several of whom, as will be seen, were of uncommon clay ; and also notices of the times in which he lived, in the early part of the century, in a northern, old-world region with social and other characteristics as peculiar as its native Doric.

The author's best acknowledgments and thanks are hereby gratefully tendered to the many friends of John Duncan and himself that have freely and kindly supplied materials for this history.

INVERNESS,

November, 1882.

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JOHN DUNCAN

WEAVER AND BOTANIST.

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HIS BIRTHPLACE AND EARLY TRAINING.

ABOUT sixteen miles south of Aberdeen, the wild rock-bound shore of the Mearns, lashed by the German Ocean, is indented by a spacious bay, into which flow two small streams, the Cowie and the Carron. Like the Don and the Dee, these rivers once entered the sea at separate points, though now they unite their waters just before mingling with the ocean. The secure harbour here formed, which has often been talked of as a port of refuge for the east coast, and the wide and fertile double valley beyond drew human habitation at an early period; and two villages, whose origin is hid in antiquity, grew at the mouths of these streams. The village to the north was named after the river on which it stood, the Cowie, and still exists beside the picturesque ruins of St. Mary's Chapel, amidst its crowded and weed-waving graveyard. The hamlet at the mouth of the Carron took its descriptive

title from a mass of sandstone that once blocked the entrance to the harbour, called *Craig-ma-cair*,* the rock of the seat or of the turn, meaning either in Gaelic, to which the word belongs. Hence the striking name Stonehaven, originally, in old Scotch, Stanehyve, the Haven or Harbour with the Stone in its throat, though this obstruction has been long since removed.

Like the granite city, the present Stonehaven consists of two towns, the old and the new, but, unlike the northern capital, the old is to the south, and the new to the north, both mainly standing within the peninsula between the rivers. The new town is spacious, well-planned, and inodorous; but the old is crowded, low-lying and pervaded by that "ancient fishy smell," that clings to all our fishing villages; for it is chiefly inhabited by those picturesque and peaceful descendants of the old piratical Danes, who gain their livelihood off that dangerous shore.

But when our story begins, at the close of last century, the site of the new town was covered with bent, and formed the links of Arduthie, the healthy recreation ground of the good folks of the old town. This was not then the fishing quarter it is now, for the fishers at that time were confined to the village of Cowie.

As the county town of Kincardine for two hundred years, created such by our wise James in 1607, and inhabited by the *élite* of the shire, it was comparatively clean and healthy for that period, and its inhabitants had the usual caste and consequence characteristic of all seats of local

* Either from *cathiar* (*th* being mute), a chair or seat, or *car*, a bend or turn. The same word also occurs in the name of a rock south of the town, *Dunnacair*, Dun signifying a hill or fort.

government. It was, and still is, mal-odour and its causes notwithstanding, a picturesque place, recalling Old Edinburgh in many respects, with its crowded streets, narrow lanes and wide pends, revealing pretty peeps for the painter, and its old houses, with the family crests of the once titled inmates above the doorways. The old pier was then sufficient for the growing trade ; the new harbour not being formed till 1812. The present great Flemish-looking steeple had only been built ten years when the century closed. Before its erection, there was no public clock for the regulation of the business of the quiet-going burgh. The march of time was indicated, to the eye, by a quaint old dial, that had stood for eighty years near the quay, and, to the ear, by a bell, simply hung in sight of the lieges at the top of three tall posts near the cross, and rung at stated intervals, and on occasions of public moment.

Into this quiet, pleasant, old town, in the mid-winter of 1794, there walked, with sad countenance and heavy step, a good-looking young woman, named Ann Caird. She had travelled that day eight weary miles, from the upland village of Drumlithie, where her parents dwelt ; and she carried a burden which should only be borne under the happy sunshine of wedded love. The want of this accounted for the slow pace and dejected air of what should have been a happy maiden of twenty-one. She took refuge in a house not far from the Old Tolbooth, at the end of the pier ; and soon after, on the 19th of December, gave birth to a son. This boy, who was named John Duncan, after his father, a weaver in his mother's village, and who was thus ushered into the world under a

ban always hard, but at those stricter times almost cruel, is the subject of this history.

His mother, as he used to tell with pride, was "a strong, pretty woman." Bred up in the healthy country, she could even lift with ease "a boll of barley over a riddle."* She came of a robust, long-lived race, her father surviving to the great age of 105 years. Why his parents never married it is now impossible to say. His father, characterized by the son as a pretty clever man and good weaver, afterwards became a soldier, perhaps on account of this youthful folly, and he seldom saw the lad, though he took some interest in him. The place of both parents, however, was, in most respects, more than filled by the devoted mother, who cherished the child with no common care. The poor woman, deserted by her lover, took up house in Stonehaven, not far from the old pier where her son had been born. She supported herself and her boy by taking harvest in the country, at which she was a superior hand, but chiefly, during the rest of the year, by weaving stockings, then a staple trade with the continent, for which houses existed in all the larger towns of the north, and gave out the worsted to be worked at home.

Throughout life, John Duncan had the highest respect and affection for his mother, and to her memory he always recurred with peculiar pleasure amidst trying experiences. One of her sons, still living, born after John had left his home, speaks of her in the same terms of loving regard, as an unusually hardworking, honest, affectionate woman, and economical housewife. Their combined testimony proves her to have been a good, clever woman, strong in mind and

* The sieve used for corn by farmers.

body, rearing her children well, and supporting her eldest son single-handed and alone. On his death-bed, when his nurse was kindly tucking the blankets round the old man, his heart went back once more to his mother's house in Stonehaven, across the varied experiences of more than eighty long years; and, in tones which showed that the fountain of tears had been opened, he said, "So my mother used to do to me!" His mother was always his ideal of a tender, kindly woman.

But Stonehaven was no unworthy place in which to be born, and possessed unusual elements to mould her children for good. These certainly had the deepest influence on the life of her lowly son, physically, religiously, and scientifically. Her streets furnished a varied and interesting playground and numerous well-conditioned playmates for the lad, when he was old enough to run about. The harbour was there with its exciting and ever-attractive life to boys. A curious stone dial near the edge of the pier, bearing circles and figures and points of the compass, drew his youthful fancy, and, no doubt, silently impressed him—for who can limit the educative force of such early associations?—with a desire to pursue the study of dialling and produce copies of this chronometer, as he did in after years. The old granary of the Marischalls, which stood near it on the quay, and which, as being used for court-house and prison, was known as the Old Tolbooth, would be regarded by even the wildest boy with solemn awe. Its window facing the sea was gazed at with wondering eyes, for from it, after the '45, the imprisoned Jacobite Episcopal clergy used by stealth to baptize the infants of their flock. The newly-finished tower of the steeple, with its great clock, erected three

years after his birth, was not far off; and the town cross that stood by its walls, was the centre of many youthful pranks; while a curious round boulder half-way down the High Street, on the side path, near a heckling shop, was the special rendezvous of the town lads.

At that time, "Bony," as Napoleon was familiarly known amongst the people, was the terror of Europe; and our continental wars were then in full rage, with all their heavy drain on the national manhood and the national purse. War was the daily sigh of our homes, the talk of our streets, and even the cry of our children in their games. In Stonehaven, in Duncan's youth, the boys regularly played at soldiering. They used to appoint their officers, enlist and arm their men with wooden swords and guns, hold court-martial over deserters, and imprison and punish the refractory; a friend of John's, James Barclay, spoken of in this history, being thus immured for a considerable time in a hen-house. These mimic war-plays were entered into with remarkable zest by the boys of that time, and, no doubt, did much to develop a patriotic spirit and intensify the national hatred of the great continental aggressor.

Then what was grander in the world than the liveried four-in-hand coach from Aberdeen, which daily clattered into town, drawing an admiring crowd of urchins, and then slowly climbed the Red Braes to the south, on its way to Edinburgh; the red-coated guard with the post bags catching it up, by a short cut, at the top: while the return coach from Edinburgh came rattling down them at a splendid pace, and repeated the same pleasures?

When little Johnnie was able to take a wider range, as he grew older, there existed in the country round a won-

derful field for developing his muscles, strengthening his nerves, and instilling quieter and deeper lessons into his youthful heart, which, in after years, moulded and elevated the man. There was the long, pebbly beach, between the Cowie and the sea, to which the boys used to wade in ebb tide, to play with the plunging waves, bathe in their waters, and seek for the pretty pink, ribbed shell (*Cypræa Europea*) to be found there, a favourite both for its beauty and for its rarity—known by the Pentland Firth and vended there as “Groatie buckies,” and called, in sacred Iona, by the great name of St. Columba, and sold there also by the children. There were the breezy Links, where the new town now stands, with their undulating hollows, redolent with wild flowers and wavy with bent, the haunt of children and cattle, where Johnnie first saw and smelled the favourites of his life. There was the Bog Well under the Red Braes, across the Carron to the south, to which, when of age, he went daily for water for his mother, and where he was always sure to meet with merry groups of women and bairns bent on the same errand; for these were the days before water-pipes were dreamt of, and this well supplied the whole town with its famed limpid treasures. There was also the more distant St. Kieran’s Well, a good chalybeate, with healing virtues—then in its natural wildness, but now conserved in a granite fountain—to which he and his mother walked across the Links, when the pressure of over-toil somewhat relented; but not during the Sabbath rest, for in these strict times such journeyings would have been profanation.

Beyond this, finely set amidst its woods, was the house of Ury, the abode of that religious enthusiast and sufferer,

Robert Barclay, the moral-force Quaker apologist, of his son the founder of new Stonehaven, and of his physical-force grandson, the pedestrian and pugilist, to whom John's mother had probably been nursemaid, for she always called him "my boy"—the burial-place of the family in the grounds, called "the Howf," being then a boyish haunt. There were also those never-failing attractions to youth, the Cowie and the Carron, with their shady nooks and minnow pools for "gudling," where boys spent hours together in untold bliss. There were the ruins of St. Mary's Chapel and its churchyard, and the fishing village of Cowie, on the way to them, where the lad watched its strange inhabitants; and where he once saw a marriage amongst them, full of old-world customs, as he used to tell, when the bride made her affianced swear to be true to her, by her father's house, the fishing boat and the fish he caught. Across the Carron amidst tall trees, there stood the quaint old Kirk of Dunnottar, the parish church of the town, to which his worthy mother regularly took her boy, and where she pointed out the Covenanter's Stone, which was erected for those who had perished when descending the Dunnottar cliff from their foul prison, and at which Sir Walter Scott first saw "Old Mortality," then engaged in renovating it, the amiable enthusiast having died when John was five years old.

Then, last to mention, but first in youthful estimate, there were, still more distant and dangerous, and therefore all the more attractive, the glorious "heughs" and "coves" and "braes," the wild and wonderful cliffs, that guard the bay of Stonehaven on both sides, and stretch away to what seemed illimitable distance—a splendid region, rich in

health, adventure, beauty, grandeur, poetry and deathless memories to all who have had the advantage of roaming in their youth along such wild and precipitous shores; a happy privilege which the author recalls with gratitude, as spent on a similar coast in the neighbouring county of Angus. This glorious education John Duncan enjoyed and profited by to the utmost, and, to his dying day, he never wearied of talking of the thymy braes and magnificent rocks, with their associations and stirring adventures, around Stonehaven and Dunnottar.

Geologically, the bay of Stonehaven is most interesting, from this amongst other facts, that it occupies, and no doubt greatly owes its existence to, a junction between the Silurian and the Old Red Sandstone, not far from the Kirk of Cowie. It thus exhibits two very diverse styles of rock and scenery on its two sides—the twisted gneiss on its northern half, and the thick-bedded conglomerate on its southern. It is this picturesque conglomerate that forms the famous cliffs round the Castle of Dunnottar. The scenery along the shore, with its high precipitous crags, washed by the waves, and scooped into magnificent headlands frowning over the deep, its isolated stacks, gloomy caverns, and winding rock-bound bays, is unsurpassed in its way for variety, wildness and grandeur. For boys, these contain the very essence of romance. Even the names they possess are irresistible to youthful imagination and promise endless adventure—the Boar Stone, the Diel's Kettle, the Fowls' Heugh, with its countless sea birds, the Long Gallery, the rock of Dunnacair, the very word enticing to fearlessness, the shelves of Dunnimail, famous for dulse, and many more, equally picturesque in

sound and signification. Then within two miles of the town, protected by its almost inaccessible precipices seawards, and its guarded portal landwards, rose the magnificent ruins of the Castle of Dunnottar, which form one of the grandest and most striking sea-pieces in Scotland, rich as the land is in such scenes.

This remarkable coast was the constant haunt of John Duncan in his early years, and few surpassed him in adventurous courage and power of scaling a cliff. As he expressed it himself, "I had a terrible faculty o' climbin'. I was wonderfu' venturesome; awfu' fine at the fit (foot); and fear never cam' on me." Dunnottar itself was the chosen scene of countless scrambles, which strangely never issued in accident, though pursued under conditions that, to the unaccustomed, would be gruesome and appalling. He and his companions used to approach the castle both by sea and land, and to them it was simple cowardice to enter by the prosaic gateway, then, as now, under lock and key. They must climb the seemingly inaccessible cliffs near the end of the headland, only reached by boat; or clamber in by Wallace's Hole, a small window on the south side in the portal wall, now closed up but then open to the venturous, by means of which the champion of his country once gallantly wrested the castle from English hands. This loophole Johnnie was always the first of the band to reach, when he would haul up his more timorous companions. Tripping over the rubbish which then filled the now empty room behind, they would range "roond and roond aboot like cats," as he said, through the whole interior. They entered every room, explored every dungeon, seated themselves on the topmost turrets, till they were sated

with enjoyment; and hunger, calling a halt, sent them back to town.

Though he could not then understand the stirring history and cruel tragedies that had passed within those crumbling, grey-lichened walls, these were glorious days, "grand times," as John used to call them. They were more—they were an unrivalled training of the future man.

CHAPTER II.

THE UNLETTERED HERD-BOY, AND HIS ONLY EDUCATION.

BUT amidst all this admirable outdoor education, what of the school, when he came of age to attend it?

At that time, the parish school of Dunnottar, near the Covenanters' churchyard, was the chief educational seminary for the town. The schoolmaster was Mr. Dawson, a man of great force of character, who, against much opposition, compelled the reluctant heritors to erect the teacher's house apart from the school, one of the very few instances of such healthy separation then to be found in the country; for the rule was to include both under one roof, the school below and house above, low-roofed and ill-ventilated, and so it generally continued to be in Scotland till the passing of the Education Act, in 1872. In Stonehaven itself, an adventure school was kept by a Mr. Melvin, who, possessing neither the official prestige nor the sternness of the parish dominie, attracted scholars by other means. As in all such cases, the result was the fiercest rivalry between the two temples of learning, with those frequent "bickers," or organized fights between scholars, which have been immortalized by Scott as engaged in by him when at the

High School of Edinburgh, not thirty years before. These encounters were often fierce and dangerous, the one side trying to chase the other across the Carron, which flowed between the schools, as a kind of Rubicon or challenge stream, and to drive them back to their barracks on either side. Into these educational quarrels every youth in the town entered, and these John Duncan, peace-loving though he was by nature, frequently witnessed and took part in, which would by no means be a poor one for a boy of such active, mettlesome spirit.

These scholastic experiences were all that the boy ever had of school life. He never was within the walls of either seminary as a scholar. As in George Stephenson's case, the school did *nothing* for John Duncan. School going was then sadly uncommon, to an extent we can scarcely credit now, and a large proportion of our poorer classes entered active life utterly unlettered. Bad as it was with boys, it was worse with girls, few of whom in the humbler ranks could even read at all, and fewer still could write. John's mother would seem to have been able to do neither, for if she had been, such a kind mother would not have allowed her favourite son to grow to manhood without knowing a single letter. But so it was.

In addition to the bad custom of the time, extreme poverty was the main cause of this neglect in John's case. With all her industry in plying her wires daily, and in wielding the sickle when the corn grew yellow, the good woman was barely able to win enough for her boy and herself. In questioning John about his want of schooling, he generously and fairly never once breathed a whisper against his mother, mentioning its prevalent neglect, which

made his case far less singular, and her extreme indigence as the true causes.

So great, indeed, was the poor woman's need at times, that the thoughtful boy did what he could to add to the narrow store, by running little errands, and by gathering rushes along the burn sides and mosses. From these rushes he extracted the white pith, to form wicks for the old-fashioned house lamps called "crusies," then in universal use. These wicks he sold in small penny bundles "about the size of two ounces of twist tobacco," as he used to tell to some little children he was intimate with, when he wished to encourage them to be kind and helpful to their mother. This bit of kindly assistance to his mother he carried on for years while quite a child, wandering far and near by the streams and mosses in search of the requisite rushes, and bringing the green bundles home to be stripped. The early intercourse with nature necessary for such work, was his first practical introduction to the flowers that became the passion of his later life, and, no doubt, sowed the seeds of after love for natural studies; and the common rushes ever afterwards carried to him the peculiar charm of earliest happy association and wild wood wandering, with dear memories of assisting his poverty-stricken parent.

On account of the pressing needs of home, when he was scarcely ten years old—the same age as James Ferguson, the astronomer before him, and David Livingstone after him—the brave little lad had to give up all his thoughtless but delightful plays, into which he had entered with such zest, and face the stern realities of life and bread-winning, by going to service. Like Ferguson at Keith, and Dr. Adam of Edinburgh High School at Forres, he was sent to herd at

several of the farms in the neighbourhood, lodging with his employers, but coming home to his mother when he could. While thus engaged, we catch occasional glimpses of the life he led and the varied experiences through which such a youth had to pass in the rude farm life of that time.

In the first place he went to, his treatment was very harsh. He was then a simple-looking lad, shy and retiring, and his real vigour was hidden under a cloud of bashfulness which enveloped him more or less all his life. Being more inclined to bear than to fight, he was of the very type that invited the unkindly attentions of the youthful tyrants of his own age, when he came across their path; and the extent to which rough practical joking was then carried amongst farm servants, as told in many a narrative, is now simply incredible.

Poor Johnnie, for example, got his thick hair filled with the chaff of barley, which has often been made an instrument of cruel trickery. The pain caused by its stiff sticky beard is very irritating, and it is impossible to rid the hair of it unless with the assistance of another, which John found in his mother. What was still worse, they filled his head with those unclean parasites from which his watchful mother had kept him free, as she had now again to do. But his treatment was otherwise bad. Though drenched with rain while tending the cattle, he was not allowed to go near the fire after they had been stalled in the evening; and he had often to retire as he was to his comfortless couch in an outhouse, where he poured the water from his shoes, wrung his wet stockings as dry as he could, and had to put them on again in this state next morning. His usage, however, was not everywhere so

cruel, and he always gratefully recalled the kindness of a good old woman he herded to, who treated him more like a son than a servant, dried his wet clothes when he returned after a rainy day, and altogether provided the shy, awkward but thankful lad with the luxury of a comfortable home. Thus, in his very first start in the practical work of the world, little Johnnie got more than a glimpse of both sides of the shield of life.

The places where he was thus employed as herd were, happily for him, close by Dunnottar Castle. Being naturally thoughtful, which home straits had strengthened, he could now gaze with growing interest and intelligence on its ruins—whether they stood in gaunt isolation on their sea-washed rocks on sunny days, or gleamed weird-like through driving mist and rain, as he remained at his post, when they seemed to the boy like companions in suffering. Though unable to read for himself the strange story that haunted their walls, he drank it with avidity as heard from the lips of numerous narrators during the long winter evenings, or as told him by some kindly companion while they sat together on the braes above, or by his friend the keeper who lived close by. With the keeper's help, he studied the ruins thoroughly, and became intimately acquainted with their every detail.*

But in all their long, changeful and fascinating story, what charmed his young imagination most was, not the halls where royalty had rested; not the place where the Scottish crown, sword, and sceptre had lain, and whence

* John's knowledge of Dunnottar seems to have been minute and correct, and he used to speak with great respect of Dr. Longmuir's contributions to its topography and history.

they had been cleverly borne to the neighbouring church of Kinneff; not even the stirring story of Wallace and his gallant capture of the castle when he struck so grandly for Scottish independence—all which, and much more equally stimulating, made his blood leap, and was recited by him with fervour to the end. But it was the “Whig’s Vault,” on the edge of the cliff, where the Covenanters were immured, with its crevices in the wall to wedge their hands in, and the still more terrible hole below, in which the crowded wretches took turns in breathing opposite a crack at the base of the wall! Nothing coloured his whole existence more than the inspiring story of the struggle for Scottish religious freedom, which entered deep into his inner heart in after life, and infused his piety with the uncompromising fire of the old Covenanters—

“The stern undaunted will,
And the scorn to receive, from a despot’s decree,
What should flame up with power from the hearts of the free!”

as Professor Blackie sings when inspired by the same theme. And there is no doubt that the deep Scottish enthusiasm roused by this chapter in our history, has done more than aught else to nourish high-souled independence and religious fervour in the country. It was undoubtedly no mean privilege for this boy to be brought under its influences and in daily sight of the scenes where some of its saddest but grandest tragedies had been enacted.

So felt John Duncan, and when last I saw him shortly before his death, seventy years after he had been the herd-boy at Dunnottar, when his strong vitality was slowly

ebbing away, he spoke with undimmed ardour of these early days and the life-moulding impressions they had produced. The very motto of the Keiths, inscribed on the torn and faded banner borne at fatal Flodden, and now preserved in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, was a guiding maxim and high impulse for life: VERITAS VINCIT. And round few places in the country has Scottish history more revolved than Dunnottar, as even a slight glance at its eventful story will prove; and for a lad or man there is nothing more educationally valuable then to have a visible and inspiring centre round which to group his historical knowledge, especially if it is illumined by the poetry of the past and the glamour of youthful enthusiasm.

Here also, on these sweet-scented braes with their rich and varied flora, clothing their crests, clinging to their crevices and hidden in their darksome caves, was intensified another of the strongest impulses of his life—his love of wild plants. In conversing afterwards on the subject, he could not tell when he began to be interested in flowers. As he said, "I aye liket the bonnie things;" but he always looked back to the cliffs of his early days as generating his deeper affection for them, and surrounding them throughout life with a bright poetical halo. As he correctly put the matter himself, "I just took a notion to ken ae plant by anither when I was rinnin' aboot the braes. I never saw a plant but I lookit for the marrows o'd (that is, for those similar); and, as I had a gweed memory, when I kent a flower ance, I kent it aye." In this early activity of the faculty of comparison, the essence of all true thinking, involving, as it does, that of discrimination, lay the foundation of his future scientific success. Of his

unusual memory, we shall find abundant proofs by-and-by. So vivid was his recollection of the plants he had seen there in these early days, before he had begun in any way to do more than admire their colour and scent their fragrance, that during his later scientific studies, when he discovered a new plant, he could recall with perfect accuracy the spot where he had seen it years before on the shores of the Mearns. Thus, very shortly before his death, the doctor gave him some drops of *Hyoscyamus niger*, or common henbane. After learning what it was, the old man brightened up, and at once mentioned that he had seen it in his youth within the walls of Dunnottar, one of its stations in the north, although he had seldom found it since, and never in the Vale of Alford—the memory of these happy days then irradiating his countenance with a sunset glow.

But how strange the contrasts of life! Here was a lad, nearly fifteen years old, intelligent and inquiring, all on fire with the desire to know—who was totally and literally unlettered, ignorant even of the alphabet—herding in the land where Knox had pleaded and laboured, so that no parent of whatever condition should “use his child at his own phantasy,” but bring him up in “learning and virtue,” the children of the poor to be supported at school “until the Commonwealth have profit of them;” and in sight of the castellated home of that enlightened nobleman, George, the fifth Earl Marischall, who, in 1593, munificently founded and endowed the college in Aberdeen that bears his honoured name, with its numerous bursaries to assist such youths as he!

As his active mind gradually opened, and his natural

intelligence craved appropriate food, the boy began keenly to feel his painful disabilities in thus being unable to read, and to desire their removal. To go to school now, in his extreme poverty, was clearly impossible. What was to be done? However willing, his mother, unhappily, was unable to satisfy him in this new thirst. He could not teach himself; for up the threshold steps of the temple of learning we must all be led by another, however independent we may become after having entered its portals. But as yet there was no kindly hand to conduct John Duncan to the golden gate.

CHAPTER III.

WEAVING AND A VILLAGE OF WEAVERS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY.

BUT the lad had now reached his fifteenth year, and must choose a profession for life. Was he to remain at farm work and become a ploughman? All his instincts turned from such a heavy, unintellectual, bucolic future. He was too keen, too active, too clever, to walk "between the stilts" all his life. He had tried it. He first accompanied the ploughman as "gaudsman," to "goad" and guide the horses, and had, in time, held the plough. But the more he essayed it, the more he felt its utter incompatibility. His intercourse with farm servants and increased knowledge of the life they led, now extending over nearly five years, had not been encouraging, either morally or intellectually.

The agricultural population of all countries, through many causes incidental to their condition, has always been much behind the rest of the nation in intellectual activity, if not in moral habit, since long before the time of the Athenians with their Bœotian neighbours. Even yet, with all the modern ameliorations in implements, work, and time, the exercise of intelligence evoked by their life is not very high. At the beginning of the century, with their old-world appliances, long hours, exhausting if not oppressive toil, and

small domestic comfort, it was in a very backward condition, In truth, John had even then gathered a poor opinion of their intellectual and moral status, which, as things then were, was probably not unjust ; and subsequent intercourse with the class, especially in his scientific studies, only served to strengthen these early impressions, for which we shall find more than sufficient grounds as we proceed. On the other hand, their strong physique and high health were matters of which they had reason to be justly proud, and made them despise the members of other occupations in which these good elements were lower than with them. This is well illustrated by a speech made on one occasion, about the time we speak of, by the farmer of Boggatyhead, which overlooks Dunnottar Castle, when his stooks of corn were being blown over the cliffs into the sea by a heavy storm. "Rin," says he, "to Stanehyve, and get as mony men as you can, to help here ; and if ye canna get men, get weivers or onything !"

One of the commonest of sounds heard then all over the land, and not less in Stonehaven, was the merry click-clack of the weaver's shuttle. John had listened to it from his earliest years. He had often watched the busy weaver, always an attractive sight to children, and gathered the refuse beneath the looms in kindly workshops. His father had been a weaver, his mother's people were all weavers, she herself had assisted them in her younger days, and he had heard the loom talked of since he could remember anything. Several of our greater countrymen had also followed the same trade, which at that time held much higher rank than now ; so that its lowliness was no bar to greatness or study. John, therefore, determinately fixed

on following the ancestral occupation and becoming a weaver.

Nothing could have formed a greater contrast to the byre and the plough he was leaving than the loom to which he was going. Of all occupations, there is none that employs the body more than weaving, while actively exercising the mind. In working, one hand moves the "lay," the other drives the shuttle; in some classes of work, the shuttle is deftly thrown through the warp from hand to hand, either of which moves the "lay" in the short interval between. The feet work the "treddles," the fingers tie the thread, while the eye is ever on the alert to see that all goes well in the countless intricacies of the cords; for a single flaw would spoil the cloth. In weaving a striped stuff, still greater care is required. The darker or lighter lines must be inserted by means of additional shuttles, which are laid aside on the edge of the loom till required, each in turn shooting to and fro under the ever active hand. The breadth of each stripe has to be judged by the eye, which the expert workman learns to do with singular accuracy, assisted, if need be, by a pair of compasses, which lie ready for use when the requisite breadth is thought to be reached, a process of minute judgment that necessitates unusual correctness of observation.

Weavers then formed, as a whole, a remarkable class of men—intelligent, and observant of the progress of events at home and abroad; devoted to politics, strongly or wildly radical, if not tainted with revolutionary sentiments, after the intoxication of the first French Revolution; great talkers when they gathered together in the street or public-house, during the intervals of work; intensely

theological, often religious, well versed in all the intricacies of Calvinism, severest critics of the minister's discourses, and keenest of heresy-hunters, scenting it from afar, in phrase or simile, herein only being strong conservatives—in a word, general guardians of the Church, reformers of the state, and proud patrons of learning and the school-master ; but, withal, good fathers, good churchmen, good citizens, and not seldom good men—favourite subjects with all delineators of Scottish character, “douce Davie Deans” being a mild but picturesque specimen. At the same time, it should be remembered that John Duncan entered this once universal and well-remunerated occupation at a transition period in national progress, when the hand was being rapidly superseded by steam, a fact which accounts for much of the poverty that pressed him during his latter days.

At first sight, it might seem a mistake to exchange an occupation so much connected with nature and natural phenomena for one so sedentary and confined. But the advantages of an agricultural life for natural study are more seeming than real, and were much more so at that time than now. It is not the shoemaker's children that are the best shod ; nor are our field workers the best field students. Many things account for this, patent to the most casual observer, but chiefly then the long laborious and depressing hours. But in his new employment, the passion for nature, already generated in the lad by his early life, could still be gratified in leisure hours, outside the weaver's shop, as it would have required to have been in the other case, beyond the farmer's fields. Then, in autumn when work was slack, he could return

again to the harvest rig, with what advantages it offered ; and in after years, having time greatly in his own hands, as a home weaver and not a worker at a strict-timed factory, he could use his leisure as he pleased for outdoor pursuits. Under the most adverse circumstances, enthusiasm would make its own opportunities. In every way, therefore, there can be no doubt that to John Duncan the weaver's treddles were better than the ploughman's stilts. At length, in 1809, about the time Thom, the Inverurie poet, began the same occupation in Aberdeen, when Duncan had entered on his sixteenth year, arrangements were completed for his being apprenticed as a weaver in the birthplace of his parents, a weaving colony, where they also had sat at the loom.

Drumlithie, to which he now went, is a small inland, rural village, or "toonie," as John called it, seven miles from Stonehaven, and eight from Laurencekirk. It is pleasantly situated amidst some embowering ash trees, in an undulating hollow, cultivated to the summits of its enclosing heights, at the northern extremity of the far-stretching Howe of Strathmore. The centre of a wide agricultural district, it has now a railway station of its own on the busy line between Perth and Aberdeen. Like most quiet country villages, it possesses a comfortable inn, a school-house, and, in this case, several churches ; for, in addition to the Established Church and the representatives of Scotch dissent, it boasts an Episcopal chapel, half of the population having stuck to prelacy from the old days, even in the neighbourhood of Dunnottar and its Covenanting dungeons. Architecturally, though an ancient site, it contains nothing peculiar, except a curious solid, circular,

stone tower crowned with a belfry, built in 1777, its top having been recently renewed, whence a bell tolls at special times of public assembly.

When the thin, shy, uncouth-looking, friendless hero of our story entered the village early one morning at the beginning of the century, it presented a very different aspect from the silent, sleepy, retrograding hamlet it is now. The houses were mostly thatched, and stood amidst neat well-tended gardens, and the whole place had an air of vital activity about it that betokened prosperous trade; while the clatter of the loom resounded from every dwelling. As he passed along the narrow street to the upper end of the village, where he was to spend five important years of his life, he could observe through his sheepish eyes, under their projecting brows—which saw deeper and farther, however, than the casual observer might suspect—that numerous groups of weavers eyed him from the corners of the streets, where they stood without coat or hat, adorned with the inevitable apron, the badge of their trade, which he was soon to don. His lank, ill-filled figure, his awkward stoop that bespoke bashfulness and toil, his simple, retiring look, his meagre, worn apparel, his small but well-tied bundle that bore all his possessions, did not escape their critical gaze; and the question went quickly round who this “queer kind o’ creatur” could be, that was inquiring for the sharpest and most domineering man in the whole village, the notorious Charlie Pirie—another suggestive example of the wolf and the lamb.

John had entered a town of rural weavers. Every householder had his workshop attached to his house. He rented, moreover, a large garden and a considerable croft of

land, of from two to four acres, and kept a cow. At early morn every day, as certainly as the sun rose, the blast of the horn of the common village cowherd resounded over the vale; when from every gate a cow joined the general herd, which was led by him to the wide common in the hollow, below the town to the north, now under cultivation. The same merry sound was heard in the evening, when he returned with his lowing charge, and every animal went of her own accord to her own byre, bearing rich treasures for the pail. The public cowherd, generally an elderly weather-beaten man, was known throughout Scotland by the title of "Tootie," from his tooting or winding his horn—a name still attached to places such as "Tootie's Nook," a street corner where he used to assemble his cattle in an ancient town in Angus, where the writer was born. His name and functions recall a bygone picturesque state of life once prevalent in the country, but now seldom seen; the upland rural village of Lauder, south of Edinburgh, being one of the very few spots, if not the only place, in Scotland where this remnant of past rural comfort still lingers.

In Drumlithie, the staple trade at this period was that of "green" or unbleached linen, though a little woollen was made in the shape of wincey. Some time after John Duncan left it, when bleaching was better developed through increased knowledge of practical chemistry, "white weaving," or bleached linen, was introduced, and added to the local population and prosperity. In John's time there, flax was extensively cultivated in the neighbourhood, but it has been abandoned for more than thirty years, and there, as elsewhere over the country, the remains of the pits where it was steeped may still be found. The whole of

each family engaged in the trade—the father and sons wove, and the mother and daughters spun the yarn. Even the farmers near made it a condition, in hiring female servants, that they should be good “spinsters;” and they got then two shillings a spindle for the produce of their wheels and lissom fingers. The household varied their sedentary life by tending their gardens, rearing homely but pretty flowers—for not a few were creditable florists—cultivating their crofts, then under a four years’ rotation, shearing the daily grass for the cow, looking after their poultry and cattle, and cutting, drying, and fetching home their peats from the moss, which then stretched beyond the public common—for coal was then little used in inland districts.

A hebdomadal silence and sanctimony fell upon the noisy hamlet, when walking was a crime, when the voluble population spoke in subdued tones, and the churches were crowded, Sabbatarian Leagues being then unknown and unneeded. A cheerful, active, social and intellectual life, however, burst forth on Monday morning, and pervaded the week till midnight on Saturday, when the most pressing business at once religiously ceased. The usual social, political and ecclesiastical questions were ardently discussed in Drumlithie, with all the accustomed keenness of professional reformers, and the affairs of the Church and the nation, and the conduct of the Napoleonic wars, then raging, authoritatively and conclusively settled—for Drumlithie at least. At that time, newspapers were costly and rare, and could only be afforded by the rich or by clubs of the villagers—some twenty joining for one paper; but the two or three that weekly arrived were greedily devoured and thoroughly digested with a keenness now unknown, till

they became the merest rags, and were precious even then. Some of the weavers possessed not a few books, such as John's master, and these were not allowed to gather dust on their shelves; but a taste for general reading was not common even amongst weavers. The parish school then stood, as now, at the upper south end of the village, and was taught at that time by Mr. Charles, a worthy, old-fashioned man, who, in 1820, six years after Duncan left, became minister of Garvock, above Laurencekirk, and died in his hundredth year, tended to the last by his old house-keeper, of about the same age, that had been with him in Drumlithie; and the elements of education were, as a whole, fairly prized by the community.

The above picture, which is a simple statement of facts gathered from eye-witnesses and participants, reveals a state of rural society creditable to the country and the age, self-supporting, well-conditioned, hardworking and comfortable, with valuable social elements that have greatly passed away with the decay of village communities and the overgrowth of city centres. To some of these elements it may be well and wise for us, as a nation, once more to return. One thing, at least, the most sceptical will allow—tastes and habits then were much simpler, and in many ways healthier, than they are now. As put by one of my aged informants, who was a boy in the village when the century began, "Fowk didna need a' the pleasures then that they need noo." But whether, as he maintained, "no half the mischief was dune then that is noo," and whether our fathers were better men than their children, are other questions open to both positive and negative replies.

CHAPTER IV.

THE APPRENTICE WEAVER UNDER THE SHADOW— TASTING OF TYRANNY.

THE house that John Duncan entered, his home for five years—from 1809 to 1814—was a thatched cottage at the upper end of the village, close by the parish school. He was received with motherly kindness, which reassured his timid heart in this land of strangers, by Meggie Dunse, his future mistress, a quiet, couthy woman, with a depressed air but unusually intelligent look. As the daughter of a well-to-do farmer, she had received a good education, and read much more than was then common, especially amongst women. She at once took to the unco'-looking stranger, and became his fast friend and tutor, when he had greatest need of both.

Her husband, and her own and John's master, was a notorious character. He was one of the weavers and croft-owners of the village, who produced linen cloth and sold it at the neighbouring fairs. Growing no flax himself, he bought unbleached yarn at the coast town of Bervie, nine miles south-east; and had a horse and cart of his own to carry him to the various markets round, which he regularly frequented. He was then in his thirty-seventh year, and, though short in stature, was well-built, robust, and unusually

strong. He was known far and near as one of the best pugilists in the whole country-side, and this accomplishment, combined with a fiery temper and habits of ungovernable rage, made him a dangerous enemy and a formidable opponent—a kind of local Hercules without his gentlemanliness. Besides lashing with his tongue, swearing being one of his milder accomplishments, he had thrashed with his fists every one that would encounter him, except a neighbouring farmer, called Smith, who, having turned the tables upon him, had endeared himself to the bruiser's numerous enemies. On one occasion, when in Stonehaven, Pirie was not the least afraid even to face the celebrated pugilist, Captain Barclay of Ury, on account of a fight between their dogs. He acquitted himself in that battle so successfully, that Barclay complimented him, and presented him with £2 on the spot for well-nigh thrashing him !

Though holding the religious dignity of precentor in the Episcopal chapel, he followed certain questionable pursuits, not very consistent with that office—amongst others those of distiller and smuggler. In a loft above his workshop, he “made malt ;” that is, had a secret still, known to few. Under cover of the yarn and cloth that appeared in his cart, he carried on a considerable trade in the spirit thus produced, and also in gin, which was then landed from the opposite continent on the convenient rocky shores of the east coast.

Many were the encounters Pirie had with the excise officers while carrying on this illicit traffic, then, however, not very uncommon, in which his formidable fists stood him often in good stead. One day, when he had a large quantity of the contraband concealed in his house, he took

his spirited mare into the very kitchen, and placed her with heels towards the door. By irritating the creature, he made her fling so fiercely in the face of the officers in pursuit of him, that they beat a retreat from the enraged pair of beasts, scared by the hoofs of the one and the fists of the other.

At home, though he could be and often was kindly in milder moments, he ruled every one with a rod of iron, including his amiable and intelligent wife, who had frequently to bear much from his fury. The house was comfortable, for the man was fairly prosperous ; and food, which was in Mrs. Pirie's keeping, was good and abundant. But he was tyrannical and exacting with his apprentices, of whom he had a succession, and his treatment of the quiet, shrinking lad now come to his house, who was cowed by his strength and passion, was harsh, if not cruel. He often struck him severely, as he did every one who came within his reach when under anger, which was easily kindled into fierceness. In poor John's case, the very weakness and unresisting timidity of the victim, natural to the boy and increased by repeated blows, only fanned the rising flame, as it always does with such bullies. Occasionally the crushed worm did turn in appeal and anger, for the boy had a firm independent spirit beneath his quietness ; but that only increased the stamp of the iron heel.

So notorious did his cruelty become, that it was the talk of the village ; and people said that Pirie must surely be his father to take the liberty of using him so badly ! Like the conscious tyrant he was, he even prohibited John from visiting his neighbours, for fear he should talk to them of his treatment. Those that would have befriended the lad in many ways were afraid to do so, not to increase the

hardness of his lot ; for every one pitied and liked the amiable, quiet, thoughtful, down-trodden apprentice, "puir Jock," as they kindly called him in the village vernacular.

John's clothes were also of a mean description. Poor, of course, when he came, they were allowed to become worse without being renewed, though mended all over by kind Mrs. Pirie, till they looked disreputable, even in that plain-dressing age. Then his master exacted the heaviest tale of bricks, forcing him to work late and early. Young as he was, John's very smartness was an occasion of increasing his burden—for he soon became a very good hand—and he had to do greatly the work of a man. Pirie had then only two looms in the shop, the one occupied by himself when at home, and the other by the apprentice. At any pressure of work, as before an important market, the boy had often to weave the greater part of the previous night. On Saturdays, before the interruption of the Sunday, he had generally to toil on till midnight, after which the Sabbath must be kept holy. And there was not a single holiday in the long year.

So intolerable did his lot become, that even patient, dispirited John ran away more than once, only, however, to be brought back again by Pirie's unfeeling hand, under cover of law ; for the power of masters over apprentices then was absolute, and often degenerated, as in this case, into pure tyranny. Pirie frightened him by brandishing his indenture before his eyes, with all its penalties for breaking it. Once John's father returned from his barracks to his native village, to see his friends and visit his boy. On learning from the neighbours and himself the treatment

he received, he determined to remove him, and during Pirie's temporary absence took him along with him, with the intention of providing for him elsewhere. Unfortunately, Pirie returned before the two had gone very far from the village, followed them, attacked the father violently, sending him heels over head through a hedge with one fell blow, and then mercilessly beat the unfortunate soldier. He ended by seizing the son and dragging him back to bondage, and dared his father to touch him again, threatening both with all the terrors of the law.

In 1811, the second year of his apprenticeship, John suffered along with others, through causes over which Pirie had no control. That was the year of "the bad harvest," now become historical. The autumn was very bad on account of the wind and rain; the corn that was cut stood so long wet in the stooks that it began to sprout again; and what remained uncut was all shaken and became useless through a fierce gale that blew on a Sunday, long remembered. The meal made from such grain was miserable stuff, being black, sandy, and un-nourishing. As John told in after years, "it was so bad that it crunched between his teeth, and he often looked at it twice before he could muster courage to eat it." Superstition added to the general misery, for a large comet coursed through the heavens that year, in sight of terrified, starving beholders, who looked upon it as at once an evidence of Divine displeasure, and a herald of the coming judgment day, then speedily expected.

But all was not dark in John's lot in Pirie's house; for it is a black day indeed that has not a single gleam of sunshine. One bright ray that illumined the gloom was

the sympathy of his good mistress, whose patience under similar sorrows was an example and a support, and whose kindness was secretly and substantially increased on every renewed outburst of her husband. Her influence over the lad in other ways was unusually high and important. Her intelligence was far above common. She had an exceptional taste for reading, which she had sedulously cultivated. She possessed more books than most in the village, and she was reckoned "a terrible scholar." Her memory was so good that she could recite long pieces of prose and poetry from her varied reading. She had even been impelled to express her crowding thoughts in not unmusical verse, and she still sustains the reputation of having been a poetess, a couplet said to be hers being still preserved :

" If health were a thing that money could buy,
The rich would live and the poor would die."

Then, fortunately for the comfort of both, and especially for John's higher culture, their taskmaster was often from home, and they had happy days together, working, talking, reciting, and reading, when John became somewhat proficient in that art. This communion must have been of inestimable value to the expanding head and heart of the lad, and formed an important element in John's education. He could not have come under higher and sweeter influence in this the most susceptible period of his life, and it no doubt permanently moulded him for good. His case is a remarkable example of the compensations to be found in every lot, however untoward and sad.

But, alas ! one dark winter day, this cheering beam was suddenly quenched. John and she were busily engaged

that forenoon in the kitchen—for “there were nae braw hooses then like noo,” as my informant incidentally remarked—shaking the linen yarn which he had been washing in the burn, and which was hung on poles all round the room to be dried and prepared, the toil being enlivened by cheerful talk and higher discourse. His mistress, with her accustomed kindness, dropped her work by John’s side, to carry a warm mug of ale to a man who had been hired to do some outdoor work for her husband. Speedily returning, she took a seat by the fireside to rest for a little, feeling somewhat faint with the continued exertion. She had scarcely sat down, when John, who was busy with the yarn, heard a slight cry and a sudden movement, and turning quickly round, saw the good woman lying in a heap on the floor. She had fainted and gently slid from her seat to the ground, and the vital spark had instantaneously fled. A medical weaver in the village was speedily sent for, but all without avail—she never breathed again, having died of heart disease. The shock was severe on the solitary witness. Her death sent a thrill through the village, as sudden death always does in a community where all belong as it were to one family; for that was then, and still is viewed—illogically, of course, but all the more deeply from its mystery—as a special warning from Deity, as if God were not as present in the silent procession of life as in the catastrophe. To John, her death was more than that of a kind mistress and good woman: it was the loss of a mother, teacher, and intelligent friend, and the quenching of the firelight of his domestic life.

After this, the relations between Pirie and John became daily more aggravated, and the cruelty he suffered was

harder to bear, now that this sympathizer was gone. For example, it is still related in the village that the tyrant kept him for hours together, even in the depth of winter, at the burn side, washing and "knocking" the yarn—that is, hammering it with a heavy wooden mallet, called the "knocker" or "beetle," on a flat boulder called the "knocking" or "beetling stone,"—and then wringing it dry in a frame constructed for the purpose. It was a hard piece of work at any time, but, in the frosts of winter, it was pure cruelty. During the whole process, the arms required to be bare and the hands were constantly wet. The consequence was, that his hands became all chilblained and frost-bitten, and broke out in sores difficult to heal. This treatment roused the indignation of the neighbours, but remonstrance with its author only tended to increase it in the same or other directions. One kindly woman, however, had the courage to weave and present him with mittens to cover his bleeding hands and keep them warm. At the susceptible age at which John had arrived, such depressing experiences have always painful effects on the man, however strong the personality and bright the after life. It is scarcely possible for the human plant, more than any other, to escape permanent injury in some degree by living in the shadow or under the crush of a powerful neighbour in its early stages. Happy is it for the man in whom innate elasticity and subsequent light and freedom retrieve these early blights* and twists, and in whom it mainly leaves an intense hatred of oppression in every form. In Duncan, the evil results remained in some measure throughout life, though the bitter experience was fraught in many ways with good.

CHAPTER V.

THE APPRENTICE WEAVER IN THE SUNSHINE—ENTERING THE TEMPLE OF LEARNING.

BUT in spite of these miserable and depressing external conditions under which he lived in this otherwise pleasant village, his inner life of growing intelligence and thirst for knowledge—which, innate as it was, had been nurtured by the seashore—rapidly progressed, and became the talk of the place. From the very first, he was seen to be a quiet, retiring, harmless being, not given to gossiping or to making many friends, pleased rather with the joy of his own thoughts. He sought the seclusion of a solitary walk, when time was allowed him, and never frequented the open street, with its many groups of aproned workmen. He was then a short, lank lad, having much more bone than muscle, and so near-sighted that he required to examine all he looked at with a smile-provoking closeness. He had an absurdly shy and backward manner, and his home treatment induced a half-furtive look, as of a hunted hare ; and he was dressed in poverty-stricken clothes. Altogether, he was a peculiar-looking young man, generally viewed as a “queer sort of creature.” Gradually, however, he won the growing regard of all, as they witnessed his life and perceived his studious habits, and this was

greatly increased by the natural pity his persecution excited.

Soon after coming to Drumlithie, impelled by his rising intellectual energy and stimulated by Mrs. Pirie's influence, he set himself, with the quiet determination that characterized him through life, to learn to read. Happily, in the village there were more than one willing hand to help him up the steep stair that conducts to the temple of knowledge. The good genius to whom the merit seems to belong of having first taught him the letters, those magical wards in the key that alone unlocks the temple gate, was a woman called Mary Garvie, whose name he preserved with childlike simplicity and deep gratitude to the last, mentioning it to me a few months before his death, more than seventy years after. She lived in the cottage to the end of which the workshop was attached in which John was employed. She was the wife of a weaver and crofter, Robert Clark; but, according to the homely intimacy of Scottish village life, she always received her maiden name from her neighbours, and she never was designated by the more formal title of Mrs. Clark till, inheriting a legacy, she removed to a larger and finer house. She was a woman in many respects resembling her good neighbour, Mrs. Pirie, being better educated than usual, intelligent, kindly, and pious, though without her literary tastes and accomplishments. Being next door to the workshop, her house was one of John's few haunts, into which he used to steal when he could. To her he seems to have naturally first confided his utter want of scholastic learning, rather than to his mistress, from native pride and shyness and the disturbing influences in her home.

John now first learnt the A B C, in his sixteenth year, under Mary Garvie's tuition, at her pleasant fireside, naming the letters in the old-fashioned Scotch style, "Ah, Bay, Say," and concluding with "Ized and Eppericy And"—the last a curious remnant of old school Latinity, which being interpreted is, in the Roman tongue, "*et per se*, and," and, in the vulgar speech, "& by itself, *and*." * Having conquered these pregnant hieroglyphics and their first syllabic combinations, his future progress was now greatly, if not wholly, in his own hands; for, like Edmund Stone, the self-taught mathematician, John Duncan was the very man to believe that "to know the twenty-six letters was quite sufficient to enable a man to learn anything that he wished."

But he had another tutor, who used to help him after he could read with a little fluency. This was Mary Brand, a girl of twelve when he came to the village, the daughter of a weaver, John Brand, who resided in a cottage next to Pirie's. She was then at school, or had just left it, and used to come into the weaving shop, when Johnnie had any leisure, to hear him read his lesson, correcting inevitable mistakes and helping him over difficulties. There the two would sit together on the loom, John with the book close to his eyes, laboriously and earnestly groping his way through the page under her bright guidance; while many a merry laugh rang through the room at the errors made by the slow, sober, diligent, and short-sighted scholar. The two formed a striking picture for a character

* The so-called letter "&" is merely a short monographic form of the Latin *et*, the letters of which can easily be detected in it, and which is so pronounced in "&c."

painter, as they sat there at this employment unwonted in a weaving shop, behind the countless threads and beams of the loom, with the light streaming in upon them through the near window, under the thatched roof open to the rigging, which was hung with the cobwebs and the accumulated stour and dust of years. Speaking on the subject to her brother, a communicative old man who still survives in his eighty-second year, bent with cruel rheumatism, I asked if there was anything of the tender passion involved in the arrangement, for it was an unusual thing for a young girl to do. He replied that "they were only bairns thegither readin' a lesson;" and rightly remarked that had love been in their hearts, there would have been precious little thought of learning in their heads.

The eager student was also abundantly assisted by his good mistress in this scholastic work, as we have seen, while the passages read were illuminated by her intelligent commentary and abundant memory stores. Under this gentle tuition, John made rapid progress, for, as David Brand says, "he was terrible anxious aboot learnin'." So anxious was he, as he himself used to tell, that he also carried on his studies in church—for his poor attire did not keep him from public worship, though submitting him to public remark, and "claes werena just sae dandy in thae days," as observed by one of his friends. When the minister gave out the psalm to be sung and the chapter to be read, John got the place turned up by one of his kindly neighbours, and followed the reading as far as he was able, and with increasing facility; and when the text was selected, he laboriously conquered it in the book during intervals in the discourse. After he returned home, he

was never satisfied till he had read the whole chapter for himself. By such praiseworthy assiduity, he gradually became a tolerable reader.

Yet, though he read so much during his lifetime, he *never* was able to read with great fluency, having to the last to spell his way over a new or long word, and doing so aloud, even when reading in public, to the amusement of his auditors, his own dead earnestness in the process preventing any confusion on his part or perception of surrounding smiles. What the Rev. Walter C. Smith makes dowie "Dorts the Mason" say of himself, was greatly true of John Duncan :

"Ye had rare schooling, I had almost none,
But gnawed a book as dogs will gnaw a bone."

But John gnawed the bone to some purpose, and always got at its marrow. This imperfection was no doubt due, in great measure, to his extreme and permanent short-sightedness, but may also have arisen from his late acquirement of the art ; just as he never became a good speller, even of common words, though seeing them so often.

Writing he does not seem to have begun for several years after this, being for the time satisfied with the attainment and exercise of the new and glorious accomplishment already gained, which opened to him the very gates of paradise. He was long content to revel in the blissfulness of mental acquisition ; the need for written expression would come by-and-by, and set him to achieve its instrument. Thus we have no evidence of his learning to write till almost twenty years after he came to Drumlithie, in 1828, when we find him, in his thirty-fourth year, laboriously working at a copy-book !

It was an unusual but happy coincidence that just when our neglected scholar required assistance, there should have been thus closely associated with him those possessing the requisite education, intelligence, and kindliness, to give the needed aid, with that womanly intuitive tact and perception that saw more than appeared on the surface, in the outwardly unattractive and absurdly shy young weaver. From these good women, he got help in more than the mere elements. From Mrs. Pirie, with whom he spent so much time, he gained stores of information and an insight into poetry, with an access to books, that must have broadened and strengthened his growing intellect. From Mrs. Clark, he obtained important religious instruction, for she was devoted to such subjects ; while the motherly sympathy and high character of both women would develop his better nature, and greatly soothe him under other hardships. Their whole relations to the lad afford a beautiful glimpse of the genuine helpfulness and kindliness that not seldom characterize the social life of our common people, a fact which will be abundantly illustrated in the progress of our story. All these good women have long since passed away, but "this that they have done shall be told as a memorial of them."

After Mrs. Pirie died, and Mrs. Clark removed to her grander house, John attended a night-school for five or six weeks, to improve his scholastic attainments, now at a stage for him to profit by a schoolmaster. This was Robert Lindsay, a man in feeble health, who had a small day side school in the village, and eked out his living by teaching in the evenings. He had some reputation as an instructor, especially in arithmetic, in which he was said to

be able to put a boy through "the Gray," an old treatise on arithmetic, in a single winter. These few evening hours were all that the school ever did for John Duncan. Becoming gradually more independent of external assistance in his literary studies, he used to retire to the garret in which he slept, to pursue them undisturbed ; and many an hour was spent by the ardent scholar deciphering the typographical maze with his short-sighted eyes. He did so aloud in a kind of humming tune, and every page was read and read again till fully conquered in word and thought—a peculiar thoroughness remarked by all that knew him. His progress was rapid ; as one of his old friends said, "he learned himself a great heap." His strong memory, which was one of the faculties characterizing him throughout life, was specially noted, and he used to surprise his friends in Drumlithie by reciting *verbatim*, on his return home, great portions of the sermon he had heard.

His study of external nature began now to be more actively and extensively pursued. One of his friends, James Sinclair, now an intelligent old man of eighty, residing at the Kirktown of Fetteresso—who is emphatic as to John's excellent character and disposition, and the high estimation in which he was held in the village—tells how he sometimes accompanied John in the rambles that his close confinement allowed him, especially in the Den of Kinmonth, close by the church of Glenbervie, a short distance from the village, where runs the Drumlithie Burn. In these journeys, he said, there was scarcely anything they saw which John did not seem to be familiar with, and to be able to say something about.

It was while in Drumlithie that he began the first form of his botanical studies, that of Medical Botany, which he carried on with increasing ardour and extending knowledge all his life.

Plants, in this practical botany, were known as "herbs," students of the subject as "herbalists," and professors of it as "herb-doctors." The art of healing by these natural simples was then greatly in vogue amongst weavers and shoemakers, many of whom were really skilful and successful in their more or less empiric treatment. It was at that time a very popular form of medicine, in which, amidst much error, there was more virtue than is now generally conceded; and it was a decided gain to our rural communities, when medical men were comparatively few and expensive, and greatly confined to the larger towns. It was natural, therefore, that John's interest in plants, created around the old cliffs, should take this special practical shape, familiar as it was rendered to him by general belief and practice. Indeed, no more scientific form of botanical study was then available to him. Few, if any, scientific treatises on Botany then existed, certainly none in a popular form, for many years after he left Drumlithie. Then, Medical Botany was at that time greatly a formulated study, possessing text-books to be had at no great cost. Culpepper was the great authority, and his illustrated "British Herbal" was in common use. By getting a loan of Culpepper from some of the local herbalists of the village, John was able, during his apprenticeship, to make a beginning of the study of plants, which he learnt to discover and name with the help of the plates that accompanied the work. This was his

first introduction to the technical study which was in time to become the enthusiasm of his life.

Though the lad was naturally so very retiring and bashful, which his harsh treatment had increased, and liked to spend his leisure in solitary walks ; and though he visited very few houses in the village, he had some good friends with whom he occasionally associated, in addition to those already mentioned. Next door to John's weaving shop lived a shoemaker, called Dallas. His house, which looked right out on the shop, was a daily haunt of the apprentice weaver, into which he used to steal, to chat for a little with the intelligent "sooter," and at times confide the grievances received from his bullying master. The shoemaker had a son, a lad of seven when John first came to the village, called Alexander, or, in daily speech, "Sandy." Knowing few of his own age, John became attached to the little boy, who used to run in and out of the shop, and who was delighted to carry his "pirns," the reels containing the thread for the shuttle. Amongst other things, to please the boy, John put up a swing between the two looms that stood end to end in the shop, the rope being fastened to the great beams that formed their framework. There Sandy used to swing in jubilant glee, after he came home from school—for his parents gave him what was then a fair education—while John sat busily plying his shuttle. During dinner hour, and at other times when his taskmaster was from home, the young weaver took a swing himself, by way of change from his over-sedentary work ; and not unfrequently the two might be seen on the swing together, standing, as is the custom in such an exercise, face to face, the one alternately

propelling the other, amidst the ringing laughter of both—*forbidden* sounds when Pirie was present. John's youthful associate is still alive in the village in which they had these merry bouts, a hale, genial, intelligent old man of eighty-one, inspector of poor of his native parish, and to him I am indebted for vivid glimpses of the village life of the time and John's sojourn there.

After Mrs. Pirie's sudden death, Duncan's life became gradually more miserable, both from his master's fists and from the want of household comforts when his fireside good genius had fled. In the end, so intolerable did it become that he ran away at last for good and all, in 1814, when his apprenticeship was about finished, never more to return.

When the quiet young man of twenty looked back from the road to Johnshaven, a fishing village five miles off, and saw Drumlithie asleep in the hollow, in the dim morning light, he felt exultant, like an Israelite of old escaping from "the house of bondage." His cruel Pharaoh, however, survived for more than thirty years after, till 1847.

The village since then has passed through not a few changes. When "white weaving," or the trade in bleached linen, was introduced, it reached its acme of prosperity, and could boast of more than a hundred active weavers and a flourishing trade. It now possesses but one. The busy workshops have all been swept away; the commonry is no longer theirs; the peat moss beyond has been drained, and coal is universal; the toot of the cowherd, and the merry blast of the stage-coach, as it swept through the streets like a bright vision of the busy outer world,

have been replaced by the scream of the locomotive and the heavy roll of his chariot wheels, with all the concurrent remorseless innovations on old rural village life.

That very year, 1814, there appeared in Edinburgh the now world-famous anonymous tale called "Waverley," the first of that wonderful series, inspired by genius almost Shakespearian, which inaugurated a new era in novel-writing and modern literature. But it took long till the springtide of interest and admiration reached our rural towns and villages. To such literary achievements, unhappily, John never was introduced; the prejudices of the time in such regions, and the rigid religious influences under which he afterwards came, effectually shutting him out all his life from their broadening and enlightening pages.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JOURNEYMAN WEAVER DURING HIS FIRST FREEDOM.

JOHN DUNCAN remained only a short time in Johnshaven. Rejoicing in his new freedom, dear to all young people, and dearer to him from the previous slavery, he began to move from place to place, to see the country, extend his experience of men and things, and improve his skill in his trade. Smitten with a desire to see and be near his mother, he returned to his native town, where he lived for some two years, winning his own bread and helping her. He found Stonehaven considerably extended since he had left it five or six years before, and very much, since he had become a herd on the neighbouring braes. The new town had begun to show the spacious style in which it had been laid out by Captain Barclay's father, and it was evidently only a question of time that the Links would soon be entirely absorbed, and the new town overshadow the old, draining off its best people and gradually abandoning it to the poorer population that now occupies it.

John prosecuted his studies with growing fervour, his greater leisure giving him increased opportunities, fully prized by the keen young weaver. Now that the miserable influences that had stunted his physical and mental growth

had been removed, he began to feel a return of the vigorous elasticity of youth. His desire for mental acquirement was a rising appetite, certain in time to become dominant. He lived very simply, if not sparsely, though healthily, in order to be able to obtain the tools for intellectual work—the much-coveted books. In Stonehaven, he began the formation of the large, well-selected, and, for the very poor man he always remained, costly library which he gradually accumulated, and the possession of which became one of his ruling passions.

He traversed the cliffs and pleasant neighbourhood of Stonehaven with enlightened eyes, in search of the herbs he was now able to distinguish and name, with the help of the great Culpepper. These he concocted into the various wonderful preparations therein detailed, which were to charm away all disease frail flesh is heir to, and he began to acquire some local fame as a herbalist. Such a man could not, however, rest satisfied with the mere memories of the borrowed volume he had seen at Drumlithie. He must have his own text-book, and after months of extra work, for wages were very low, he became at last the proud possessor of a copy of his own, which cost one pound—an immense sum to a lad so poor, just out of his apprenticeship, and having his mother to assist. But it was the old story of a will and a way, and another proof of the omnipotence of true resolution. The book on which John spent so much was a remarkable one, no less than the "Bible of the Herbalists," then a very numerous sect scattered all over the country, which received an enthusiastic apostle in the young weaver. His belief in the system which formed his first introduction to

scientific inquiry, remained unbroken to the end, and was strengthened by his practical mastery over it and the good it did in his hands.

From the knowledge of the heavenly bodies required in Culpepper's astrological system, John was early led to the study of astronomy, which for many years, as we shall see, became one of his special pursuits. This issued, by-and-by, in his studying several cognate subjects, such as astrology, dialling, meteorology, and calendars, of which more anon. In 1815, the first year he returned to Stonehaven, he bought a copy of "Orr's Belfast Almanack," an old calendar which still holds its own among the people ; and from that time till his death, for sixty-six years, he purchased an almanack annually, some of them high priced, and finally possessed a complete suite of these, which he presented to one of his disciples, Mr. John Taylor, who was following kindred studies.

That year, also, Stonehaven took a worthy share in the national celebration of the victory of Waterloo and the overthrow of Napoleon, in which John Duncan, with his hatred of tyranny, recently intensified at Drumlithie, took an active part. In that village, he had also acquired a taste for politics, and an interest in the great questions of social progress then increasingly agitating the country, and he now began regularly to read the newspapers and keep himself conversant with the rapid march of events.

About this time, his mother removed from Stonehaven to Aberdeen, where she resided in the Hardgate. There she made a living, as hitherto, by harvest work, washing and dressing, and other domestic employments, like the hard-working, careful woman she was. John either accompanied

or soon followed her to the same city, and continued his kindly attentions to his mother, visiting her regularly and paying her rent, a large demand on his poor purse, till her death, about 1830, above fifty years of age.

In 1816, when Duncan removed to the granite capital of the north-east of Scotland, Aberdeen was not then the large, fine city it now is, but a comparatively small provincial town, with narrow streets, grouped chiefly round St. Catherine's Hill. The ideas of what then constituted a street are still preserved in the name of Broad Street, which is little better than a winding lane, leading to the University of Marischall College—the *old* building erected by Earl Keith in 1593, for the present handsome structure was not built till 1837. The splendid thoroughfare of Union Street, now one of the good streets of Europe, had just been begun, about 1812, by the construction of the high bridge across the Den Burn. All south of it, where now stands the spacious and substantial city between it and the Dee, was then green fields, where Duncan gathered herbs in the dewy morning.

John's travelling at that time, and long, long after, was performed altogether on foot, a mode of locomotion then almost universal amongst the mass of the people, who thought nothing of thirty or forty miles a day. He was always a splendid pedestrian, excelling most men in the smartness and extent of his journeys. He approached Aberdeen by the old Brig of Dee, then half its present width, passed over the narrow, parapet-less bridge spanning the Ruthrieston Burn close by, one of the oldest bridges in the district—now deserted, but over which went the traffic of hundreds of years—and he entered the town by

the low road that ran through the Hardgate, and crossed the Den Burn near its mouth at the harbour. Long years after, he used to recall, with a kind of melancholy pleasure, the old condition of things, more than half a century before, remarking that, "like himself," all sublunary things must change.

Besides a desire to see the world, one of John's reasons for coming to Aberdeen was to perfect himself as a weaver. As he afterwards told me, he made up his mind when he became a weaver to *be* one, and to master the whole subject; and he was the man to do it. Aberdeen was even then the seat of a great manufacturing trade in cotton, linen, and wool, carried on in numerous large factories, which employed, at that time, more than three thousand hands, out of a population, in 1821, of under forty-four thousand—a very large proportion of the adults. The weavers then formed a powerful corporation in the city, and wielded great influence. They could be seen, as in Drumlithie, standing in the streets in wordy confabulation, arrayed in their clean white aprons, the badge of their trade, of which they were justly proud.

At first, John entered the large weaving factory of Leys, Masson and Co., who had immense establishments where the busy thoroughfare of Market Street now stands, and at Broadford, then a suburb of Aberdeen, but now enclosed in the city. Their great works, which included a foundry, were considered among the largest of the kind then in Scotland. Here famed linen and cotton cloths of various kinds were produced; and things were so carefully managed that, as John used to say, they had very little waste in their productions—"there wasna

muckle i' their pob," that is, in the fluffy refuse of flax that remains in the manufacture; ending his observations on the subject with the sentiment, that when we do any piece of work, we should do it so thoroughly as "to leave little in the pob." The firm had also a bleach-field at Rubeslaw, now well known for its granite, where "green" linen yard was bleached white, from which light-coloured cloth was produced—the first time John had seen it. His old master Pirie had once tried bleaching, but the vitriol, a necessary agent in the process, dangerous in the hands of the unskilled, only burnt his yarns, and his fingers in more senses than one, and he gave it up.

Until now, John's work had been greatly confined to linen cloth of various kinds, though he had had some practice, even at Drumlithie, in woollen stuffs, especially wincey, which consisted then of strong linen warp, across which was woven woollen thread or weft of different colours, hence known as "linsey-woolseys." In order to obtain more practice in this kind of work, he by-and-by entered a woollen factory at Windmill Brae, where winceys and other woollen fabrics were woven. In a short time, he was able to keep up with the best of them, as he used to recall with pride, and soon became a superior weaver of winceys, blankets, carpets, and the like. In proof of this, a story is told of him by one of his Drumlithie friends, which at once proves his skill as a weaver and his strength of will as a man—a lifelong characteristic, greatly hidden beneath his quiet, shy exterior. He was once engaged in a shop, in which Pirie's son, Duncan, and a weaver called Sandy Hadden, worked along with him. Hadden wore a woollen vest of an uncommon fancy

pattern, then more difficult to produce with existing appliances than now. While talking together on weaving matters, Hadden challenged John to make a similar piece, wagering a good deal that he could not do it. They parted for the evening. Next morning, John produced the cloth required, woven to pattern. He had worked at it all alone during that night !

Some of the woollen goods, then woven entirely by the hand, were very trying to the weaver, and looked much more so to the unaccustomed on-looker, from the extreme exertion and watchfulness they required. Such were some of the patterned broad-loom winceys, which were double the common width, and were woven in a special large or "broad loom," the pattern being produced by means of the Jacquard machine, invented in 1790. In these, the shuttle had to be deftly thrown from hand to hand extended at full stretch, through the moving warp, operated on by numerous treddles below, over which the nimble feet of the weaver moved with unerring accuracy, though of necessity out of sight. These cloths John used to weave at this early date in Aberdeen, which still retains its ancient fame for winceys, though they are now made chiefly of cotton and wool.

There also lived in Aberdeen, during the whole of John's stay there, another weaver, poor and lame, but full of the lyrical afflatus, who afterwards became famous, William Thom. Born in that city in 1797, he was three years John's junior, and worked in a cotton factory in Belmont Street, removing thence to Dundee in 1831. It was not, however, till he returned, in 1840, to reside at Inverurie in Aberdeenshire, where he first began to publish,

that he burst into fame as the "Inverurie poet." After a brilliant, but meteoric, career, in which he was thrice fêted in London, he died in 1848 at Dundee, where he now lies buried. There is no proof that Thom and Duncan, fellow-weavers though they were, ever met. Nor is it very likely that the quiet-going John Duncan moved in the same circle with the jovial "Willie Tam."

CHAPTER VII.

UNHAPPY DOMESTIC EXPERIENCES.

JOHN DUNCAN'S story now enters on a sad chapter, which darkened more or less all the rest of his days, and might have wrecked his life, if he had not possessed the strength of character and capacity for higher pursuits that raised him above its deteriorating influences.

Like most well-regulated, affectionate men, John wished to have a home of his own, "a dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest," blessed by the tender offices of love, to which to retire from the colder world without.

Shortly after coming to Aberdeen, his attention was taken by a good-looking smart young woman, named Margaret Wise, whom he had seen at a print-field there. They became acquainted, and an affection, real at least on his part, sprung up between them. The young man, however, found that, some months before he knew Margaret, she had borne a child to another. Nevertheless, with the impetuosity of youth, and under the glamour of first love, which seems to have been very strong in one of his quiet but ardent temperament, prudence was thrown to the winds; and they agreed to be married. They were united in 1818, two years after his coming to the city, and the ceremony was performed by the able and eccentric

Dr. Kidd, one of the most popular and peculiar clergymen that ever lived in Aberdeen, about whom hundreds of remarkable stories are still current.

John furnished a house, determined to do all he could to make a pleasant home for all of them. The future, in the circumstances, did not look very auspicious, but might have been happy, as it has proved even in worse cases. Here it turned out disastrous. His wife seems to have been radically ill-conditioned in tone, and unsettled in disposition and habit, with strong inclinations towards those indulgencies that had made her a mother too soon. From the first, she was not very kind or considerate to him, and, ere long, began to exhibit tendencies that rendered domestic peace impossible. Quarrels ensued, and she was accustomed to exclaim in rage, that when *her* boy was old enough, she would ask him to thrash her husband's back for him. This child, whose name was Andrew Durward, though occasionally called Duncan, stayed with them, being kindly adopted by John, as his wife's son.

In time, two daughters were born to them, the eldest, Mary, on the 20th of July, 1821, more than two years after marriage, and the second, Elizabeth, or Beattie, on the 22nd of December, 1823. These double pledges of affection should have consummated their true union, and restored peace and happiness, if anything could. It was in vain. Matters grew worse. Her natural proclivities only became more pronounced. She began more or less openly to "take up" with other men; and when women "yoke that way," as her husband sadly said long after, "they winna bind. When they dinna hae the richt side o' that question, they're fairly thro'."

It is a sad story, and should be quickly told. Remonstrance became useless ; unhappiness increased ; till one day the crisis came. John, coming home from work at an unexpected hour, found a man where no man should be. That was the end. She left the house alone, abandoning her husband and children. Even then, his old affection reasserted itself and he made overtures for her return, offering to let "the dead past bury its dead," if she would only promise even yet to amend. All was useless, and they parted for ever.

The house was broken up. She took with her her own boy, and John retained the daughters. Had he been a richer man, he would have sought and obtained divorce. Being very poor, he had to remain united in name and law with a worthless woman. She joined her fortunes with those of her new fancy, to be discarded in time ; and, after passing through various lower experiences, ended in becoming a wanderer over the country, selling small trinkets and at last begging her bread. She tried to annoy her husband when she could, endeavouring on one occasion to father a child upon him, and bringing him to court, of course in vain. She used also to visit him, to extort money, when she knew where he lived. At all times, John treated her with kindness, and without recrimination or reference to the past. Before she died, she was subject to St. Vitus' dance, and became a poor miserable creature, draining the last drops of bitterness from the cup she had mingled for herself, and dying in the west of Aberdeenshire, unknown to her husband, a nameless object, more than twenty years after she had ruthlessly wrecked her home.

It was a sad and terrible experience, which would have blasted the life of most, of all but a strong man. To John Duncan, it was a life-long grief, a secret sore that might have drained out all vitality or driven him to questionable relief. His home was despoiled, his dream of domestic happiness cruelly dissipated. Better far, better a thousand fold, had she died. But no, she lived, a blight and a blame. For years, he removed from place to place, to escape her presence and the curse of her connection ; and he never again took a holding of his own till she had passed away. The subject was ever present to him as a hidden anguish, a thing to be proscribed in speech, and to be breathed to no man, not even to his dearest friends. To none of these did he speak of it, not even to Charles Black, his second self, during their many years of closest intimacy.

But it is vain to think of hiding such secrets from the world. They haunt even the most innocent, like crime, and, at the best, become a source of misunderstanding with the most kindly. His friends knew the tale, and rumours of it floated amongst the people, the very indefiniteness of their knowledge being a means of exaggeration and cruel surmise. It was only his singular modesty and unimpeachable uprightness that preserved him from being condemned. With his friends, it was a forbidden topic, restrained by their affection for the man and their respect for his action in the unhappy circumstances. To one alone who admired him have I ever heard that he voluntarily entered on the subject, and that was when it became unavoidable by his wife seeking him out ; and even then he spoke, without passion or hard words, of the miserable cause of his woe, and only entered a mild defence of his

conduct, which gained full consent. When another sympathetic friend had occasion to mention that he had known it for forty years, the old man, who thought him quite ignorant of it, fairly broke down, as if stabbed to the heart. To the last, he could never refer to it without the acutest pain. When, in talking to him of his history shortly before his death, I delicately referred to his unhappy domestic life, he touched on the subject with difficulty, saying, amongst other things, that "when a man has a bad nee'bor, that will listen to nothing, he's glad to get clear o' her." Referring to her death, he said it caused him grief even after all that had happened; and the memory of the bitter past reviving as he spoke, he turned away with tears in his eyes, deprecating further reference to it, by saying, "But ye see, that's a' by noo!"

These distressing experiences in the tenderest relations, which touch the deepest springs of our being with strange power, might have had disastrous effects, at least on his temper and disposition. That they did not vitiate his habits by driving him to excess in search of consolation is highly honourable to his moral power. They might, however, have made him ill-tempered and more or less misanthropic and morose, and it speaks volumes in the man's favour that they did not; though his temperament was naturally keen and sensitive, and felt such troubles to the very core.

What rendered the grief under which he suffered the harder to bear, was the fact that it was not dead—that its heartless cause lived so long and, for more than twenty years, wandered in the very district in which he dwelt, before the public eye and with no guarded tongue, in a guise

disreputable to herself and intolerable to him, and under conditions that might at any moment seriously compromise his social respect. It was an ever-present, inexorable fate, through which none but the most depraved would wish their worst enemy to pass. But it was endured daily for more than a score of years, with all its painful possibilities, by this simple weaver, in silence and dignity, without vituperation of its cause, and with no loss of his own self-respect or the esteem of society; the man himself being strong enough, throughout the long and wasting trial, to preserve his equanimity and calmness, and in time to regain his natural brightness and humour. No doubt, the necessity for hiding from his fellows this skeleton of the heart would increase his native reserve and make him more retiring, mistrustful, and self-absorbed. But the man passed through the bitter ordeal, if not unscathed, at least undeteriorated; and undoubtedly, in many respects, raised and broadened, through the sanctity of conquered sorrow. This was largely owing to his own moral balance and strength of character and will. But it was also in great part due to the measures he wisely took for relief, in moving about the country, in working all the harder at his trade, in seeking variety of employment, and, chief of all, in sedulously prosecuting the higher pursuits to which he now increasingly devoted himself.

His two daughters were boarded out by their father, with poor people to whom their labour was of some value, and were in this way carefully brought up, though they were a drain upon his slender resources. In time, they grew to womanhood, and became domestic servants to several of John's friends and relations. They did well, preserving

their good name, though thus nurtured without the advantages of a virtuous home. They would seem to have been truly attached to their father, and letters still exist from both of them, addressed to him by his affectionate daughters, which prove the pleasant relations that subsisted between them. The fact that they could use the pen so creditably as they did, shows that their education had not been neglected.

The eldest, Mary, was a good-looking brunette, "a gae *setting* sort o' lassie," as they say in Aberdeenshire, and her father's favourite. For years, she drove a milk-cart into Aberdeen, selling her master's milk, and being much liked for her pleasant, cheerful manners. She at last married a shoemaker called Smart, in Aberdeen, where they lived long in the Gallowgate, and where her father used to visit them.

The younger, Elizabeth, married John Cormack, who made his living by travelling over the country, selling broom and heather besoms and other articles of natural produce, and who was hence universally known as "besom Jock," or "heather Jock." This man was somewhat of a character, a great humorist, and an inveterate talker; but he was an honest man even in public repute—a rare merit in such a life—and was generally respected. His wife becoming paralyzed, like her mother, Cormack got a "coach," or hand-carriage for her, in which she used to sit along with the articles he sold, and in which she was driven by him ungrudgingly all over the country. This single fact reveals a volume of kindness in the man, which in the whole circumstances is almost poetic in its tenderness, for he was, as everybody acknowledged, "partik'lar gweed" to his helpless mate.

John Duncan kept up correspondence with both daughters to the last. They paid visits to each other, and he frequently assisted them in their poverty, in various ways. As was natural and pardonable in a father, he wished his second daughter had married some one of higher social standing than a hawker, and was considerably ashamed of the connection—a foible that even the most philosophical could scarcely rise above in connection with a daughter, however honourable in character the lowly husband might be.

When he wished to meet the Cormacks to give them the assistance he regularly did, he used to appoint some more or less secluded place for the purpose. On one occasion, after seeing them on a hill in Tullynessle, in the Vale of Alford, he called on a friend who had a farm at its base, and complained of the disgrace it was to be connected with such people, relatives though they were of his own. His friend tried to soothe his wounded feelings by reminding him that Cormack was an honest, much-respected man. John replied that he knew that, but that surely he might get something more respectable to do than making heather besoms; for that occupation is irretrievably associated in Scotland—in which social status and respect stand high, amongst even the poorest—with tinkers and their disreputable life, with which Cormack had not the remotest connection or sympathy. But it is in vain to reason against such feelings, and it shows John's true kindness of heart that, possessing them so strongly, he still treated their subjects so kindly, as he continued to do till they passed away. Both daughters have long since died, along with their husbands and children, so that no representative

of John Duncan now survives, if we except his half-brother, his mother's second son, already mentioned.

His wife's son, Andrew Durward, or "Durratt," as the name is popularly called and as he himself spelled it, seems to have grown a respectable, kindly man, though brought up under the untoward circumstances in which he had been. He became a soldier, and letters of his, written to his sister Mary, from Colombo in Ceylon, in 1842, still exist, full of religious feeling. In one of these, he wished to know how his father, John Duncan, was getting on—a proof that he retained a kindly remembrance of the man in whose house he had been sheltered for six years; and promised to send his mother ten shillings a month, if he knew how to do so. He returned to this country after obtaining his discharge, married, and made a living, in addition to his small pension, by traversing the country with various wares, and was known as "an honest creature." Unfortunately, like his mother and sister, he at last became paralytic, and had to be supported by his wife. She is still remembered by many as a clean, tidy woman, selling wares from a basket which she carried about. He at last died, in October, 1867, in the poor-house of Clatt, in Aberdeenshire, to which he and his wife had then come in their wanderings, and where she remained till her death. An attempt was made, by the Parochial Board there, to prove John Duncan to be his father, which of course failed, but which caused him some trouble and expense. A son of Durward's, a strong vigorous young man, walked a long distance from the farm at which he was engaged, to attend John's funeral, and helped, as a relative, to lower him into the grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOME-WEAVING, HARVESTING, SOLDIERING, AND SCENERY.

JOHN DUNCAN remained in Aberdeen for nearly eight years, six of them in a house of his own. Nothing of very great public importance had occurred during that period, except the growing agitations to improve the social and political condition of the masses. Like the class to which he belonged, John was a keen politician, keeping himself fully abreast of all these questions, perusing the newspapers of the time with the greatest zest, as he did to the end of his life, many of the copies he then possessed still existing as protections to his botanical specimens.

In 1816, when he arrived, there took place the immense popular November meetings in the Spa Fields in London, where some 30,000 persons assembled to vote an address from the distressed manufacturers; the riots that occurred a few weeks afterwards causing great injury to property, Watson, the leader, escaping to America, and one of his friends being subsequently hanged. In 1817, there rose the scare of sedition, set on fire by the notorious Green Bag and its dangerous contents laid before Parliament, with the consequent suspension of Habeas Corpus and prohibition of all popular gatherings, from the fear of treasonable inten-

tions, which the state of the country had increased. In 1818, Queen Charlotte died, and in 1819, the best of British queens was born. In 1820, "the first gentleman of Europe" took his seat in the royal chair, inaugurating his reign by the cruel trial of his ill-used wife; and in 1822, his visit to Edinburgh turned the heads of the Scotch people, and, not least, that of the Great Wizard himself. But only the faintest ripples of such splashings of the social and political sea reached the canny north-east of Scotland, though there they were watched with the deepest interest by local politicians like our hero, as significant indications of coming popular progress. In 1824, the brilliant, volcanic, but powerful "Manfred" died, an event that caused more than usual sympathy in Aberdeen, whose interest in poetry was certainly not very strong; for his mother belonged to the county, and in and round the city her son had passed some of his early days and gained many of his happiest inspirations.

In the same year, John Duncan left Aberdeen to wander over the country which stretches in sight of the mountain that towers so grandly in Byron's poetry, the dark Loch-nagar. After his wife's conduct had so rudely shattered the sweetness of home, he at once broke up his house and fled from the scene which had witnessed his misery and her disgrace.

He now commenced a new phase of his life, by adopting a special variety of his trade, that of country weaver. Hitherto, since completing his apprenticeship, his work had been confined to towns, where he had weaved more or less in factories for the home and foreign markets. Now he was to become a household workman. His varied

experiences from Drumlithie to Aberdeen had given him full insight into all sorts of work connected with his trade, both linen and woollen ; so that he was now prepared to execute skilfully any kind of cloth he might be called upon to make.

Understand precisely, good reader, what kind of weaver John Duncan was now to become ; for during the greater part of his life, he was an example of survival, which gives him additional interest. In this respect, as in many others, "old times were breathing there," with him, as with Wordsworth's Roman matron in humble life. He entered a class, now exceedingly rare in Scotland, though for generations, before the steam-engine and kindred inventions had extinguished so much of the past, universal in the country. They wove what was known as "home-made" or "hame'art-made" cloth, from the materials being prepared in the homes of the people, as distinguished from the manufactured goods of the factories ; and they were therefore designated "home" and "country" and "customer" weavers.

In the olden days, when each parish, hamlet and glen had to be largely self-dependent and self-producing as to food, clothing and other needs of life, the weaver was as necessary a personage in the community as the smith and the carpenter, the minister and the schoolmaster. The father and sons sheared the sheep of the wool ; the daughters prepared and spun it into thread at the birring wheel, and the thrifty mother, in the intervals of household work, either wove it into cloth herself (facts that still survive in the fine old words "spinster" and "wife"), or sent it to the weaver, called then by the nearly obsolete term of "webster"

or "wabster." He received the thread thus spun by the hearthstone, wound it into warp, wove it into cloth of the kind and pattern desired, and sent it home again to the "customer," whose person and family were thus protected both by night and day, from the summer's heat and winter's cold, by these substantial home-produced stuffs.

It was this ancient order, with the poetry of Penelope and the sanctity of Scripture round it, that John Duncan now entered. It was this by-gone period of Scotch thrift, Scotch independence, and Scotch home life that he represented to the last, long after it had almost died out through the country. His life thus affords an interesting glimpse into the past, of a state of society admirable and beautiful in its time, with features of excellent industrial and moral quality, which the steam-engine and modern improvements have banished for ever.

Another very commendable feature in this country life was this. During the autumn, when work in country districts became slack, from the general occupation of the people with the harvest, it was a common custom for weavers, as well as carpenters, smiths and others, to enter the harvest field, and take an autumn campaign in cutting down the standing army of cereals; and it often formed part of the engagements of such labourers to be allowed to "gae to the hairst." Many went to the south and hired themselves on the larger farms there, returning at the end of the season with the fruits of their labours in heavier pockets. It was a practice at once healthy, remunerative and informing; for they saw the different parts of the land and extended their knowledge of the world. Of course, these were the days of the sickle, when

the scythe was little used, and reaping machines had not been dreamt of in the north. The strange harvester that had taken shape in the quiet Forfarshire manse of Carmylie, and was first produced in what is now reckoned a rude embryonic form, by its clerical inventor, the Rev. Patrick Bell, in 1826, two years after John Duncan left Aberdeen, was long viewed with suspicion by conservative agriculturists, and did not become general for many years afterwards.

Of this health-giving field of labour John now took yearly advantage, gaining strength, money and knowledge, gathering medicinal plants, seeing new regions, making new friends, and gradually dispelling the malign effects of the sorrows through which he had recently passed.

Besides taking harvest yearly, and wandering in search of herbs, John varied his sedentary life by going at intervals to Aberdeen, to buy yarn for his work and books to satisfy his increasing intellectual thirst.

For many years, also, he went annually to Aberdeen to be trained as a soldier. About 1824, the time he broke up his house, he seems to have joined the militia, to relieve his mind from heavier thoughts, and swell his small purse. That being a time of wars and rumours of wars, even after the once omnipotent war-scurge had been caged in the rocky Atlantic isle to die there in 1821, this home force was then regularly drilled, in full complement, for a considerable period after peace was restored. During the French wars and long after, the ballot was in force, as it still can be in any emergency. Every able-bodied male was eligible to be drawn between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five; with certain exceptions, such as peers,

professors, clergymen, parish schoolmasters, apprentices, etc., and, in Scotland, every poor man having more than two lawful children, or property under fifty pounds. This militia service being irksome to many persons, associations were formed, in each district throughout the country, for the accumulation of central funds to pay the requisite bounty to volunteers when any of their members wished to be relieved from duty, the general sum being five pounds, but, during the French wars, rising not unfrequently to forty.

John Duncan was once balloted, and twice offered himself as a volunteer for others, receiving for this the additional bounty of five pounds—a great sum to a poor weaver; helping him to meet the expenses of the daughters' upbringing, and buy some desired volumes from the old book shops in Aberdeen, which he used regularly to frequent, and where he picked up many a rare volume and pamphlet. From a letter addressed to him as "Private soldier, Aberdeen Militia," in 1825, he must have joined before that date. The militia were then drilled twice a year, once in early spring and again in the end of summer, a month at one time and six weeks at another, though, in times of peace, the militia require to be only twenty-eight days in the field. The commander of the corps was Colonel Gordon of Cluny (the father of the late John Gordon, Esq., of Cluny), known as the richest commoner in Scotland, a vigorous but kindly and popular officer, who, by the over-free use of his tongue when excited, could be "a gey coorse fellow whiles," as our soldier said. In 1826, John offered himself as substitute at Pitcaple on the Urie, in the parish of Chapel of Garioch, and in 1831—the

year Thomas Edwards became a militia-man in Aberdeen,—he was attached to the “Aberdeen Militia regiment or battalion for the parish of Keithhall.” In all, he continued connected with the service for some twenty years.

John liked the life and training, and made the most of them, attending to orders, and never having to get extra drill in the awkward squad, as he used to tell with pride. The effects of the drill upon the little man appeared in his firm step and erect bearing, traceable even in old age. Long after he had ceased soldiering, he used to shoulder a stick and show his paces in martial form before his more intimate friends. The solitary exhibition, in which he represented in his own person at once officer, private and battalion, gone through with great vigour, was, it seems, a sight to see, raising many a kindly laugh.

Drill was carried on in the courtyard of the barracks, and, when weather was favourable, on the extensive links that skirt the sea near Aberdeen, the scene where the “mad” Edwards rushed out of his ranks, in 1831, to chase a butterfly. Many of the men were very rough, but not a few were, according to their companion, “smug eneuch,” that is, smart enough. He met much kindness from every one, he said, and the sergeant became a great friend of his, doing him good service when his wife troubled him about one of her children. Flogging was then not uncommon in the militia ; indeed, it was not till 1814 that an enactment was made, authorizing courts-martial to inflict imprisonment instead of the lash ! On more than one occasion, John witnessed its infliction, and he saw three men flogged in one day, for being intoxicated and giving insolence to their officers during drill. But he affirmed

that a well-conditioned man was well treated in the militia, and had a good opportunity of doing well.

John used to relate some of his experiences as a soldier. The first time he saw a balloon was at an inspection, when one was sent up from the barracks, on the Queen's birthday, carrying a cat in the car, and bearing it south across the Dec. The crowd drawn by the spectacle was very great, and John was in danger of being crushed. On another occasion, he suffered more seriously.

Riots were then of frequent occurrence in the larger towns, chiefly through political excitement, and Aberdeen was no exception. A serious riot occurred there in 1802, at George the Third's birthday, when the soldiers were called out to quell the mob; another took place in December, 1831, when they burnt down Dr. Moir's Anatomical Theatre, one of the first of its kind in the north, generally known as the "Burkin' House," from the universal scare against anatomy excited by the Burke and Hare murders in Edinburgh, in 1828. It was in a Meal mob which took place before this, that Thom, the poet, was apprehended, and, while in prison, wrote his first poem, which was thus, as he calls it, "jail born," beginning,

"They speak o' wyles in woman's smiles."

At one of these birthday celebrations about this period, in which the rabble thought themselves entitled to license, and often indulged it to the danger of their quieter fellow-citizens, John went like others to see. The fun soon degenerated into serious disturbance, which raged round the town house and harbour, and the military had to be marched from the barracks to drive back the mob. John

somehow got entangled in the crowd just as it was charged by the soldiers. One of them struck him with the butt end of his gun, saying with a fierce oath as he felled him to the ground, "That's deen for you, at ony rate!" It was a serious moment, which might have proved fatal and rendered this history unnecessary; for, apart altogether from the blow, he might have been trampled to death. John never related the story without great seriousness and thankfulness at his escape. "Man," said he, "whan I was fell't to the grund, I thocht I was nae mair. But on my hands and knees, like a cat, I managed to creep oot o' the mob." Happily his head was greatly saved by his thick militia cap, but even with it, he received a deep and painful wound which took long to heal. In this riot, several persons suffered severely and many were lodged in jail. John used to conclude his narrative with the natural remark, "I hae aye keepit oot o' mobs since syne." By this fierce blow, which might have been more disastrous, the occiput bones of his head were damaged, and he bore the deep mark to his dying day.

The district in which Duncan passed the remainder of his days, the extended period of fifty-seven years, was that part of middle Aberdeenshire that surrounds and is finely dominated by the far-seen and famous hill of Benachie. Though under seventeen hundred feet in height, it has the style of one of our greater mountains, from its isolation, contour, and volcanic-looking crest, which give it the picturesque name it bears, signifying in Gaelic, the Ben of the Pap, a not uncommon designation of mountains in the Highlands. It exhibits on every side a striking aspect, and from some points looks a splendid

object in the landscape, catching the eye and centralizing the view from a long distance, all over this part of the country. It is a hill of which Aberdeenshire is justly proud, and it is celebrated in sweet song. It is the synonym of home and country to every one born under its shadow, the mention of the name drawing tears to the eyes of those long banished from it, as in the case of John Duncan's friend, Charles Black. To these two men it became, as Charles says, "what Lochnagar was to Byron," the sacred mountain of their lives, illuminated and consecrated by the halo of a thousand memories.

Benachie forms the centre of the great granitic outburst which rises through the Silurian rocks of middle Aberdeen. On the west, it looks into the fertile hollow of the Vale of Alford, of which the Benachie range is the eastern boundary. This range runs north and south, from Benachie, which forms its bold northern end, to Correnie Forest, where it overlooks Strath Dee. It is closely and in many places wildly wooded, except at its two extremities, which are bare and commanding. It is cut through from east to west at two points—by the River Don, which drains the Vale of Alford and seeks its narrow way through a curving glen that forms a huge rent right across the hills, from Castle Forbes to Monymusk; and by the more elevated glen of Tillyfourie, close and steep, through which the Alford Valley Railway has been carried—the river and the rail dividing the range into three nearly equal portions, and then meeting at both sides of the chain. The whole forms a fine series of hills, surrounded by countless scenes of uncommon beauty, commanding wonderful prospects of the level country below, and richly rewarding the geolo-

gist, mineralogist, and botanist who explore their hidden recesses, and not less the archæologist and historian who examine their interesting remains and historic sites. Benachie is to our story what Arthur's Seat is to Edinburgh, the Acropolis to Athens, or Mont Blanc to Chamouny.

CHAPTER IX.

HIS EARLY LIFE AS A COUNTRY WEAVER.

FOR a short time, John lived in the distant village of Aberchirder—known locally by the sweeter name of Foggielohan, or the Mossy Glade—away in the middle of Banff, on its elevated plateau overlooking the Deveron, not far from the church of Marnock, soon to become famous in Disruption times. Returning from Banffshire, he took up his residence for some years, between 1826 and 1832, at a place bearing the pastoral name of Longfolds. It lies on the plain immediately to the east of the Benachie hills, opposite the point where the Don bursts through them, a few miles north of Monymusk. It is in the middle of a beautiful, well-wooded, well-cultivated district, full of fine scenery, backed by the ever-charming mountains, which are headed by the fort-crowned Mithertap, as the crest of Benachie is piquantly styled, with its lower shoulder bearing the sonorous title of Craig-na-thunder.

It was a fine region to settle down in, the centre of much that is picturesque and interesting, and John was the very man to take full advantage of it. Here he made his first acquaintance with Benachie. He ascended to the cyclopean hill-fort on its top, and gazed on the country round, which was to become his home for life and the final

resting-place of his bones. Close at hand, flowed the clear stream of the Don, skirted with noble trées and adorned with many a beautiful domain. A few miles distant, nestling amid parks of the baronial House of Monymusk famous for its reliquary, was the village of the name, with its ancient priory, its quaint, square old tower, its druidical circles and famous sculptured stone. About a mile farther south, hid amidst its extensive woods, stood old Cluny Castle, where his friend Charles Black was then, unknown to him, an apprentice gardener, from 1832 to 1834, from his nineteenth to his twenty-first year; the present imposing palace not being erected till 1836. Farther east, rose the old Flemish, turreted Castle Fraser, one of the finest specimens of the kind in Scotland. All these places, and many more that beautify the country, were speedily examined by Duncan, and the whole region, hill and hollow, fully explored.

One day, in returning home after one of his excursions in search of Culpepper's herbs, when daylight was on the wane, he thought he would lessen the distance by taking a short cut through a wood. It was strictly protected by the game-keeping laird, but, at that late hour, it might surely be risked; and he entered the forbidden domain. He had not gone far when he spied the proprietor coming towards him at a curve in the path, without himself being seen. At once wheeling right about, he began to retrace his steps as if going in the opposite direction. He was immediately hailed, peremptorily called upon to stop, and roughly questioned as to his being there. John pleaded to be excused and to be allowed to proceed, on account of the lateness of the hour and the distance he had to go; but

in vain. With several forcible expletives, he was told to return the way he came. This, with seeming reluctance, he at last did; and then tripped along with a merry heart in the very direction he wanted! In after years, when in high glee, he used to tell the story of how he had been too much for "the *sanshauch** crabbit bodie o' a lairdie."

On a similar occasion, in the same neighbourhood, he was treated with more kindness by the proprietor of Monymusk, also a great game-preserved, but, moreover, a lover of flowers. John was seeking for plants in a young wood, through which ran an old footpath, recently shut up. He thought himself secure from discovery in such a quiet corner, and felt, no doubt, that science ought to cover a multitude, if not of sins, at least of trespasses. But what was his surprise, when raising himself after groping for some herbs, to observe the very man he wished least to meet there, approaching on horseback, and too close for him to escape! "What do you want here, sir?" at once greeted his ears. John replied that, seeing there was a road that way, he thought he might follow it. The proprietor told him that it was now shut up, as he might have known from having to climb the fence. John replied that he would be obliged if he would show him the way to such and such a place, naming the one he wished to reach. This the proprietor agreed to do, won over by his mild manner, and, while conducting him, entered into conversation with him regarding the plants he was carrying. When he learnt the purpose of his trespass, the gentleman gave him full

* Aberdeenshire for "proudly disdainful," said by Jamieson to be from a Gaelic word of the same sound, meaning morose.

liberty to traverse any part of his forest without fear of challenge.

One of John's reminiscences here gives a vivid glimpse of the social life of the time. At that period, soap, it seems, was little used by the common people, from its being too expensive! John used to tell that, in many houses in which he lived, he got no soap to wash himself with; but instead of that, if he wished it, he could have the outside husks of corn when ground, known as "seeds," from which the nutritive gruel called "sowens" and a thin paste required in weaving were made. When rubbed in the hands with water, they raised a kind of saponaceous lather. This substitute he was generally unable to use, on account of the pain caused to the skin by the sharp-pointed scales, and he was fain to do without it. Several of his friends bear the same testimony, in the experiences of their youth, to the general want of what now seems a necessary of life. When John was calling one day on a farmer who lived above Monymusk, before he entered the house, he actually *heard* the rasping noise of the man shaving himself within! He had no soap on his face, and was shearing the stiff bristles of an old beard with a blunt razor, on the bare unmoistened surface! "Dear me!" exclaimed John, in real surprise; "wid ye no be better to use some sape to shave wi'?" The farmer, turning round, as the water trickled from his eyes with the sheer pain of the operation, replied, in unfeigned astonishment at such extravagance, "Na, na; sape's daar!" which, in the broad Aberdeen vernacular, signifies "no, no; soap's dear."

Another part of the same neighbourhood where he worked at the loom for some years, was on the north

shoulder of Cairn William, which guards on the south the passage of the Don through these hills. Here he stayed at two places. One of them was the elevated farm of Cornabo,* seven hundred feet above the sea, commanding a glorious view across the well-wooded glen of the Don to Benachie, which reared its grand bulk right opposite. The other was at the mouth of the Slack Burn, which runs near it, at Milldourie, in the deep hollow below, where this stream joins the Don. Close by Milldourie, along the clear flowing Don, which is there enclosed in a narrow Highland glen, and between it and Monymusk, lies the beautiful spot known as Paradise. It was laid out in 1719, more than a hundred and sixty years ago, as a beautiful garden in the French style, with fruit and flowering trees, interspersed with forest timber, which were disposed according to a well-arranged plan, and it must then have formed a fair and fruitful scene. It is now only the skeleton of what it was, the forest trees alone remaining. The larch, spruce, and oak are unusually splendid, and are said to be unequalled in the north of Scotland. One circular group close by the river, enclosing seats for rest to pilgrim visitors, looks like a Temple of the Winds, with its encircling gigantic colonnade, amidst glorious umbrageous arbours, sheltered and secluded from the outer world by the towering mountains.

This was a favourite haunt of Duncan's, who used to describe it in after years as a wonderful spot, far more beautiful in his time than it is now. The wood on the hills round about was also more extensive than now; the present proprietor's grandfather having planted, it is

* Pronounced Cornabó, with accent on the last syllable.

said, fifty million trees in fifty years—a wise sower who has enriched his children by the superabundant harvest. Not far from Paradise, on the way to Monymusk, are the picturesque ruins of Pitfichie Castle, often passed by the brave little weaver in the dark, as he returned from herb-seeking rambles, despite its howlet cries and haunted chambers. Many a time, under the tall trees, did he watch the stars, brighter from the deepened blue of the sky as seen through the dense foliage, while he moved homewards to Milldourie ; these bright celestial letters being, as we shall see, as familiar to him as those of books, for he was now an ardent star-gazer. It was as sweet a secluded spot to live in as could well be found or imagined, dear to a solitary thinker like him ; and it has long been cherished by the tourist and the pleasure-seeker as a retreat of unusual silvan and mountain beauty. It shelters, as such a spot is certain to do, not a few of our rarer plants ; but at that period, John sought for plants merely for their secret virtues, though he returned to its botanical treasures a few years later, when his vision had been purged to clearer sight after meeting with Charles Black, at the other side of Cairn William.

One of his employers here, who had a weaving shop in connection with the farm, not unusual then, was a miserly old farmer, notorious in the district for his excessive greed. To save a bawbee, he was ready not only to scrimp his men, but to pinch himself to a degree incredible even in the annals of parsimony. He used to serve his ploughmen with the sourest of buttermilk, and when it was so far gone as to be refused by them with no muttered curses, his like-spirited housekeeper would come to her master, saying, “ We’ll better gae that buttermilk to the *weyvers*, for our

men winna sup it." "Just sae," replied the churl; "and if *they* winna tak' it, I'll sup it mysal'!" continued "the nasty greedy glide,"* an opinion with which John would righteously and indignantly conclude the tale.

In these places by Don side, John was pursuing several studies, of which more anon. Of these there was one in particular which he was strenuously endeavouring, with his hardening fingers, to conquer—the mysteries of "pokers, hooks and hangers," for it was only now that, by help of a copy-book, our student learnt to write. There is no evidence that he had done this before his thirtieth year, being contented for ten years with the newly discovered delights of reading. His copy-book now lies before me, as then written by him in August, 1830, that is in his thirty-sixth year. It contains a very good setting, by some skilled hand, of capital and small letters of various sizes, ending with the well-written, encouraging line, "Take care, and you'll write well." John's care is evident on every page, and his success, in view of his late beginning, encouraging and creditable. He also does a double stroke of scholastic business by writing out his Latin exercises—for he had attacked even the language of Rome—as a means of caligraphic practice.

What a curious commentary was all this private, studious toil, under the shade of the groves of this Paradise by the Don, on the beneficent curse of labour pronounced on our too feeble, unlettered progenitors in the Paradise on the Hiddekel! How long was it, it may be wondered, before the curse took the form of framing pot-hooks on papyrus by the young Jubals and Jabals of the

* The gled, an old Anglo-Saxon word for the kite.

pre-diluvial days? To poor John, the Adamic ban, like the bitter herbs of Culpepper, became a blessing, and the best antidote to rankling sorrows.

When he left the banks of the Don, after residing near Monymusk for some years, he travelled farther north, by the great road that skirts the east side of Benachie, on to the banks of the Ythan, to a carding-mill at Rothie and a wool mill at Fyvie, where weaving was carried on. There also he was in a beautiful neighbourhood, for he seems always to have settled at places remarkable for natural attractions. There he frequented numerous scenes of loveliness and grandeur in wood, water, rock and keep: the wild den of Rothie; the ruins of Formartine Castle, on the precipice overhanging the struggling Ythan; the Braes of Gight, the patrimony of Miss Gordon, Byron's mother; the villages round Fyvie, with the old churchyard where lies "Tiftie's bonnie Annie," of ballad broken-heartedness; the site of the Mill o' Tiftie, where she lived with her cruel kindred; and the big baronial Castle of Fyvie, with its interesting story, of which John got a copy—altogether a region of great natural beauty, poetry, and romance.

Here John made the acquaintance of a worthy man, George Caughrie, then gardener at Rothie Norman, through whom he increased his acquaintance with plants, and whom he used to visit in after life. All his days, he made a point of gaining the friendship of gardeners wherever he went. They worked amongst the plants he now increasingly loved; they also furnished him the means of obtaining herbs not indigenous to Britain, but required in his widening pharmacopœia, and of practising his predilection for garden work, in which he used much to engage,

and which became a pleasant alternative to his sedentary life.

He generally settled down for some time wherever he got weaving. He was reckoned a very good workman, and his employers often gave him a higher rate of wages than common. As Mr. Adams, of Rothie Mill, wrote him in 1841: "There are several who do not give this rate of wages, but I want good work, and I know you can give me that. Only, what I make for myself is one penny under the above rates." His simple tastes, quiet industrious habits, general intelligence, and unobtrusive well-regulated life always made him a favourite; so that he was generally asked to return, and was written for, if any particular kind of cloth was wanted.

Moreover, he set himself, with his usual earnestness and intelligence, to be a thorough master of his craft, both practically and theoretically. He studied the mechanics of the loom, and followed the rapid progress made in these through the extension of machinery. With this aim, he purchased at an early date, "Essays on the Art of Weaving," in two parts, by a namesake of his own, "inventor of the patent tambouring machine," published in Glasgow in 1807-8; "The Weaver's Assistant," by Alexander Peddie, published in 1817; and "Murphy on Weaving," a learned treatise with engravings, published in 1831, which he afterwards got strongly bound for regular use.

CHAPTER X.

HIS STUDIES AT THIS PERIOD : ELEMENTARY SUBJECTS AND HERBS.

JOHN'S unhappy domestic life during the eight years of his residence in Aberdeen had greatly interfered with the progress of the studies he had begun at Drumlithie, except politics, which, amongst the keen polemical websters of the city, had roused this increasing interest. But, with the greater leisure of his enforced solitariness, and amidst the sanative influences of the country life he now led, his intellectual appetite revived, and he devoted himself with redoubled earnestness and characteristic energy to certain subjects which will now reward our attention.

He set himself first to make up, as fully and as speedily as possible, the defects of his early want of education.

We have seen how he learnt to read, and the eagerness with which he began to use this golden art. When he learnt to write, it is now impossible to state. We have found him working hard at it when living near Monymusk, in 1828, that is in his thirty-fourth year, and making creditable progress ; so that he was soon able to write and receive letters. He carried on the careful practice of it in set copies, moreover, for several years after that.

The meaning and etymology of words claimed his early

attention, and, to assist him in this desirable work, he soon procured that capital old book, unique in its time, and still worth having, the "Universal Etymological English Dictionary of N. Bailey, *φιλολογος*," with the derivation and explanation of words in common use, in the sciences and arts, in law, in place and proper names, etc., and "a collection, explication, and illustration of our most common proverbs," which are really well done; "the whole compiled and methodically digested, as well for the entertainment of the curious as the information of the ignorant; and for the benefit of young students, artificers, tradesmen, and foreigners, who are desirous thoroughly to understand what they speak, read, or write"—a far better book than its magniloquent title-page would indicate. In 1757, it had passed through seventeen editions, and was the very help a solitary student like our good weaver required. In 1830, he also bought a "Dictionary of the Scottish Language," published three years before, to extend his knowledge of the vernacular he used so well. The etymology of the names of the places round about him he also wished to know, and he has preserved a list of names derived from the Gaelic, with their meanings, written by him at an early date.

He worked also at grammar, with the help of a "Grammar Made Easy," published in 1805; and at arithmetic, guided by the immortal Cocker, of which he used the edition of 1787, afterwards getting, in 1839, the "Introduction" of Gray, a name as synonymous with arithmetic in Scotland as Cocker's in England.

So determined was John to get at the roots of things in regard to his studies, that he essayed Latin, and his

exercise-book still exists, evidently led to the subject by the technical names of the plants with which his medico-botanical studies made him familiar. He used the grammar of the great Ruddiman, the small edition of 1803, issued from the Edinburgh University Press. He purchased a copy of "Ainsworth's Latin Dictionary," edited in 1825 by a Dr. Ross; and a "Catechism of Classical Biography," of 1824. His Latin was of real practical utility to him in his after botanical researches. He began also the Greek rudiments, in spite of its peculiar alphabet to bar the way of a home student. This great language he continued to study, chiefly in order to get at the original tongue of the New Testament, as we shall afterwards see. He was not the man to rest contented with using big technical terms, however fluently, without knowing what they meant. He knew their meaning and etymology to an uncommon extent. John's motto throughout life in all he did, from weaving to Biblical criticism and higher Botany, was, like that of all strong men, "Thorough." His Latin and Greek he took some pleasure and pride in using in various ways, like all private students of a foreign tongue, as poet Burns did his French.

A knowledge of the world in which he dwelt was necessary to his happiness, and he studied geography. He must become acquainted also with the strange and fascinating story of the doings of the human beings that have lived and died on its surface. He therefore devoured history and biography, both British and general, ancient and modern, and on both subjects he gradually gathered a large number of books and much varied information.

In a scientific direction, John had two chief studies at

this period—those of plants, as far as they were medicinal herbs in medical botany ; and of the stars in astronomy.

It was not till he was forty years old that he was introduced to scientific Botany proper, which became the enthusiasm of the next forty years, after his fortunate meeting with the friend of his life, Charles Black.

Before this meeting, however, John's knowledge of plants was neither small nor uninteresting, as it could scarcely be with so humorous and practical a master as Culpepper. We have seen how he began the study while yet in his teens, during his apprenticeship at Drumlithie, and how he early purchased a copy of Culpepper. Notwithstanding his strange-looking name, Culpepper was an Englishman, born in London in 1616, and dying in 1654. His book is curious and interesting, bearing on its front that it contains "nearly four hundred medicines made from English herbs, physically applied to the cure of all disorders incident to man, with rules for compounding them," by "Nicholas Culpepper, Student in Physic and Astrology."

Of each plant, it gives a description, sometimes pretty minute, though popular and unscientific ; the places where it was to be found ; its flowering time ; its "government," according to the astrological influences under which it should be gathered, to possess potency ; and its "virtues" or the diseases it was held to cure, with directions for preparation and use. It contains a deal of queer, old-world learning.

Nicholas Culpepper's style is quaint, with a touch of biblical antiqueness, often dryly humorous, and not seldom rudely outspoken. He does not describe the elder tree, for instance, "since every boy that plays with a pop-

gun will not mistake another tree instead of it ;” he says that if eyebright “ was but as much used as it is neglected, it would half spoil the spectacle-maker’s trade ;” and that the common practice of applying a medicine in one part of the body to affect another, is “ as proper as for me when my toe is sore to lay a plaister on my nose.” He gives curious personal details, as his curing his own daughter of the king’s evil with pilewort. He tells us, “ Mars loves no cowards, nor Saturn fools, nor I neither.” He essays practical philosophy and kindly moralizing. For example, he wishes “ gentlewomen would keep butter-burr preserved, to help their poor neighbours, as it is fit the rich should help the poor, for the poor cannot help themselves ;” “ let no man,” says he, “ despise cinquefoil, because it is plain and easy—the ways of God are all such ;” “ seven years’ care and fear makes a man never the wiser nor a farthing richer ;” “ he that reads this, and understands what he reads, hath a jewel of more worth than a diamond.”

He leaves a remedy to the world, “ not caring a farthing whether they like or dislike it ; the grave equals all men, and therefore will equal me with all princes, until which time the Eternal Providence is over me ; then the ill tongue of a prating fellow, or one that hath more tongue than wit or more proud than honest, shall never trouble me : wisdom is justified by her children : and so much for wormwood.” He talks facetiously of Dr. Tradition, Dr. Reason, Dr. Experience, Dr. Ignorance, Dr. Folly, and Dr. Sickness. Altogether, the good Culpepper aims at being at once the “ guide, philosopher, and friend ” of his disciples. Certainly he cannot be accused of ever being wearisome, obscure, or dull.

John Duncan possessed at a later time a very fine octavo copy of the "Herbal," edited in 1835 by Sir John Hill, M.D. He also took out, in sixpenny parts, a large work by this same Sir John, "The Family Herbal," with an account of all plants, English and foreign, "remarkable for their virtues," with recipes for "distilled water, conserves, syrups, electuaries, juleps, draughts," etc., and "elegant plates of one hundred and sixty English plants, accurately drawn and coloured from nature."

At an early date, he bought another smaller but more scientific work of a similar kind, "Tournefort's Compleat Herbal" (1719), "translated from the Latin," two volumes in one, also with very good plates. The author, who is described on the title as "Chief Botanist to the late French King," was a Frenchman, one of the greatest botanists of the seventeenth century, who was born in 1656, and died in 1708. He travelled widely, and wrote several works on botany, which did great service to the growing science. He was the first to classify plants in genera, and formed a system which maintained its sway till it was superseded by that of Linnæus. Duncan purchased, in 1842, an "Alphabet of Medical Botany," by James Rennie, M.D. He extended his medical knowledge in after years, and possessed books on some of its more difficult parts, such as "Walsh on Cancer."

Even after being introduced to scientific botany, Duncan retained to the last a thorough faith in their medicinal virtues, and pursued his quasi-medical studies alongside of his scientific. His knowledge of plants was at no time a barren, dry, technical accumulation of characteristics and words, in both of which botany is richer than most other

sciences, and which form a strong temptation to its ardent students to know these and nothing more. He gradually amassed a varied lore of interesting, practical, picturesque facts regarding plants, which he used to draw from when conversing with his more intimate friends and disciples ; and he continued throughout life to treat himself and them with the decoctions and ointments he made. In the flower garden he formed afterwards at Droughsburn, he cultivated such of them as did not grow wild, but were required for his medicines.

A few glimpses of John's utilization of plants in this way may be both interesting and instructive. When I first made his acquaintance in his eighty-third year, in taking a walk with the bent, eager old medico-botanist, as we passed the fig-wort (*Scrophularia nodosa*), he told me how he had cured himself of a very painful affection by means of a decoction of this plant and the common dock, adding, with grateful energy, "Man, it wrocht like a chairm ! Widna the doctors hae made a fine job o' me ?" Throughout life, until his last illness, he would never submit himself to a medical man's hands, believing rather in his old friends, Culpepper, Tournefort, and Hill, than in all the wisdom of the schools—like all genuine herbalists, whose condemnation of common practice is always uncompromising ; and like the valiant Culpepper, who declares "the College of Physicians too stately to learn and too proud to continue." When Dr. Morrison of the Guise, in the Vale of Alford, on one occasion urged him to take salts and senna, then a universal cure, for some illness he had, he replied, "Ay, that's the way ye do—ye hunt it oot and ye hunt it in. I'll gae to the chield at the gairden"

(Charles Black) "and get some rhubarb roots, which will do *my* job. I'll hae nane o' yer dirt!"

He used to give proofs of his own successful practice with herbs, in his own experience and in that of his friends, many of whom have spoken gratefully of the good his drugs did them. He spoke of curing several more serious diseases with them, "nae an easy dune thing;" of healing, amongst others, a woman who had been a cripple for years with a painful affection; and of like successes, which increased his faith in his works. But he had too much sense to place unlimited reliance on all he read and heard on this subject, for John had always in him a good spice of philosophical scepticism. Of many of their decoctions, he used to say that they were "gweed-less, ill-less stuffie," that is, they did neither good nor ill. But in a discriminating study of the medical virtues of plants, he made rapid progress; as he said, "I cam' great speed." With successful applications, he began to be "thocht siccar," that is, a secure, safe guide. Letters still exist addressed to him, acknowledging cures, asking advice, and, on occasions, telling him not to trouble himself to revisit the patient, on account of the improvement already effected.

As examples of the curative plants he employed:—He used sneeze-wort (*Achillea ptarmica*) as a cure for toothache; and a little of the root placed between the teeth causes salivation and a slight elevation of the teeth like incipient toothache, so that it may cure by the homœopathic law of *similia similibus*; being named sneezewort, he said, from its leaves having once been ground into a kind of snuff. When he showed this plant to a young friend,

he said, "This is a cure for toothache ; yet fowk'll be real ill wi' their teeth, afore they'll believe you or me, and they'll gang awa doon to Mr. Hay's" (the druggist's in Alford) "and pay threepence or fourpence for fat they micht get for naething but foul fingers!"—that is, for the trouble of digging for the roots. In garlic, he had great faith, and he kept it in his garden, using it to destroy the disagreeable eructation arising from castor oil, which it at once cured or prevented. Elecampane, or aligopane as he called it (*Inula helenium*), a rare British plant, he kept in his garden, as a potent cure for a cough, by means of a decoction from its roots. The leaf of the greater plantain (*Plantago major*) he used to stop bleeding with; and it has a remarkable power in this way, having been long known in Scotland, on account of this property, as "the healing leaf." It should be pulled slowly, so that the strong fibres in the broad ribbed leaf may be drawn out.

Of knotted figwort (*Scrophularia nodosa*), he made an ointment for the throat, whence the plant has also the name thread-wort or throat-wort, and with it he once treated Charles Black. Tansy he used as a cure for gout and for various women's diseases. Spurge he cured warts with, by means of its milky juice. The common bluebell he made a preparation of, to increase women's milk. Peppermint and spearmint he used to grow in large quantities, and sell dried in bundles, for various purposes. From one of the Polypody ferns, he made an ointment or "saw" for burns. Lichens, "the scabs o' stanes," he used to make a liniment of, for chapped lips. For consumption, he employed, (1) the root of parsley, boiled first alone and then with candy sugar ; (2) a decoction of horehound,

hyssop, sedge, and camomile, boiled first alone and then with treacle. For dysentery, he found "an infusion of camomile flowers a useful remedy." For jaundice, he had a very simple cure, "two raw eggs with a little cold water in the morning, and one egg about twelve o'clock, another about seven in the evening, all in the same manner, by which in a very few days the distemper would subside and the colour resume its natural hue."

As examples of plants he made practical use of:—The gum of the gean (*Prunus padus*) he used as a substitute for gum arabic, being less transparent, but as strong. The common speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) he made into a kind of tea, for which, though strong, he said, it once used to be employed in the country. From the fine-leaved heath (*Erica cinerea*), he brewed a kind of ale, said to have been used by our Pictish forefathers, and hence called "Picts' ale," the secret of which, it seems, we have now lost. Wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), which is prettily called in Aberdeenshire "birdies' bannocks," he employed the leaves of, as soap; and its juice, to take out ink, containing, as it does, oxalic acid. He was accustomed to put certain blades into his stockings next his feet, to keep them right when on any of his long excursions. In wandering about the country, he was always on the outlook for new practical uses of plants, and was thus vastly pleased one time, when in Forfarshire, to find that the factory girls there used a decoction of the avens (*Geum urbanum*) as an expectorant and tonic, to help them to get rid of the dust that settled in their lungs in their ill-ventilated flax factories. The lichen (*Lecanora tartarea*), called in Gaelic *crotal*, he used for dyeing a kind of brownish-purple,

as it still is in many parts of the Highlands. Another lichen made what John called a "fool fite," that is, a foul or dirty white.

As examples of the picturesque bits of associations he had about plants:—The Lousy earthnut (*Bunium flexuosum*), which is dug up by boys for its sweet, knotted root, he said was a good food and could sustain life; and he used to tell a story of the Danes surrounding a party of Scots in a bog, and trying to starve them into surrender, in vain, for the Scotch leader showed his soldiers how to dig up these roots, which supported them till the enemy thought them sustained by magic or heavenly aid, and went off. The spotted persicaria (*Polygonum persicaria*) he knew the usual legend of, which says that the purple spot on its leaf was the sacred blood that dropped on it as it grew under the cross; but he used also to tell another about it, that it was the leaf Cain "dichtit (or cleaned) his fingers on" after murdering his brother! The aspen, he said, shivered as it does, because it was the wood that formed the hated cross; and he said the wandering tinkers were the descendants of the vagabonds who made it. He took delight in gathering every scrap of interesting matter regarding our wild flowers, and I have a set of his notes giving the plants that were used as the badges of clans and families.

The Cranberry, when ripe to blackness, John used to say was "grand for giving headaches." Of Meadow Sweet he used to quote two lines—

"Pleasant as 'tis for a nosegay,
Smell it once, and throw't away."

The power of its over-luscious odour in causing headache and other pains, John said, arose from its containing prussic

acid—it certainly has a smell like that of crushed almonds and other stony seeds—and he used to tell a story of four young botanists turning very ill, by leaving it in their bedrooms, and only being relieved when the doctor threw it outside. Of poisons to be obtained from our common wild plants, he often said he knew as much about, as, if put into a well, “would poison a’ the fowk o’ the hale countra side !”

It is now uncertain if John ever had any real belief, like Simpson the mathematician, in the astrological influences of the heavenly bodies on the “virtues” of plants, as so fully laid down in Culpepper, though such belief was far from uncommon in those days. One of his friends thinks he had, and says he used not only to gather plants under the proper stellar conjunctions, but even to take the horoscope of any one that wished it. I have found no proofs of this amongst his books or notes, or from his later friends. One of these is very decided on the subject, saying that John believed in nothing superstitious.

That he was vastly interested in Astrology, like many others then and not a few now, seems certain, if only from the number of books he accumulated on the subject, such as “Bo, an Indian Astrologer,” and two large and expensive works, “A Manual of Astrology” and “The Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century;” though he possessed none of the text-books for making the necessary calculations for its practical study. When John Taylor used to read Culpepper’s remarks on the planetary influences on plants, in their botanical conversations, and asked him what he thought of them, he would reply, like the thoughtful philosopher he was, “Man, there are some terrible queer

things i' the world!" And what is John's exclamation but an echo of Shakespeare's?—

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

But, whatever his earlier predilections in favour of the superstitions connected with this remarkable subject, gathered from his earliest master, the English astrologer, he would seem to have thrown the mentirely aside in the later and more scientific period of his long life.

CHAPTER XI.

HIS ASTRONOMICAL STUDIES: "JOHNNIE MOON."

DUNCAN'S study of Culpepper introduced him not only to the plants that had medicinal virtues, but to the stars that "governed" them or had "dominion" over them, according to the astrology of the author and the time. In order to gather the cinquefoil when Jupiter is "angular and strong," it is necessary for the gatherer to know not only Jupiter, and his position in the sky, but those relations to the other planets and constellations that constitute his angularity and strength; if loosestrife is "an herb of the Moon and under the sign Cancer," and if rue is "an herb of the Sun and under Leo," to do the plants justice, you must not only know the Sun and the Moon, which, as the facetious astrologer says, "every boy that plays with a pop-gun will not mistake," but you must know both the Lion and the Crab, especially if either of the former is in "the house" of the latter. And this knowledge is all the more necessary to a true Culpepperian physician, for doth not the mild and learned Culpepper asseverate—"I would willingly teach astrologers to be physicians, for they are most fitting for the calling; if you will not believe me, ask Dr. Hippocrates and Dr. Galen, a couple of gentlemen that our College of Physicians keep to vapour with,

not to follow"? Still true of many other things than physic, most redoubtable Culpepper! It was impossible, therefore, for any one, much less an earnest disciple like John, not to look into the stars. This he did with ardour, first, it may be, for the sake of the "government" of the herbs he gathered, but by-and-by for their own sakes, and for higher practical ends. Whether he became an astrologer or not, John became an enthusiastic astronomer.

He obtained text-books on Astronomy at an early date, such as "Astronomical and Geographical Lessons," by James Levett, published in 1814, and the "Catechism of Astronomy," and he studied charts of the heavens. By-and-by he grew so familiar with them that he could with ease distinguish and name them singly and in their constellations, and point them out to those friends who would listen to such heavenly lore. So eager did he become in his studies that, on clear frosty nights, he was seen setting off for the tops of bare hills commanding an uninterrupted view of the skies, and he did not return to his cold couch till long after midnight—a foolish and thankless proceeding, in the eyes of his wiser and more comfortable neighbours; so that he began to be thought "no very wise."

When staying at various places, John used to set up dials on dikes beside the house she lived in, to guide him in his observations. He would be busy at these things in the dead silence and the dark, when, all at once, down went the dial at the far end of the dike, followed by the crackle of bursting laughter, and the hurry-scurry of running feet, the meaning of which John knew too well. It was some of the mischief-loving sparks of the neighbourhood, who were thus making fun of the curious weaver's crazy pursuits—

"moon-struck madness," in their eyes. And such annoyances were frequent and trying enough. Hence he was obliged to seek seclusion at a distance, whither their fears of the dark and its denizens effectually prevented their following him, or at an hour when even the restless spirit of fun was conquered by the more potent god of sleep.

While he stayed at Milldourie, close by Paradise, he had very good sites for stellar observation, on the hills around that beautiful hollow, where the clearness of the sky in a frosty night would be intensified by the dark foliage of the trees. For wider outlook, the hilltop near Cornabó, eight hundred feet above Paradise, where he lived for years, was free of trees, and he was often found there when most were beneath the cosy blankets; while just above this, Cairn William, double the height, without a tree for more than two hundred feet from its summit, was a splendid point of vantage, commanding an uninterrupted view of the whole heavens above, and a wonderfully impressive prospect of the darkened world below, with Benachie in front and the deep Don between.

It was most certainly no wonder that, in those days, when science was quite unheard of amongst the common people, a man who pursued such unearthly gazing at these uncanny hours should be thought to be more than queer, and to be decidedly affected by the moon to which he paid such absurd devotion. Hunting for weeds was sufficient to rouse suspicion, but this glowering nightly at the stars more than completed the proof. The man was "mad" or "wud"—or "next door to it."

Akin to his astronomical pursuits, was the then common study of Dialling. When clocks and watches were com-

paratively scarce, the making of dials was, of course, an art of great practical value, and was much followed, up to fifty years ago. Their theory and practice were often taught in schools, and a knowledge of the subject was frequently a requirement of teachers, some of whom were practical masters of the art, and have left, in various parts of the country, very creditable specimens of their skill in this department of practical astronomy.* It will be remembered by those who have read the life of that remarkable genius, James Ferguson, the Banffshire stargazer, as told by himself and Dr. Henderson in a book of intense interest and fullest information,† that dialling was one of the early subjects to which that young stargazer directed attention, guided by "God Almighty's scholar," as his disciple calls him, Alexander Cantley, mathematician, astronomer and diallist.

John Duncan also became a theoretical and practical diallist, making dials for himself and his friends, and specimens of his handiwork still exist in and round the Vale of Alford. Among his papers, there remain several very creditable drawings of different kinds of dials, upright and horizontal. Some of his correspondents also worked at the same art, and sent him sketches of dials they had seen or planned, with elaborate details of the form and height of the stile, the elevation of the plate, the length of the hour line, and the divisions of the hour circle. In 1830,

* The elaborate dial in the churchyard of Currie, near Edinburgh, made by the late parish teacher, Mr. Palmer, is a noteworthy example.

† "Life of James Ferguson, F.R.S., in a brief autobiographical account, and further extended memoir by E. Henderson, LL.D." (Fullarton and Co., 1867.)

he also made a drawing of a large geographical clock and dial, while staying at Longfolds.

John once possessed a watch, bought as soon after he had completed his apprenticeship as he gained sufficient funds, proud like all young men to possess this evidence of money and manhood ; but this his after needs, about the time he left Aberdeen, obliged him to part with to a fellow-workman, and he never had another wheeled chronometer of any kind. His astronomical knowledge, however, was an adequate practical substitute. Throughout his life, he could tell the hour with remarkable accuracy, by observing the height of the sun when in the open air, and by the direction and length of the shadows when his beams streamed across his loom. At night, the position of the stars was sufficient to show the time ; and his accomplishments in this way, especially in the dark, created profound astonishment amongst his ignorant neighbours, who thought this another of his ways that were "no very canny."

But his desire of accuracy in all things, including hours, which his study of astronomy had increased, rendered him dissatisfied with this more or less indefinite mode of measuring time ; and he made a pocket sun-dial as a substitute for watch or clock, which he carried about with him for years, and which still remains as a proof of his executive power and the practical direction all studies took in his hands. It consists of a card about five inches long and three and a half broad, nailed to a piece of thin wood of the same size, with certain lines and figures drawn upon it and a pendent green, twisted cord, half as long again as the card, bearing a small blue glass bead,

but now without the light plummet that once hung at its extremity. This was John Duncan's pocket sun-watch.

Such instruments have from time to time been advertised, and one called "the American timepiece," was shown by Mr. John Taylor when he read an account of Duncan, before the Aberdeen Natural History Society, in July, 1881, and exhibited John's herbarium and pocket dial. This American instrument, advertised for one shilling as a wonderful discovery in 1867, was found to be almost identical with John's! It indicated the time correctly, Mr. Taylor found, to within half an hour, while John's did so to within a few minutes, that forenoon, the 15th of July. John's dial shows abundant evidence of careful but constant use, being protected by a long roll of thick brown paper fastened to it at one end, and wrapped round it twice, in the manner of a pocket-book. The whole is of the homeliest construction, and is all the more interesting as being entirely the handiwork of the old astronomer. This instrument John called by its old Greek name of horologe, the hour-teller, or, as he transformed it, his "horledge;" and as such it was known amongst his acquaintances, who had a humorous pleasure in using the quaint word.

After considerable search, I have fortunately discovered what is no doubt the original of John's sun-watch and all subsequent forms of the same style of instrument—in a portable dial invented by the super-ingenious Ferguson, the astronomer, and published by him in 1759.* Ferguson's dial is here reproduced to show the nature of the sun-clock thus used by our weaver. It was warranted, when

* See "Memoir of Ferguson," p. 244, already mentioned.

rectified, to show the hour of the day, the time of the sun's rising and setting, the sun's declination and the days on which the sun enters the signs of the Zodiac. Ferguson thus describes it :—

“The lines $a d$, $a b$, and $b c$ of the gnomon, or stile, must be cut quite through the card ; and as the end $a b$ of the gnomon is raised occasionally above the plane of the dial, it turns upon the uncut line $c d$ as on a hinge. The line dotted $A B$, must be slit quite through the card, and the thread must be put through the slit to keep it from being easily drawn out.”

In Duncan's dial, the slit was also cut through the

wooden board on which the card was fastened, and the cord inserted was fastened to a white mother-of-pearl button at the under side which moved along the slit as required.

“On the other end of this thread is a small plummet, and on the middle of it a small bead for showing the hour of the day.

“*To rectify the dial.*—Set the cross line on the slider to the day of the month, and stretch the thread from thence over the angular point XII, where the curve lines meet; then shift the bead on the thread to that point.

“*To find the hour of the day when the sun shines.*—Raise the gnomon, and hold the edge of the dial next the gnomon toward the sun, so as the upper edge of the shadow may just cover the *shadow line*; and the bead then playing freely on the face of the dial (by the weight of the plummet) will show the time of the day among the hour lines, as it is before or after noon.

“*To find the time of sun-rising and sun-setting.*—Move the thread among the hour lines, till it either covers some one of them, or lies parallel betwixt any two; and then it will cut the time of sun-rising among the forenoon hour lines, and of sun-setting among the afternoon hour lines, for the day of the year indicated by the cross line on the slider.”

Ferguson's dial also showed the sun's declination, but Duncan had not copied that part on his drawing, as not being of practical value for his purpose. It answered only for places in the latitude of London, and required to be rectified for other latitudes, which Duncan did for Aberdeen. This dial he used during the greater part of his life, and he

was often asked to consult it by his friends and others, to their great surprise and amusement.

John took notes of various astronomical phenomena ; for instance, recording that "on the 12th of April, 1842, there was a ring about the sun from two o'clock to four o'clock," and giving a drawing of it.

He also made a special study of calendars, and, as already told, bought an almanack every year, which he carefully preserved to the last. Numerous memoranda exist made by him regarding eclipses and other celestial phenomena that were to happen during the year, evidently transcribed, to be placed on his loom, according to his custom, in order to be glanced at while engaged in weaving, and to guide his nightly observations.

The related science of Meteorology, then in its infancy, also drew his attention throughout life, and he showed considerable skill in interpreting weather signs, the theoretical causes of which he investigated. These his frequent wanderings *sub Jove* gave him ample opportunities of observing. He possessed a thermometer and other meteorological gauges.

From the nature of the case, John's astronomical studies attracted more popular notice amongst his unlearned contemporaries than even his herb-doctoring, during his pre-botanical days ; and it would have been strange had he escaped some relative nickname. This he did not do. For many years before he became generally known as the botanist of the latter half of his life, he was notorious as an Astronomer, and was in various parts spoken of as "the star-gazer." In some places, he was called "Johnnie Moon," or as the Aberdeen tongue expresses Luna's name, "Johnnie

Meen," a form as near to the original Anglo-Saxon *mona*, and the Gothic *mena*, as our modern English one, which we have no more reason to plume ourselves upon than the Aberdonians on theirs.

Another early cognomen that our harmless astronomer received, was the strange one of "the *Nogman*," by which he was generally known in several districts, but which none of his nicknamers could explain. The explanation, however, is not far to seek. Another name for the stile, index, or pin of a sun-dial that throws the shadow is, as we have seen, the Greek word *gnomon*, whence the art of dialling was called gnomonics. This odd-looking word, John, with his home education, faithfully pronounced every letter of, and inverting, from his short sight, the first two letters, called it "nogmon." As he talked a great deal about it in connection with his dials, the queer-sounding word was eagerly caught up by the bumpkins, and speedily transferred to the man himself, under the idea that it was a personal designation, denoting a kind of man, a "nogman."

It was more truly descriptive than they knew, for the Greek word *γνώμων*, or *gnomon*, means one that knows, a knowing man, which John surely was. It is not a little curious that this quiet wanderer on the earth's surface should have received a name almost identical with that of the Rosicrucian guardians of hidden treasure, the Gnomes who dwelt in the earth's centre. But John "the nogman" was a true gnome in more than in oddness of aspect; for he was a guardian of real gold, "the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

CHAPTER XII.

LIFE AND STAR-GAZING AT AUCHLEVEN AND TULLYNESSLE.

THE Gadie,* or Gaudie, is one of the classical streams of Scottish poetry, heard and sung of by many who have never seen the region through which it flows, and who may have little idea that it belongs to the north. The beauties that poesy has woven round it breathe more of the sunny south, with its "bud and blossom," "licht o' gowd and leaves o' green," "its bloomy heaths and yellow whins," amidst "its bosky linns," than cold Aberdeenshire. But the refrain sufficiently reiterates where it runs—"at the back o' Benachie," the hill that appears so much in our story.

The north side of the Vale of Alford is bounded by an elevated ridge stretching from the Coreen Hills on the west to Benachie on the east, where it abruptly terminates in its striking peak. Along the north side of this ridge, runs a quiet, pastoral hollow with gentle slopes, generally well cultivated, which are watered by this famous stream. It is itself only a small burn, which rises in the parish of Clatt, to the north of the Coreens, and flows eastward along the northern base of Benachie, into the Ury, which joins the Don at Inverurie.

* Pronounced Gaadie, with a long, broad *a*, as in *far*.

In the middle of its course, just under the rounded top of Hermit's Seat, the north-west shoulder of Benachie, lies the small village of Auchleven, or the Smooth Field, a title which sufficiently indicates the feeling of rural seclusion that pervades the scene. It stands on the road between the Vale of Alford and the country town of Inch, where there is now a station on the railway, never dreamt of in John Duncan's time. Auchleven is a clean, tidy little village, with its shops and its public school, and a carding-mill driven by the Gadie, which here does practical work, theme though it be of poetical honours. It is overshadowed on the south by the huge bulk of Benachie, though its picturesque peak is out of sight at this point, and it is within view, on the other side, of the curious ruin of Dunnideer on its conical hill, a conspicuous object seen from far. The district has long been inhabited, and has numerous standing stones, circles, and cairns, that carry us back to prehistoric times.

To this quiet country village came John Duncan, about 1823, and here he remained for several years, returning to it again before he finally settled down at Droughsburn near Alford. Like Charles Black and all those who have roamed by its banks and braes, he had a great affection for this green hollow, and the stream that waters it. He could utter his feelings with literal truth, in the words of one of the songs composed in its honour :—

“ I've roamed by Tweed, I've roamed by Tay,
By border Nith and Highland Spey,
But dearer far to me than they
Are the braes o' Benachie.”

In Auchleven, John seems to have been happier, better

understood, and more appreciated, than at most places in which he sojourned, and his old companions there retain a pleasant and grateful remembrance of the man, and speak of him with high respect.

He worked in the carding-mill at the south end of the village, where the Gadie crosses the road to Alford. He lodged with a weaver on the other side of the road, called Sandy Smith, in a tumble-down, thatched cottage, now entirely removed. He slept above a thatched stable at the mill, in a loft reached by a ladder directly from the highway. This apartment was merely the triangle formed by the sloping roof, seven feet in length, with sufficient height to stand up in at the centre. It was lighted only by an opening, three feet by two and a half, in the small door that gave entrance to it. This hole for light was without glass, being closed by means of a sliding piece of wood ; so that when it was shut, the place was in darkness, and when it was open, the wind had free entrance, even in the wildest winter day. John's bed was at one side of the space, under the sloping thatch, his chest containing his clothes and books being at the other, with a narrow passage between.

From his studious habits, which soon became the talk of the village, this close, miserable hovel obtained the name of "the philosopher's hall," or "philosopher's den," or more curtly "THE PHILOSOPHER," which it retained for many years after he had left it. Here John slept during the ten or more years in which he lived at Auchleven, contented and solitary ; here he kept his books and instruments, and wrote his letters and papers on the lid of his chest ; here he used to sit for hours, reading and

thinking and studying ; and to this chilly hole, without a fire, and always in the dark in winter—for a candle would have been dangerous—he retired nightly to rest. To make it more tolerable in cold, frosty times, he used to carry a bottle filled with hot water, supplied by a kindly neighbour. While lying there, he could distinctly hear the breathing and stamping of the horses, and the lowing of the cows, in the double stable and byre below, the fumes of which ascended through the crevices between the deals of the thin partition that separated him from these his fellow-creatures. Talk of Diogenes' tub ! That was airiness, health, and comfort, compared to Duncan's "philosopher's hall."

John worked long hours, weaving at the mill. As the house in which he boarded for his meals was small, comfortless, and swarming with children, he used to spend his evenings in a quieter, more comfortable cottage next door, where lived a kindly woman, called Janet Brown, now gone, who filled his pirns and did his washing ; and he retired at bedtime to his lonely crib.

During his first residence at Auchleven, his chief study was Astronomy, and it was here that he received the appropriate and telling title of "Johnnie Meen." It was along a dike at the back of the cottage in which he boarded, that he used to set up dials and strings, at the top of a high ground which commanded a good view of the heavens all round, and in sight of Hermit's Seat on Benachie. An ash-tree still stands just opposite "the philosopher," into which he used to climb at nights, out of sight of passers-by. Seated in its upper branches, he would watch the wheeling constellations for hours,

happily there more unmolested among the country villagers than among the ploughmen and practical jokers in other places he lived at. To his confidential friends, he used to point out and name the chief stars and constellations, generally giving them their common as well as their Arabic designations, such as Charles's wain, the Lady's elwand, and the like. He would also explain the dials he had made, and the manner of setting them and telling the hours and the points of the compass with them ; being, as an old friend of his said, "a great dial man."

This was Willie Mortimer, the village shoemaker, who still survives, an intelligent, genial man, in a green old age, with many memories and highest respect for his departed friend. William saw John's "horologe" and was often with him when he adjusted the folding "nogman" (or "the cock o' the dial," as William called it), and told the hour by its means. He was one of the few that were privileged to ascend into "the philosopher," where he was shown the secret chest, with the books and other treasures it contained—a proof of honour and confidence bestowed on few. He was impressed, as all that knew him there were, with John's high character, retiring studiousness, inoffensive, blameless life, and great memory ; and William Mortimer had the honour of introducing him to Charles Black.

John's appearance and habits, even at that age, under forty years, were sufficiently striking, and certain to draw popular comment. He wore a blue dress-coat and vest of his own manufacture and country make, with very high neck and clear brass buttons, corduroy trousers, and white-spotted napkin round his throat ; a tall satin hat, well set on the back of his head ; a big blue umbrella, which was an old-fashioned

"Sairey Gamp," under his arm ; a staff in his hand, and great boots with iron toes, full of big tackets, on his feet ; while his trousers were generally rolled up half-way to his knees, to keep them clean, "for fear o' bladdin' them." His *tout ensemble* and stooping gait gave him the general look of a quaint country Paul Pry—prying, however, not into other people's affairs, like that well-known worthy, but into matters his compeers knew nothing of, and cared less for. From thinking of other things within, or conning over some of the technicalities of the studies he pursued, he generally had an absorbed look, which at times became an almost vacant stare ; so that by many, if not by most, he was considered "odd." Some said that he "looked like a fule," and others did accuse him, in their charity, of being "silly."

He was extremely cleanly in his disposition, dress, and habits, brushing his clothes with fastidious care, and never putting down his hat, even in the finest room he entered, without wiping off any dust that might lie there, with his handkerchief. His tastes were singularly abstemious, and his food of the simplest—his bed, board, washing and dress, not costing him, then, more than four shillings a week. Yet no one accused him of being mean, and he was reckoned "liberal within his ability ;" and it should be remembered that his wife and family, even after his daughters were married, were a constant drain upon his slender resources. Could simplicity and thrift go farther than this ?

About this period, he stayed for some years two miles north of Auchleven, at the village of Inch. Here he also studied astronomy, "wasting his time," as the people thought

and said, with such trifles, instead of devoting himself, like the sensible folks round him, wholly to his labour. His daughter Mary was then a servant with Mr. Brown, farmer at Drumrossie, close by the village. There John used frequently to visit her, and became in this way intimate with the farmer and his wife, who were very kind to him, and whose daughter, still living in Inch, recalls many interesting memories of the peculiar weaver, both in his astronomical and botanical days. At Drumrossie, he had better opportunities of observing the stars than in Inch, and there he used to use the cart-shed as an observatory; for protection from the cold in frosty nights, when the stars are clearest, is necessary even for the most ardent. He was often found there at that work, "when he su'd hae been sleepin'." The general name by which he was known in Inch, was "the star mannie," and the farm servants used to amuse themselves by getting him to point out Jupiter and Saturn and their companions, and then make fun of the peculiar names, if not the peculiar man.

The Vale of Alford widens out in various parts into lateral valleys, drained by tributary streams that flow into the Don. One of these is the upland region that forms the parish of Tullynessle, on the eastern slopes of the Coreen Hills, drained by the Suie Burn. It is a warm, pleasant hollow, facing the south, its curious name meaning, it seems, in Gaelic, the knoll that looks southwards. It possesses a church and school, and some ruins of departed greatness in the old castle of Terpersie, which overlook it from the west.

On its higher slopes, known as the Braes of Whitehaugh, there lies a farm called, from its size, Muckletown, close by the hillock of Wardhead, and a short distance south

of a hill crested with trees, called from its shape Knock-saul, the hill of the barn. This farm is only some five miles over the ridge from Auchleven. Here John Duncan lived for some years, weaving for the farmer, Robert Barron. Robert had a holding, and a weaving shop, in which he worked himself and employed some journeymen. Besides being weaver and farmer, he had some local fame as butcher, veterinary surgeon, and sportsman. He was intelligent, keen, practical, and vigorous, and could show considerable temper when roused. He was bright and blithe, even after he got his leg broken, and followed the plough on his wooden stump, whistling and singing as he went.

John boarded with this good man, and weaved in a shop, now in ruins, behind his house. It had three looms, lighted by three small windows, looking to the road that ran past the door. Above the workshop, there was a garret formed by the low triangular space under the sloping rafters, which was reached by ladder, through a trap-door in the ceiling at the upper end of the shop, opposite John's loom. This upper room had no ventilation whatever, except through the thatch, and no light but what came up "accidently" through the small trap-door. With what ill-lighted, unventilated places were our forefathers satisfied, really little in advance of the underground dens and caves of the prehistoric times! Yet up here often slept, night after night, three men in the three box or "stockit" beds that were fitted up in the stifling, darksome den, in some ways worse than John's solitary "philosopher" at Auchleven.

Here at Muckletown, John also carried on his astronomical studies, and many memories of his eccentricities

still survive amongst the aged people in Tullynessle. One of these, a daughter of Andrew Wilson, a farmer who lived next door to the weaving-shop, was then a little girl about ten years old. Her young imagination was taken with the queer little weaver and his peculiar ways, and her excellent memory has well preserved the things she then saw and heard with her sharp eyes and ears.

Nearly opposite the workshop, on the other side of the road, stood Robert Barron's byre, from which a long dike stretched right in front of the shop and parallel to it. Along the top of this dike, John used to place his dials. Each of these consisted of a piece of slate, with a central stile inserted in the middle, which formed the famous "nogman," of which his contemporaries made such fun. While here, he also possessed and used a small telescope, or "looking-glass," as they naturally and correctly called it, a translation of the poetic "optic glass" of Miltonic poetry and Galilean renown. This he also adjusted on the dike, to examine the stars. On clear, frosty nights, John made his observations along the dike, returning at a run, to save time and to keep up his temperature, to the weaving-shop just opposite, where he registered his observations and consulted his books and almanacs. It was in connection with this dike that the practical jokers of the place used to throw down his dials and play other pranks upon the absorbed and short-sighted astronomer. Andrew Wilson, whose house as next-door neighbour he used to frequent, would not allow his daughters to make sport in any way of the odd little man, but tried to inspire them with some of the respect his studies should have roused in every one.

In Tullynessle, he was also known as the "star-gazer."

and "the nogman." But though he devoted his leisure to study, he did not neglect his work and is still remembered in the place as a capital weaver. His medical practices, not making such an impression on the people as his studying the stars, are not so well remembered there by survivors.

John was delighted, at all times when any one would listen to him, to speak of his studies, and to the willing and intelligent he would pour forth his lore for hours. Especially did he take pleasure in talking to young people, in the hope of leading them to higher things. He used to point out the stars and call them all by their names, to Mr. Wilson's little maidens and to youthful Robbie Barron; but as Robert now naïvely remarks, he was too young to be able to say whether he did so rightly or wrongly!

To escape the annoyance offered to him at the cottar town, John used to go to a distance, especially to the top of the neighbouring eminences, to make his observations and have a wider field of stars. The sides of the isolated Knocksaul, about a mile north of Muckletown, fourteen hundred feet in height, commanding a splendid view of the whole celestial hemisphere, were special haunts of his. There he would remain for hours, often far into the morning, watching the heavens, like the young astronomer Ferguson, a hundred years before, when he lived near Keith, some thirty miles to the west.

One night, his next-door neighbour, Mrs. Wilson, was attending on a sick cow, about two in the morning, after the rest of the family had long retired to bed. She was sitting with the animal in the lonely byre, which was dimly lighted by a rush lamp, an eerie-enough place at that hour, when the door began to creak on its hinges in the dead

silence. Looking apprehensively round, she saw it stealthily and slowly pushed open, while a weird-looking face, darkly illumined by the solitary rush light, appeared in the narrow space, giving her "a terrible fright." In tones of real terror, she sprang up and demanded who was there. In an instant, she was relieved. It was only John Duncan, who at once stepped forward to show himself and to apologize for thus alarming her. He explained that seeing the red light shining through the crannies of the byre at that late hour, he thought the place on fire ; otherwise, he would not have disturbed her. He had been at the top of Knock-saul, watching the stars. But, as she said, "he was a quiet, harmless man and interfered in nobody's affairs."

John lived at Muckletown for seven or eight years but not continuously, contented, comfortable, and happy, notwithstanding the pranks played on him by his frolicsome neighbours, and in spite of a visit from his wandering wife, who turned up here as she had done everywhere else. When not engaged in his studies, which he usually prosecuted in the shop or in the open air, he spent the evenings next door, at the pleasant and appreciative fire-side of the Wilsons, or in the merry kitchen of his employer. Being a public-spirited, humorous man and a good fiddler, Barron's house was a kind of rendezvous for the neighbourhood. Notwithstanding his philosophy and douceness, John enjoyed a merry evening with the best of them, contributing his share to the entertainment along with the rest, for he was always counted "capital company" when amongst congenial friends.

One night in 1831, this secluded community were startled into consternation and tragic fear. The winter

that year had been unusually severe, though less so than afterwards in 1837, known as the year of the "big storm." Mrs. Wilson, the good woman whom John had frightened at midnight, left the farm to go over the hill to Auchleven with some wool, to get it made into worsted at John's old mill there. The afternoon was fair enough, but a heavy snow-storm came on with the evening, and as she did not return after the dark had come down, an alarm was raised. The whole population of the Braes of Whitehaugh, John amongst the rest, turned out to seek the lost woman, who happily was found, after long search, in a snow wreath, where she would without doubt have perished, had she not been rescued in time by her kindly neighbours.

Duncan was counted by most about Tullynessle, "a queer kind o' creatur'," "a droll body," "an awfu' queer man," "losing his time, instead of working at his loom," though the worst never did or could accuse him of being lazy. He was, nevertheless, "universally respected," as an intelligent, honourable, well-living man, with "nothing mean" about him, and "generous as far as he was able." Though he was always poor, his wages being small, he never failed to pay his way, and borrowed from no one. His unusual aspect is still remembered on the Braes, especially when he went for oil for his lamp to the shop at Waterside, at the north end of the bridge of Alford. He would then set out, dressed in his best, in the style already described at Auchleven, and, as became one who was going into civilized regions at the merchant's, he of course wore his tall "lum" hat. He also carried the inevitable umbrella under his arm, his stick in the right hand, and a great black earthenware bottle held by a

string, in the left. He was certainly a queer figure, as he ascended the Wardhill to Boggie-Shallock and followed the old church road, by the base of Millhockie Hill, to Syllavethy, long before the granite quarries were opened there, on to the bridge over the Don.

To the last, though he never again lived at Tullynessle, he kept up friendly relations with the district where he had spent some happy years, frequently visiting it, to see old acquaintances and gather plants. Muckletown was a special resting-place in his later days, when Robert Barron had passed away and his house had become the home of Mrs. Wilson's daughter, and she had become Mrs. Duguid. After kindly entertainment, he would sit for hours by the cosy ingle, enjoying the children's play and a "spring" from her husband's fiddle, showing and describing the plants he had then gathered, bubbling up into glowing humour, as the solitary man always did amongst congenial hearts, and often remaining in this pleasant circle till near midnight. He would then, old as he was, fearlessly face the dark and dubs, and walk home alone, some ten miles, all the way to Droughsburn.

CHAPTER XIII.

SETTLEMENT AT NETHERTON, AND VILLAGE LIFE THERE.

JOHN DUNCAN was now to take up his more or less permanent residence in a district where his life was destined to pass through a transformation that sweetened and elevated it—the pleasant Vale of Alford. In the early summer of 1836, the year of Coleridge's death and of the emancipation of slaves on all British soil, John made the acquaintance of Charles Black, the chief friend of his life, and began his stricter scientific studies.

After the Don has gathered its many waters from the great mountains in the west of Aberdeen, crowned by the big Ben Macdhui, and has become a full-grown stream, it enters the expansion of its valley, called the Vale or Howe of Alford. This wide basin has evidently been the bed of an ancient lake, from which the Don had issued at the narrow and picturesque gorge below Castle Forbes, and which has laid down the materials for its present cultivated beauty. The Vale is a broad hollow plain, through which wanders the clear stream of the Don, warmly embosomed by low rounded hills, prettily varied with wood, water, and field; guarded, on the east, by the peaked Benachie, and

looked into, on the west, by the fine cone of the more distant Buck of the Cabrach. It is carefully cultivated to the tops of the enclosing hills, in a way that gives Alford no mean place in Aberdeenshire farming. Altogether, it is a sweet upland strath, beautified by fine scenery, and a pleasant place of abode.

Its houses have an air of happy comfort, its people are well clad and intelligent-looking, its churches though plain are not unpleasant, and its schools show that education is valued, as it generally is in Aberdeenshire. Though upland and inland, it now possesses its own railway, which joins it to the main line and the outer world, while the new village of Alford, created by the steam-engine, with its fine churches, banks and hotel, proves an active spirit of enterprise, which is a pledge of prosperity. Like all places long dwelt in, the Vale has also its great modern mansions, its ruined old castles, its older remains of prehistoric peoples, and its battle-field—for what fairest spot has not been stained with human blood?—where Montrose won one of his dashing victories in 1645.

The aspect and structure of its rocks and hills indicate still more ancient events, pointing back to the eras before the trees of the coal period grew, or the fishes of the Old Red swam, to the great Silurian ages, which deposited the gneiss of its upper reaches; and to the wilder disturbances that produced the beautiful granites of its lower portions; while the whole Vale and its surroundings bear abundant traces of the latest geologic changes, when the land was scratched and ground and smoothed by glacial ice.

The Vale expands into several side chambers or valleys, watered by tributaries of the Don. In one of these

just described, John Duncan had already sojourned on its northern face, in Tullynessle. He now settled down for some years at its opposite extremity on the south-east, in the parish of Tough,* under the slopes of Corennie Forest. He took up his abode at a hamlet called Nether Edindurno, or shortly Netherton, at the entrance to the policies of the mansion of Whitehouse. It lies underneath Cairn William and the Hill of Tillyfourie, close by where the Whitehouse station now stands on the Alford Valley Railway. His new place of residence was immediately at the west side of the Benachie range, on the eastern shoulders of which he had spent many years near the woods of Paradise; and it was within easy distance of the two passes through these hills to his old haunts and Aberdeen, the one traversed by the Don at Castle Forbes, and the other, at a later time, by the railway at Tillyfourie.

Netherton, now represented by one house, was then a considerable hamlet with eight or nine families, and the centre of a large district, with its schoolmaster, innkeeper, tailor, shoemaker, smith, carpenter, weaver, and postman, and also with its neighbouring aristocracy in the mansions of Whitehouse and Tonley.† It was situated on the great highway from Alford to Aberdeen, being twenty-three miles from the city, and a busy traffic then enlivened it, now drained off by the railway, which was not completed till 1859, twenty-three years after John Duncan first settled there, and ten years after he had left it. It was a delightful dwelling-place, near the well-wooded mountains to the east and south, which commanded an expansive prospect over

* Pronounced *Tooch*, with the guttural *ch*.

† Emphasized on the second syllable.

the plain of Alford, with the distant peak of the Cabrach rising beyond its far extremity. It was surrounded by old cultivated land, especially about the parish church of Tough, and by extensive mosses, now nearly drained, on the flat land below.

John was engaged to work with a master weaver called Peter Marnock, whose house stood under the shade of two plane trees and a sacred ash, which are now its sole representatives, just below the farm of Netherton. It was a long, old-fashioned, thatched cottage, built of stones and clay, with great couples down to the ground, like a Highland hut. It contained a kitchen with earthen floor, bright fireplace and shining "plate-rack;" a "ben hooße," or better apartment; and a weaving shop. The family lived chiefly in the cheerful kitchen, which opened right to the thatch, glossy black with the peat smoke of years, and which was kept scrupulously clean by Mrs. Marnock, a quiet, nice woman, noted as a good housekeeper. She had a son, who died young; and three daughters, one of whom remained at home to assist her mother, while the other two went to service.

In the workshop, which was next the kitchen, there were two looms. One of these was occupied by Marnock himself, the other by John. John lodged with Marnock, getting his food, paying so much for each meal, and sleeping in the weaving shop. He was engaged, as elsewhere, on "piece work," and was paid for what he produced; and, as wages were then very low, he was many a time "bare enough," according to a niece of Marnock's, who lived next door to him. As she tells, "he was easily pleased wi' his meat," his food being—for breakfast, porridge and milk; for

dinner, potatoes and "kail brose" (consisting of oatmeal, with perhaps a little butter, saturated with the broth of green kail), being often quite satisfied with water-brose, that is, oatmeal softened by boiling water; and porridge and milk, for supper. Here, as everywhere else, he was reckoned an excellent workman.

Marnock, besides being weaver, was grave-digger and bellman at the parish church of Tough, and, like most "ministers' men," was somewhat of a character, though not so intelligent as his class generally were. When the late Dr. Gillan, of Alford, a man universally respected and loved, became minister of Tough, he asked Marnock to ring the bell for a quarter of an hour, as was customary elsewhere. The stiff old fellow, who had rung it for years only a few minutes at a time, replied, "'Deed, minister, if ye want it rung a' that time, ye'll better come and dee't yersel'!" and the good clergyman succumbed for the sake of peace. Though he was thus a parish and church pillar, Marnock's conduct at times scarcely squared with his ecclesiastical dignity. Not unfrequently he imbibed more than he could well carry, and then used language scarcely befitting his position to every one he then encountered, including his quiet wife. His love of work was not of the keenest, and he preferred the public highway to the weaver's treddles. He never interfered with John, however, allowing him full liberty to botanise, knowing well that he made up for loss at one time by working hard at another, when others were idle or in bed.

Like all small country places, where experience has been narrow and education with general knowledge narrower, Netherton had its social drainage in superabundant gossip,

both cruel and kindly, and in envies and contentions. John's opinion of the village was not very high, for he said it was a rough place, "where they strove and fought falternally;"* adding that "where there is a lot o' wives, there is nae want o' that." John himself, as one of his friends there says, was "a man of peace, whose word was never heard among his contentious neighbours." He thought that the women in Netherton, and everywhere else, indulged in tea far too much, spoiling their own nerves and emptying their husbands' pockets—in which he was decidedly right, the over use of tea in rural and Highland districts being still a dissipation of our time. He was, as he had ever been, quiet and retiring, delighting more in his own thoughts than in the pleasure of communicating them. Though he was not given to forming miscellaneous friendships, he cultivated more social life in Netherton than in any other place; for his spirits now began to shake off the domestic sorrows of the past, that had weighed so long and so heavily on his heart, especially after the death of their weak but guilty cause.

There was the shoemaker, Charles Hunter, a very worthy and intelligent man, who has seen a good deal of the world, and still survives in active work near Netherton, in his sixty-eighth year. Of him John thought very highly, and they became very intimate. Newspapers were then high priced and rare, costing a guinea a year, worth double that sum now; but, in the village, a club was formed to purchase one, and John and the shoemaker were active promoters of the scheme and diligent readers. Being strong Liberals, they got the *Aberdeen Journal* till the Disruption in 1843, and after that, the *Aberdeen Banner*,

* A curious form of the word "eternally," or "alternately."

both of them having seceded with the Free Church. Charles Black, who was then and still is, as he says, "Tory to the backbone"—politics being the only thing in which he is conservative—stood alone in subscribing for the *Aberdeen Constitutional*. This paper John abhorred but read for its news, and, curiously enough, many of his plants in the herbarium now in Aberdeen University are preserved in the sheets of this hated organ, the paper having proved truly conservative in botanical as well as in political matters.

Charles Hunter's estimate of John Duncan is remarkably high. He praises his omnivorous reading, his extraordinary memory, his unconquerable perseverance against opposition, misunderstanding and difficulty. "When he didna understand onything," he says, "he just read it ower and ower till he had it, and then it stuck!" He believes that "he would have been a great man if he had had a good education."

The shoemaker's shop here, as in most places, was the *rendezvous* of the district, where the more intelligent used to drop in, to hear the papers read and hold discussions on the topics of the day. Ecclesiastical polemics were then volcanic, before '43; and how keen these discussions were, is impossible to be sufficiently realised by those who did not pass through that heated time.

One of the keenest debaters on these burning questions was Sandy Cameron, the tailor, who lived next door to Marnock's, a worthy, hard-working, careful, and intelligent man, respected by all that knew him. Though he cared nothing for plants, he studied astronomy in books, which became a natural bond of union with "Johnnie Moon." He was one of that species of tailor known in Scotland

by the absurd but striking name of "whip-the-cat." Such tailors travelled over the country, to sew in the houses of those who employed them, carrying with them "the goose and the lap-board,"* and receiving as wages two shillings a day and their food. Sandy, having a house and croft at Netherton, always returned home at night when he could, and frequented the workshops of Marnock and Hunter. Like many of his wandering class, he had a wonderful flow of language, but, unlike most of his compeers, who used old Scotch, he discoursed in a high-flown English style that sounded pulpit-like and impressive. It was certainly overpowering in volume, if not in substance, and was poured forth, as one of his auditors says, in "a harangue of high-sounding words that seemed to have no end." As John and he took opposite sides in church politics, the tailor defending the "auld Kirk," and the weaver championing the Free, the wordy war at times became fast and furious—at least to the ear—and the tailor perorated so volubly, that his opponent could not get a word in even edgeways. John, who was less fluent but equally strenuous, would stand in front of the loquacious defender of the ancient church in perturbed confusion, scratching his head, twitching his mouth, as his custom was at such times, and waiting in vain for a break in the flood; till his patience at last gave way, and in tones that scarcely drowned the other polemic's, he cried out in sheer desperation, "Nane o' yer English to me, man; I want nane o't. And stick to the pint, stick to the pint!"

* The first is the iron instrument, with the bent handle which gave it its expressive name, for ironing cloth; and the second, the long flat board on which that is done.

Not far from the shoemaker's, stood the post office, kept by Willie Mitchell, another tailor, who was also sheriff-officer for the district; professional fiddler at weddings and like social gatherings; a sort of "crambo-clink" poet on local themes; and a noted teller of old-world stories, with which, as a friend says, "he was crammed to the moo'."

One of the chief characters of the place was the eccentric innkeeper at Mayfield, close by Whitehouse station, Willie Davidson, who had once been a carpenter. He was generally called "Auld Mayfield," according to the aristocratic custom of the Scotch, in naming a man from the place he occupies. He often went under the name of "the Auld Dogger," but for what reason is unknown. Mayfield "inn" consisted of a long one-storeyed, thatched house, which stood parallel to the great road to Aberdeen, and was a kind of change house for the numerous travellers who then passed that way, in these ante-railroad times. The nature of the establishment was fully displayed on a signboard at the east end, next Netherton, with an intimation running thus, "Entertainment for Men and Horses by William Davidson," done in rustic lettering. It was crowned by the arms of the neighbouring family of Whitehouse—a red lion rampant. This was also "a hameart dune job," of that truthful type that caused a soldier in Stonehaven to say that he was billeted "at the sign of the monkey," a similar scarlet representation of the ill-used king of the forest!

"The Dogger" was very peculiar in all his ways. A decided stutter added to the irresistible style of his talk, but this impediment seemed only to whet his appetite for

tongue. Like the good Bonifaces of the olden days, he did not disdain to sit down with his customers and partake of his own cheer, and then convoy them for some distance on their journey, by way of completing the "entertainment" promised on his sign. In his later years, Davidson became very subject to rheumatism, but nevertheless continued his old attentions to travellers, accompanying them along the road without a coat. When remonstrated with for doing so, on account of this affection, he replied, in his best stutter, that "c-cold was the v-very life o' the room-a-room-attics ;" meaning thereby that it cured them—homœopathically, no doubt.

He was a man of considerable force of character and no little enterprise. In addition to the public-house he kept, he carried on a small grocery, which added to his income. He was also the first to start a stage coach from the Vale of Alford to Aberdeen, about twenty-three miles distant, which ran from his door. This undertaking diminished his possessions, however, and was soon given up, in those days of the universal use of "shank's neggie." * Though he had failed in carrying his neighbours when they could walk, he tried the experiment of carrying them when they could not, by introducing the first hearse ever seen in that part of the country—and he succeeded better with the dead than with the living. As an interested party, he wished to anticipate recent fiscal reforms, and drew out a long petition for the repeal of the hated malt tax. This document he submitted, before presentation, to the learned censor of English in the district, the dominie of Coulter-

* Or the leg horse, or "naig," as the foot in walking is expressed in old Scotch.

neuk, for his careful revision. He reported that it would take a clever man to *revise* it, for, like the Irishman's gun, "it would need to be done all over again!" The petition, in consequence, never reached the House.

As we shall see, Davidson's hostelry became the scene of certain important botanical experiences in the life of the twin botanists of our story.

Yet, amidst the possibilities of cruel gossip, under the watchful eyes and ready tongues of the unloving, active at Netherton, the old rooted sorrow intruded itself here, notwithstanding John's silence and care. His wife appeared in the village soon after he had settled there, and made known her relation to the stranger, twelve years and more after their forced separation in Aberdeen.

She had haunted him through all these years, like an evil thought that would not be silenced. She had sought him out near Monymusk, had risen as his evil genius at Auchleven, and had allowed him no peace even in the uplands of Tullynessle; and here, again, she appeared at Marnock's, to blight his good name, if that were possible. It was indescribably baneful and hard to bear, especially in new scenes, where he had to make his character amongst new critics. The poor woman was now a wreck, palsied and almost helpless, yet a homeless wanderer who would not rest, even to wait for coming death. Her husband, disturbed beyond expression though he was and had amplest reason to be, did not reproach her, but arranged with the Marnocks for her food and comfort that day and night, when she rested in the kitchen under the gaze of the unsympathetic, and slept at night in a comfortable bed in the barn. She left next morning, still bent on a wayfaring life,

with some of her patient husband's hard-won gains. He never saw her more. She passed away, unknown to him, soon afterwards near Insch. The story of her death and burial he never spoke of, and it must now remain for ever under an unbroken seal.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOHN'S INTRODUCTION TO HIS "ALTER EGO."

NOT far from Netherton, and at the time of our story nearly opposite to it, is the entrance to the mansion and grounds of the Farquharsons of Whitehouse. The house is one of those substantial, old-fashioned, long and narrow buildings, with broad, plain front, sunk flat, and outside staircase to the hall, that were common at the beginning of the century, before modern taste and pretension had risen in country architecture. Standing amidst a fine, sloping park of splendid trees, some of them old and striking, on an open terrace high above the surrounding country, it commands a grand prospect towards the south, over the hollow of Tough to the top of Corennie Forest and the woods of Craigievar, behind which rises the fine peak of Lochnagar. Well-stocked flower plots beautify the front, and a fine enclosed garden faces the sun to the left. The outlook behind is still more expansive, where from a farm close by, rightly named Prospect Hill, an unrivalled view may be had over the whole variegated Vale of Alford, terminating in the Buck of the Cabrach and Ben Macdhui.

It was then the custom, and so continued long after, for the Aberdeenshire county families to have their chief man-

sion on their property in the country, where they spent the summer months, and a town house in Aberdeen, to which they removed at the beginning of winter, to enjoy the festivities then fashionable in this London of the north-east of Scotland. Mr. Peter Farquharson, of Whitehouse, was a quiet, plain, unpretending man, whose father, an Aberdeen lawyer, had bought the property and built the present house, a little to the west of the ancient site. He made little stir in local or public affairs. Mrs. Farquharson, his wife, was of a different type, with pronounced character, great ability, immense vigour, and impetuous temperament, whose fame still survives in the county. She was imperious in style, and difficult to serve, sometimes changing her domestics several times a year, but withal kindly and good-hearted, if not generous. When she did take a fancy to a good servant, she became his staunch friend when he required one. Under her rigorous rule, domestic government was, to say the least of it, peculiar, and service was trying.

To Whitehouse, in the year 1834, there came, to look after the garden, a smart, good-looking young man of twenty-one, who had just completed his apprenticeship at Cluny Castle near Monymusk, and now entered on his first independent situation. The new gardener was called Charles Black. It was a trying place to start life in, but Charles was no common lad, and would succeed where most would fail. Although so young, he speedily proved himself a superior workman—whose fame, in this respect, still survives in the district—a faithful servant, and a kindly, peace-loving high-toned man. He gained the good will, if not the respect and friendship, of his imperious mistress, and—

what was still more unusual—not only remained at Whitehouse nearly four years, but returned to it again after he had married.

Charles Black was born on the first of July, 1813, at the Mains of Pitcaple, on the river Ury, not far from the site of the famous battle of Harlaw. He received a fair education, as schools then went, till he reached his thirteenth year. According to universal custom there, he then took service, first as herd-boy, like Duncan, and afterwards as farm worker, till he was nineteen. Like our hero, however, he thirsted for work more intellectual than clodhopping, and became an apprentice gardener at Cluny Castle. There he remained for two years, gaining great skill in his trade, and leaving it rarely accomplished in its mysteries. His natural endowments were uncommonly high. Ever since boyhood, amidst huge difficulties too long here to tell, he had sedulously cultivated his intellect and character. His determination and self-denial for this end were exemplary, of which one instance is typical. Receiving no wages whatever as apprentice gardener, he used to get a shilling every fortnight from his father for pocket-money. This he spent, not in purchasing any of the luxuries natural to a boy who had few of them, but in taking out, in parts, "*Mackintosh's Practical Gardener*." That was then one of the authorities on the subject, a great book that cost two pounds, procured in order to extend his theoretical and practical knowledge of his craft.

But this was but one step in the professional ladder which he had determined to mount. He must know the science of Botany, on which it stood. No matter that the subject was at that time comparatively little known or

studied in the country, and scarcely heard of amongst his fellow gardeners ; no matter that existing text-books on it were technical, unpopular, difficult, and costly, and that Botany—as far as simple exposition for private students went—was a sealed book ; no matter that he was dissuaded and mocked by his fellow workmen, and had to pursue the thorny subject practically alone and unaided—he began it, and, amidst discouragements that would have daunted most young men, he succeeded. Happily for his after thoroughness as a botanist, he attacked the subject in its true scientific form from the first.

With the assistance of a fellow apprentice, who soon chose more flowery paths, he purchased, for half a crown, "Ratray's Botanical Chart." This presented an intricate tabular view of the whole science according to the Linnæan system, being intended as a *résumé* for advanced students. It was a terrible *cheval-de-frise* of technicalities for a young novice. Though feeling it to be "a sickener," as secretly confessed, and viewing it with wonder and fear but with growing curiosity, he resolutely commenced the study of Botany. For the time being, Ratray was beyond him, but he gained insight into the subject through two simpler text-books he soon after obtained, "Lee's Introduction to Botany" and "Galpin's British Botany." So rapid was his progress, that, although he went to Cluny in November, he had actually deciphered, unaided, his first plant, the *Draba verna*—the common whitlow grass—in early spring, flourishing as it does from January to June. But by the time he completed his apprenticeship in two years, he had pretty well mastered Lee and Galpin, and even the formidable Ratray became intelligible. This book he afterwards

gifted to John Duncan, who preserved and prized it to the very last.

Charles had also made some progress in the formation of a herbarium before he came to Whitehouse, and during the year and a half he was there before John knew him, he had extended it greatly, and increased his theoretical and practical knowledge of the science. He also received great assistance in the discovery of local plants by the publication, in 1835—the year after he came to Whitehouse—of the first edition of the very book he required at this stage. This was the “*Flora Aberdonensis*,” which afterwards developed into the “*Flora of Aberdeen, Banff and Kincardine*,”* by George Dickie, M.D., Professor of Botany in Aberdeen, who has just died in honoured age, after doing admirable service to science in the north of Scotland. Aided by this new guide, Charles made rapid progress in conquering the plants of the district, and in discovering new localities.

Since 1836, when he first enters our story, Charles Black has passed through varied experiences, traversed many scenes, and studied many subjects. He still follows the æsthetic occupation of gardener, away down on the shores of the Solway, within sight of the Cumberland hills. Like the great poet that lived amongst these, and gained there those “impulses of deeper birth” that have made him immortal,

“He is retired as noontide dew,
Or fountain in a noonday grove;
And you must love him ere to you
He will seem worthy of your love.”

* This is a capital local guide, and the pattern of what a local Flora ought to be in plan and exhaustiveness, and in full acknowledgment of obligations.

Yet, unobtrusive and censurably retiring as he has always been—and quite unknown till lately dragged into notice, four years ago*—he is, as I then said of him, with bare truth, an excellent botanist, knowing intimately all our native plants ; a good geologist, possessing a large gathering of fossils, and intelligently versed in the literature of geology and its far-reaching problems ; a capital ornithologist, knowing all our native birds by plumage, flight, cry, and egg, and having a very complete collection of British eggs ; a fair numismatist, with an unusual collection of coins, home and foreign, ancient and modern, for a working man ; an omnivorous reader, especially in theology and natural science ; in short, an ardent lover and student of beasts, and birds, and insects, and plants, and not less of mankind.

Such is a glimpse of the man to whom John Duncan was introduced at Whitehouse, in 1836, which curiously was also the year of the foundation of the Edinburgh Botanical Society. Though twenty years his senior, possessed of strong individuality and unusually varied knowledge more or less scientific, and chastened by sorrows the young man never knew, in making Charles Black's acquaintance, John came—and soon felt that he came—under the dominion of a nature stronger than his own, and capable of moulding him powerfully and permanently for good. This is saying a great deal of a man then so youthful. But his strength had been already proved in his study of Botany, and the skill he had acquired as a gardener in so short a time ; and his geniality, tact, and

* In "Good Words" for 1878, in which I gave a sketch of John Duncan and his friend.

character had been shown in his discreet and harmonious management of affairs at Whitehouse. His after history, were it written, would be more than sufficient evidence that the homage and affection which John yielded him from the first were securely placed and wisely directed—a power felt by all who have come into close contact with Charles Black. Notwithstanding the unattractive aspect of the one, and the vigorous, hilarious immaturity of the other, these two men felt drawn to each other by that instinctive alchemy which, at rare intervals, welds two diverse natures together. They entered into an unspoken covenant of friendship of the diviner type, which remained undimmed till the death of the senior, and still survives in the old age of his friend.

At the close of the spring of 1836, shortly after he had settled at Netherton, John Duncan ascended the hill to Whitehouse, bearing a letter of introduction to the botanical gardener, from his friend William Mortimer, of Auchleven. William had known Charles Black when he was a farm servant, and when he himself was an apprentice shoemaker at Raehill on the Gadie, near Oyne. John had donned his best, to do honour to his expected friend. He had on his usual kenspeckle dress, with trousers turned up half-way to the knee, and his high-crowned hat, set at John's own angle on the back of his head. He certainly looked, Charles Black said, "a queer fish." From his extreme near-sightedness, general stoop caused thereby, and strange but striking countenance, he also conveyed the impression, at first sight, of "surely being half daft." The Whitehouse family were expected shortly from Aberdeen, and the gardener was busily superintending some workmen

in putting to rights the walks and woods, half-way down the avenue. John had gone right up to the house through the tall trees, looking for herbs. Not finding Charles there, he was returning home again along the winding walk to the lodge, when he came upon the sorting party.

Advancing to their leader, he abruptly asked him, "Are you Charlie Black?" After answer in the affirmative, he said, "Weel, I hae a letter for you." While the workmen scanned the little man with amused glances, John fumbled in his blue coat pocket and at last brought out a piece of newspaper, in which, with accustomed care, the important epistle was wrapped, and handed it in silence to Charles, who waited with some curiosity the issue of the interview. The letter told that the bearer, John Duncan, a friend of William's, had come to reside in that neighbourhood, having obtained employment as a weaver, and that, like Charles himself, "he was a great lover of plants."

With a searching look at the quaint personality thus introduced to him—one of a class unjustly contemned by most but themselves, and not least by servants in gentlemen's houses—and in spite of a mental criticism that he looked "a very queer customer to study plants," Charles said, with all hearty kindness, that he was glad to see him, and would be happy to render him any assistance in regard to "the floors."

Had he done anything to Botany already? Did he know any of the plants? John said he did—a good many. In real surprise, after his own hard experiences, Charles asked what books he had used to discover them. He had used "Culpepper." The mention of this book, associated in Charles's eyes with quackery, herbs, saws, and bottles,

stirred no little contempt in the mind of the young student of the grand Linnæan system, pardonably proud, if not secretly vain, of his accomplishments. But he quietly replied that he did not think any one could do much to Botany with such a book as "Culpepper."

Roused by gratitude to his old master and proved good offices, and put somewhat on his mettle regarding his own acquirements, John smartly retorted that he could do something to it; and spreading out his fingers, crooked with tying threads and digging roots, as if he were in the act of laying hold of the plants, he affirmed that he could go there and then, if he liked, and put his hands on them.

This was only the simple fact, as we know; for John's knowledge of wild plants, though not scientific like Charles Black's, was real and thoroughly practical, as far as it went. He could name a plant when seen, find it when he wanted it, and knew far more about their uses than his friend then or ever did; for Charles had an over scorn, as many good men still have, for herbalism and its empirics.

The gardener replied that he had no doubt he might, but that he had a far better and surer way of finding them out than by Culpepper's pictures—by means of Botany. "Ay?" said John, in astonishment; for the possibility was new to him, and seemed at once to open up a bright vista of future knowledge of the plants he had loved so long. He at once eagerly inquired if Charles had a book to guide him in the work. He said he had. What was its name? Charles mentioned "Galpin's British Botany," and asked if he would like to be shown the way to use it, which he would be happy to show. John answered decidedly in the affirmative, and, in his tone and throughout the conversation,

revealed glimpses of the ability and power that were hidden beneath his quiet, unattractive, smile-provoking exterior.

That one "Yes, I wu'd" was the turning point in John Duncan's life ; his first introduction to the happy severities of pure Natural Science ; and the birth of a new enthusiasm, that was henceforth to be the labour of his leisure, the solace of his sorrows, and the sweetener of his life till its close, after forty-five years of rare devotion to science for its own sake.

John asked to be shown through the garden, a pleasure he had always cultivated among his numerous gardening friends. Being busy with his men, and desirous of finishing up matters before the coming of "the big folks," Charles said that he could not attend upon him at that time, but that he would be glad to see him the following evening. They parted, and John held on his way down the avenue to Peter Marnock's, with hopeful wonderment in his silent heart, as to what sort of man his new acquaintance would prove, and still more what kind of thing this new science of Botany was ; and he viewed the familiar flowers he passed with new anticipations of more intimate knowledge.

How much, how very much, is summed up and concentrated in certain moments of the lives of all men ! The tide of Duncan's life had just swelled to that auspicious height that leads on to fortune, in its highest sense. Had he cast his own horoscope, by aid of his astrological studies, he would have found that he had reached that critical epoch when the omnipotent influences of the past eternities—with a reality and dominion that astrology never dreamt of—had effected that conjunction which ruled his destiny, as it does those of us all, the humblest equally with the highest.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIRST JOINT BOTANICAL STUDIES OF THE FRIENDS.

JOHN DUNCAN called early at Whitehouse the following evening, urged by an inexplicable expectancy. The time that night was chiefly spent in the garden and the green-houses, according to John's wish, in some general talk about plants, and in those personal questions and mutual confidences that accompany a first introduction, when the one feels after the other, by which are laid the foundations of friendship. After parting, Charles was not yet very greatly impressed with the weaver, and he still thought him "a mortal queer man." John's shyness was so great; he shut himself from all strangers beneath such an impenetrable armour of natural reserve, which the sorrows he had to hide had painfully increased, that this was not to be wondered at. He was a modest mountain daisy, whose earlier growth had been stunted by sunless gloom, barren soil, and the bitter waters of grief, and which only lifted its drooping head under the genial warmth of trustful affection and fullest confidence. His backward reticence, indistinct utterance, and introverted, shamefaced look before strangers also concealed the latent power and the strong intellect that dwelt in his little body; so that, at parting that night, Charles had small hope of his doing much in science.

But increased acquaintance soon dispelled these impressions, and Black began to see that in this weaver he had a man of uncommon mental vigour and ability, who already possessed a great love of plants, much curious knowledge on that and on many other subjects he was himself ignorant of, a remarkable memory, and indomitable energy. At first, John's progress in Botany was slow; indeed, very slow, for this scholar had never been by any means "quick at the uptake," ready in apprehension, and, in regard to entirely new ideas at his time of life, dull more than apt. But once grasped, once clearly perceived, they became his own, thoroughly and permanently absorbed.

John's visits increased in frequency, as intimacy deepened on both sides, and as the men began to catch hold of each other "with hooks of steel." John "grew upon" Charles so much that, as Charles said, he "became as it were part of himself, and if he did not come up of an evening, he felt a blank in the day." As Charles has often declared, he soon loved John "like a very brither." And John's affection and esteem for him became equally deep and absorbing. As he used to say, "Charlie Black was a bosom freend o' mine;" adding, like the solitary man he was, who valued trustful secretiveness, "if I tell't him onything, it was keepit there;" and concluding all references to their friendship with a return to the original theme, as if it were a dulcet melody that charmed him, "Ay, he was a *great* faavorite, a *bosom* freend!" Yet with all this admiration and trust, there was one subject never once alluded to between them during their long and close intimacy, because too painful for either to speak of—the central sorrow of John's life, his unhappy relations with his wife.

Though Duncan was slow in learning the thorny technicalities of the hard science he had set himself to conquer, he was intensely in earnest, patient beyond expression, eager to be taught, and humble as a child in his readiness to sit at the feet of his young teacher—a most praiseworthy trait, revealing finer touches of character and a true scientific spirit in a man twenty years Black's senior, who had seen and studied so much already. Such perseverance became its own reward, for John "got on," and his mastery over the subject grew apace. To aid him in his private study in the workshop, and to relieve his willing tutor from unnecessary trouble, he picked up, at his first visit to Aberdeen, a copy of "Pinnock's Catechism of Botany," a small introductory handbook, his first purchase in the science, with which he afterwards inoculated many a disciple, and which he preserved to the end as a pleasant memorial of early struggles in Botany. He used to bring with him bundles of plants when he came up to Whitehouse in the evening, which he gave to the gardener, asking him "to botanise *heigh-oot*." That is, he was to begin at the very first elements in discovering a plant, and tell at every step what he was doing; uttering aloud all his processes and conclusions, till he fixed its class, variety, and name, with reasons for each determination. John would himself then retrace the same ground in detail, under Charles's eye.

Though it was a considerable time before he could decipher a plant independently, he succeeded at last. Then followed the exquisite delight of self-discovery, crowned by the triumphant *eureka* when a difficult plant was finally made out.

To this was added in time the pleasures of mutual help, when the pupil could take his part with the master in determining a new-found specimen, the one using the book, and the other calling out the successive characteristics that were to guide them step by step to the very name ; and none but those who have thus worked hand in hand with a dear friend and fellow-student of plants can adequately realise the sweetness of such joint study of a favourite science. Like all such higher delights, it is one "which the world cannot give, and which it cannot take away."

During all that summer and autumn, both were busily searching for plants, John being simply indefatigable. With his greater leisure, he gathered more than Charles, who was a servant under command, with long hours and no holidays. Of course, John had more to get, as Charles had already a good collection, and he had only begun to form one. Charles had many duplicates, and kept only two specimens, handing over the others to his friend, whose herbarium began to swell to proud proportions in the weaving shop where he kept it. In all his gathering of plants, John, of course, loyally collected for both.

The two students made many an excursion near and far throughout the Vale of Alford and its enclosing hills, in search of the loved flowers ; thus not only increasing their store of specimens, but gathering a thousand delightful memories to cheer them in after years, when they could be viewed only by that "inward eye which is the bliss of solitude" and distance. So that at last, as Charles Black gratefully and truthfully expresses it, "the Vale of Alford became to us one of the sweetest spots on earth. And the Tap o' Benachie, what does it not recall? How often did

we wander over those dear old hills, and what a pleasure Botany was to John and me!"

It was their wise custom to collect and press the plants in summer, and lay them carefully aside, to be discovered during the long nights of winter, in the kitchen at Whitehouse. During the four years in which they thus worked together there, they visited the greater part of the surrounding country and conquered most of its plants, John going to more distant corners, which Charles's want of leisure prevented. And it is wonderful how much country they thus traversed together, with the little time Charles had at command from his close confinement to work; as John proudly said, "we missed naething a' roond." It is only another example of the perennial truth, of the will finding or creating the way; for in this, as in all else, enthusiastic will wields the might of the conqueror before whom every valley is exalted, every mountain and hill are made low, the crooked straight, and rough places plain.

But Charles had no spare time at all, except what was stolen from sleep, for he has always been too conscientious to steal even a single hour from the service of his employer, carrying this to an absurd extent, by refusing to take liberty when allowed it. Neither of these students grudged their sleeping hours for the flowers; and Charles was obliged occasionally to use the Sunday for more distant journeys to new spots where rarer species grew. John used at first to accompany him a good deal on that day, but by-and-by less frequently; for he became more rigid in regard to Sabbath observance, and having more leisure, he had not the same reasons for employing that day as Charles had, beyond his reluctance to allow his friend to

go alone. And who shall say that these two men, deeply religious and God-fearing as they were by constitution and conviction, did wrong in thus employing the sacred day in the study of God's great book of Nature, twin volume as it is, and as it ought to be with even the most orthodox, to that of Revelation?

Their self-denying eagerness in pursuit of plants was exemplary; as their friend the shoemaker strongly put it, they were simply "wild" about them—a description which shows the impression their enthusiasm produced on their non-scientific neighbours. They would often leave Whitehouse before daybreak, and walk up Donside to the Bridge of Alford, scanning every cranny for specimens, and return to the house before the housekeeper was out of bed, after going at least ten miles of a morning before breakfast. On one occasion, they slept together at "the big house," and set out next morning at four o'clock, "before the screech o' day," carrying bread and cheese and a bottle of milk as their simple lunch. They went across Tough, by the high ground bounding the Vale on the south; down into the valley of the Leochel at Skuttery Mill; up by Droughsburn, John's future residence; past Dorsell and Asloun to the Don beyond Breda;* and back along the plain to the farm of Guise, in Tough, where they were entertained to tea by "the goodwife," the sister of a friend; and home again that night very late. They were not rewarded, however, by the discovery of many new plants that day, after a tramp over hill and dale of at least thirty miles. Another journey led them right over the Forest of Corennie, sixteen hundred

* Pronounced *Bredáh*. It has no connection with the continental town of the name, but is probably a corruption of Braidhaugh.

feet above the sea, which bounds the Vale above the kirk of Tough ; down into the valley of the Dee ; past the church of Lumphanan, to the Loch of Auchlossan, since drained, close by the Dee. There they got the pretty green plant, with small yellow papilionaceous flowers and sharp thorns, called needle greenwood, petty whin, or carlin's spur (*Genista Anglica*), which had longer needles or spurs than they ever saw ; "bad," as John remarked, "for bar' feet." One day they ascended the Red Hill near the crest of Corennie Forest, above the farm of Tillyfour—since famous under Mr. McCombie for his fine breed of polled cattle, visited by the Queen in 1866. Here Charles dropped his copy of Dickie's "Flora," which he had purchased at its first issue ; and, notwithstanding diligent search then and afterwards, he never saw it again—a loss which he could ill afford, and which distressed him much for its own sake, as an old companion and trusty guide in their researches. John, however, purchased a copy shortly after, for they could not do without it, and thus their progress was not impeded.

They explored minutely the whole course of the Don, from below Monymusk up to Kildrummy, with its splendid castellated ruins, and on to Towie, where they found the dwarf herbaceous bourtree or elder (*Sambucus ebulus*).

But the part they frequented most was the mountainous region behind Whitehouse, which bounds the Vale on the east, already so often mentioned when John lived on its eastern slopes by Paradise. Here they would go, past the fine erect monolith of gneiss called Luath's Stone, where a son of Macbeth's is said to lie buried, to the top of the Green Hill, above thirteen hundred feet. This commands a view

reputed to be unrivalled in the district, from the sea beyond Aberdeen, by Lochnagar, up to Ben Macdhuì and the Buck; northwards, to the Tap o' Noth and the country beyond the Foudland Hills, round to Benachie and its wooded and cultivated eastern slopes. From Green 'Hill, they would climb to the top of Cairn William, down to John's old scenes by the Don, which they crossed by fords at several places well known to them, on their way to the dearly loved Benachie, every foot of which they knew. Still more frequently they walked to it, by the beautiful Brig o' Don, and the castellated Castle Forbes, nestling amidst its woods.

Benachie is not very rich in plants, except on its lower reaches. On the higher, in a moss close by the "Mither tap," they found the cloudberry, or mountain strawberry (*Rubus chamæmorus*), a rather uncommon sub-Alpine plant, with a large, pale-yellow, luscious fruit, the only rarer species they ever found there. One Sunday, they ascended the mountain, and continued their journey, to fulfil filial and social duties, by going down its eastern face; Charles visiting his old parents, whom he now saw too seldom, then resident at Burnside of Braco, and calling in the evening for John, who had seen his old friends at Longfolds. They then climbed Cairn William together on the way back to their quiet homes, in the dewy dusk, amidst the glories of the Sabbath sunset, and the adoration and thankfulness of their deepest hearts.

But pleasant beyond speech as were these wide and wild wanderings, they were equalled, if not surpassed, by the delights of deciphering the plants during the long cosy winter evenings, by the big kitchen fire at Whitehouse. It was then that the two set themselves to this happy task,

with all the vigorous enthusiasm born of love for the plants and for each other. John was so eager that, winter as it was, he threw off his shoes and coat when the examination began, and worked in his shirt-sleeves and stockings!

There is nothing like enthusiastic devotion to a subject to raise the bodily temperature. I knew two gentlemen, the keenest of chess-players, who, even at a drawing-room party, where they would retire to a window recess to play, regularly took off their coats before the game was half done, while the heated perspiration stood on their brows! Need we wonder at Duncan?

So very earnest were these two students that, as both have told me, often did the dawn surprise them at their happy toil! At that time, Charles did the chief part of the work of examination and arrangement, while John put them neatly on paper according to their classes; and, as Charles says, "deftly did he do it." He used the clean-washed floor to lay them on, the table being occupied by Charles.

Often, while thus employed, they were so devotedly absorbed in the work that hours would pass without a single word being exchanged between them; for, as Charles says, their "heads and hearts were too full!" And who that has engaged, especially with a dear friend, in the same delightful work among the plants gathered during the day, under the blue sky and amidst the countless charms of earth and air, has not known the raptures of like enthusiasm by the blazing fire, and cannot vividly recall many a blissful hour so spent as amongst the happiest of his life?

Would that such pursuits were commoner than they are amongst our people! Few things would do more to

raise the intelligence and moral tone of the country, and save the memory many a blot and the conscience many a pang. What an influence might not our schools exercise in kindling a love of science and such employment of leisure! They have it in their power, and it is devoutly to be hoped that they will gradually rise to their high possibilities.

The winter of 1837-8, which followed that of their first meeting, was one of unusual severity, long known as "the winter of the big storm," when the snow was so deep that all trace of roads and fields was obliterated, and the snow lay long into the succeeding spring before it melted. It was similar to the winter of last year, when John died. The fierceness and cold of 1880-1, while draining out the waning strength of the old man, sent his memory back to those of more than forty years before, when he struggled through the deep snow night after night, to see his friend Charles and continue the study of the plants. But Duncan never was a man to be easily daunted at difficulty or hard work, and his enthusiasm in his new study soon became an overmastering passion.

When John left Whitehouse late at night, to retire to his bed above his loom at Netherton, Charles always made a point of accompanying him to "the yetts," or entrance gates, of the policies of Whitehouse. On the way, they were always engaged in ardent talk about the plants they had been working at, or about other subjects that interested them. When the gates were reached, the argument was rarely concluded; and, even when it was, John could not allow Charles to return alone; so he must needs go back with his friend. But he went so far that Charles had to

return with him. And thus, under the charms of companionship and discourse, they often traced and retraced their steps for hours together past midnight. It is to be hoped that the reader has frequently indulged in such happy, peripatetic philosophising and folly!

One night they had been talking of some plants which Charles possessed but John did not, and Charles mentioned one he had seen growing luxuriantly near the Loch of Skene. This lake lies on the side of the turnpike which runs from Alford to Aberdeen, about two-thirds of the distance from Whitehouse to the city. John got him to describe the plant and its locality minutely. On account of their usual meanderings above and below the gates, they parted after twelve. Next morning, when the gardener rose to begin the work of the day, he was not a little surprised to see John waiting for him at the door, in a state of beaming excitement, with a plant in his hand. Before Charles could express his astonishment, John handed it to him with a bright light in his eye, and, in a quiet, subdued voice, that scarcely concealed the secret victorious satisfaction he felt, said, "Weel, Charlie, isn't that hit?"

It was the very plant they had been talking of when they parted! The eager little man had there and then set out along the high-road in the dark; through the pass of Tillyfourie, a steep bit of climbing; on by the inn of Liggerdale, a frequent resting-place for the night with travellers from above Alford; and past the woods of Dunecht on the right, since famous for their astronomical proprietor, till at last he reached the Loch of Skene. Here, at the first peep of day, he searched for and found the plant he sought, and with his well-won treasure returned to Whitehouse, to sur-

prise his friend with it in the morning. It was a stiff midnight walk of at least thirty miles.

John's delight in returning to Charles, after a more distant ramble, with his bundle of treasures, was something beautiful to see, as Charles has told me. His joy would burst out, at the moment of meeting, in some characteristic exclamation, such as "Sal, lad, I hae fund something this time!" He would then produce his specimens in succession, naming them not unfrequently, especially in his earlier efforts, by wonderful transformations of the technical terms, which raised many a merry laugh, and recounting, in humorous detail, the adventures he had had in search of them.

O the pure blessedness, the quiet ecstasy of such simple tastes as were pursued by these humble students of flowers and lovers of nature! In very truth, to them Gray's joys of convalescence were the delights of daily health:

"The meanest floweret of the vale,
The simplest note that swelled the gale,
The common sun, the air, the skies,
To them were opening paradise."

CHAPTER XVI.

DIFFICULTIES, DUMPS AND DIMPLES IN THE JOINT STUDIES.

BUT all was not smooth sailing with these self-taught botanists, notwithstanding their enthusiasm.

Having to pursue the science at that time altogether unassisted, the difficulties they had frequently to encounter in trying to decipher some of the rarer and more peculiar species were very great, increased, of course, by the want of the appliances of more favoured botanical students. It took them two whole years, for instance, to discover the Grass of Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*). This, the unbotanical reader should understand, is no grass at all, but a plant with a beautiful large white flower, which is very hard for young botanists to make out. This arises from different causes, but chiefly from the existence of certain stiff hairs symmetrically arranged within the petals in elliptical curves, bearing on their summits semi-transparent yellowish globes, very like stamens, which they are not.

Charles Black had found the plant before John came, beside a pond near the gardener's house at Castle Forbes, and was charmed with its exquisite beauty; for, along with the European winter-green (*Trientalis Europæa*), it is one of the prettiest of our paler wild flowers, well deserving its poetical name. He tried it frequently and failed, as many

an amateur has done, for it is so peculiar that it forms a genus by itself amongst the Saxifrages. At last, however, he succeeded one wet Sunday, after renewed careful examination, proudly announcing the discovery to John next day ; and the *Parnassia* carried to both of them, independently altogether of its great beauty, a certain delightful charm, to be understood only by those who have tasted the like joy of discovery after long protracted search in any scientific pursuit.

One of the chief difficulties these poor students had, was to obtain the requisite text-books for advancing in the subject, and identifying the rarer species when found—for microscopes and other instrumental appliances were out of the question, and never were possessed by them. “Galpin” was good as far as it went, but it was too brief, and required much previous technical knowledge. The best and most workable book then existing on British plants was the “British Flora” of Jackson Hooker, since deservedly dignified as Sir William. The first edition appeared in 1830, four years before Charles Black came to Whitehouse, though Hooker’s “Flora Scotica,” which they never then saw, had been issued in 1821. But the work was at a ransom price for them, being in two volumes, at something like a guinea apiece. It was a vain hope, to all appearance, that they should ever see it, and still less possess a copy.

One day, Charles met the eccentric innkeeper of Mayfield, who had a great respect for the gardener, and they entered into conversation. Davidson said he understood that he liked Botany. His son Geordie—the mention of whose name drew moisture to the old man’s eye—had got a big book about Botany, which the father knew nothing of ;

would he like to see it? Certainly he would, and he was obliged to him for mentioning it. He called alone soon after, and found the book to be the long-desired Hooker! What a treasure, and what a God-send! So it seemed to the grateful young man, provided almost by special providence. Charles not only saw it, but got a loan of it; but for a short time only, for the old man cherished it too dearly for his son's sake, who had been his special favourite, to risk its possible loss.

This son of Davidson's, who had evidently been above the average of his class at that time, had been apprenticed as a gardener at Castle Forbes, and had, like our two friends, entered on the scientific study of Botany. After completing his time at home, he had gone to a situation in England, where the gentleman in whose garden he worked, observing his studious habits, and wishing to assist him in such laudable and unusual pursuits, had generously presented him with both of Hooker's volumes, then just issued. The lad, however, was weakly in constitution, and had to return home to his parents at Mayfield, bringing with him the precious work, along with others he had purchased. Here he soon died of consumption, in the flower of his age, leaving his books behind him. These his father treasured as mementoes of his dead son, and kept carefully locked up in a drawer.

If our two earnest students could only gain regular access to these lockfast volumes! That turned out to be less difficult than they thought; for the old man, when he learnt their desire, was only too pleased and proud to see them put any value on what his son had prized, and no one else seemed to care for.

So John and Charles used to go to Mayfield—a pretty and auspicious name, suggesting a happy spring to an abundant harvest of knowledge—and over a gill of whisky, purchased for the good of the house and as a sort of return for the kindness shown them, as well as, no doubt, for their own entertainment after the labours of the day, got a look at the books as long and as often as they wished. And many a sixpence was spent, many a long and ardent hour passed by the two men, poring over these hidden treasures at botanical lore, and many a plant was deciphered by their help.

But what of their morals, in such a place and with such potent draughts? Their enthusiasm was an all-powerful protection, *and there is none greater*. Would that this potent and delightful safeguard of our young men, an ardent love for nature and for science during the critical period of their lives, were better understood by them and their educators, and earnest steps taken to put them in possession of it! It would preserve and purify the youth of our country, more even than religion itself at such an age, and it would redeem their lives from many a stain and their memories from many a sorrow.

Charles was himself able, when he went to Edinburgh, to purchase the first volume of Hooker, for which he paid eleven shillings, and he got the second from a fellow-gardener. These he brought back with him to Whitehouse when he returned there in 1840, while Davidson still kept the inn at Mayfield. There they were at John's service, and they became their consulting cyclopædia in all botanical difficulties.

Some time after this, in 1852, the year Duncan went

to Droughsburn, the innkeeper accompanied a surviving son and his family to America, and, for some reason, all the books were sold. John Duncan was at the sale to watch the fate of the memorable volumes, and, if possible, to rescue them from unappreciative hands; and they were knocked down to him for the large sum of—one shilling! Thus each volume brought the price of one of the costly libations they used to pour to Bacchus—or shall we not rather say to Flora or Minerva?—to obtain a sight of them!

Fortune does occasionally indulge her wayward fancy to dispense poetical justice, if she does not make abundant recompense, sometimes almost humorous, for bygone unkindness, as in this instance. Certainly, the reader will agree, the books could not have fallen into better hands. John got them strongly bound in calf—a pardonable extravagance—and they were carefully preserved in his chest all his days, a proud possession and a pleasant memory.

After Davidson's departure, in 1852, Mayfield ceased to be an inn, and not a stone of this old haunt of our botanists now remains; the thatched cottage having been replaced by a bran-new slated house, and the present trees that adorn it being recent like the dwelling.

But in their early botanical struggles, our students did not sail in the smoothest of seas even inside Whitehouse itself, less from the difficulties of steering amongst the greater rocks of the "big folks" themselves, than from those persistently thrown in their way by a woman. When the family went to Aberdeen for the winter, the place was left in charge of a vigorous housekeeper and Charles Black,

and these two remained alone in that great empty mansion during the whole winter and spring. It was a most reprehensible system, carried out, if not in utter disregard of moral considerations, at least in most culpable thoughtlessness—but it is one even yet not at all uncommon, involving consequences which are not seldom painful.

The kitchen, in which these two guardians of the place were then obliged to spend the greater part of the day together, is in the west end of the sunk flat, to which a long flight of stone steps leads down at the back. It is a square, whitewashed room of considerable size, with stone floor, low roof, and large old-fashioned fireplace. It is lighted by a window, above the level of the eye, which looks to the front, and round which are clustered some of the plants that grow in the plot outside. Immediately off the kitchen, close to the back door, there is a small closet, in which Charles then slept. A passage runs from the kitchen along the front of the house, leading to other apartments on the same floor, where was the housekeeper's room, and to the hall and house above.

The housekeeper was considerably older than the youthful gardener, and though she could be pleasant when she liked, she was not blessed with the sweetest disposition. She was bilious in look and temperament and unattractive in her style. For some reason, best known to herself, she by-and-by took a moody dislike to her companion, and annoyed him in a hundred ways, as only a woman in such circumstances can, alternated with kindly offices. She might have made his life miserable; but as it was, from his inexhaustible humour and spirit, high health, and the grateful relief afforded

by his botanical studies, while often making him very uncomfortable, she mainly succeeded in only rendering herself permanently unhappy. It would take a long chapter to detail the numberless petty annoyances to which she subjected him, in angry speeches and long moody silences, in preparing or neglecting his food, and in attacking like vulnerable points in the most philosophical armour. But, on the whole, she missed her mark as far as regarded the peace-loving, hilarious, and generally imperturbable object of her ill-natured attentions. John often told Charles that he should not stand it—*he* wouldn't. "Sal man, Charlie," says he, "she widna do wi' me as she does wi' you; I would sune pat a pin in her nose!"—a figure of speech drawn from the custom of fastening a wooden pin in the nose of an obstreperous pig, to keep her from burrowing where she should not, and scriptural in every point except its substitution of a pin for a hook.

The weaver, as a friend of the gardener's, was no favourite with the housekeeper. She said they dirtied her kitchen with their weeds and big boots, and so John had to leave his at the door and enter on his stocking soles; and Charles did the same. In this way, all their botanical work had to be carried on shoeless, even in mid-winter. When their specimens had been all duly spread out on the table and floor, and they were just in the very middle of an earnest evening's study, at an absurdly early hour she would insist on their stopping, and at once proceed to extinguish the fire, raking it out to the last embers, and leaving no materials in the house to rekindle it with. She would then retire to her room at the other

end of the house, the only available candle in her hand, and leave the dumfounded men speechless in the dark—and this not once, but often! For the sake of peace, they submitted till she was safely gone, when they brought out a hidden store of sticks, with which they relighted the fire after they thought her asleep, and by which they continued their labours for hours, till they were completed, under the red light of gleaming fir-wood from the moss, or of a candle hoarded for the emergency. Sometimes, however, she would insist on their going to bed, and John would either have to retire with Charles to his room off the kitchen, or go outside to wait. When silence reigned and the light was extinguished in her apartment, they would softly emerge from the bedroom, or Charles would give John the signal to enter, in order to prosecute their forbidden studies. On occasions, they would adjourn to the greenhouse to seek a few hours' peace. But space would fail to tell a tithe of the petty persecutions to which Charles individually, and the two together, were thus subjected through jealousy and bad temper.

It was impossible, at that period, to quench the fire of Charles Black's hilarity and light-hearted animal life, which streamed even through the fog and frost, rain and storm of this female Boreas. Happily for him, his spirits were irrepressible, and even astonished the more sedate and solemn weaver, and often drew forth his remonstrances. John's unconscious drollery and quaint, old-fashioned ways were at times too much for his young companion's risibility, and he would laugh so heartily that he had to roll on the floor to relieve his feelings. He was always a boisterous laugh, and John would sagely remark that if

"fowk didna ken 'im, they would think 'im daft!" Often in the middle of a silent inspection of plants, Charles would all at once give a sudden roar, "just," as he said, "to let the steam off;" or he would burst out with instantaneous clamour into a song, or into some humorous quotation from Burns, whom he had at his finger ends, or from some other favourite poet; all to the utter bewilderment of quiet John, who could only express himself in "O Charlie! O man, man!"

Then, merely to vary the monotony of the counting of petals and stamens, and the incessant iteration of dodecandria, polyadelphia, heptagynia, and like fluent botanical sesquipedalia, Charles would hold mock arguments with the good weaver, on such a question as whether weavers were entitled to keep the "thrums" or remains of the yarn, an immemorial bone of contention started to try a weaver's temper. These his earnest friend would set himself to prove on logical grounds they had a right to, and would argue solemnly on the subject, for which Charles did not care a pin-point; while the internal volcano of mirthful fun could hardly be kept from boisterous coruscations. Still farther to try him after all his arguments, he would hum "a stroud,"* while working at the plants, from a radical ballad called the "Yellow-waived Weivers o' Huntly"—

"Their sash was o' the stowan hank,
That day they walked through Huntly!"

This referred to their procession, along with other trades, in that ancient town, on the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832. John would gravely remark that "it was guid for

* A popular song.

him that he didna live at the roadside, else they would tak' him to the asylum!"

Sometimes when Charles was reading the Tory paper, the *Aberdeen Constitutional*, he would interpolate, of his own creation, some of the most outrageous Tory sentiments, to "touch up" John's radicalism; for a time with thorough success. But these new passages John at length wished to see with his own eyes, like the unbeliever he was!

At first, John brought his boots, when he took them off, and placed them by the fender to dry, especially after a long tramp through the moss and heather seeking plants. Ere long they would strangely disappear from that position, though Lizzie, the housekeeper, had not touched them, however much she disliked these capacious "boats," rather than boots, with which the weaver protected his extremities. John then tried to hide them outside for safety, and when it was time to retire he sought them there, but found them not; and he was fain to go home barefooted, till Charles would take pity on him and produce them, amidst John's kindly remonstrances and advices to give up such pranks, which in a man, and much more in a botanist, he said, were scarcely to be commended.

Nor was John's bonnet—a broad blue Tam o' Shanter he wore when not in state with his long "tile"—allowed to remain unmolested more than his boots. It would unaccountably disappear when parting time came, Charlie not being always the culprit, and poor John had sometimes to go home bonnetless in consequence of this style of practical joking, then rampant in country places. By-and-

by, John's instinct on entering, when he had untied his brogues, was to pocket his bonnet, to prevent possible theft; but even clever pocket-picking was not unknown in Whitehouse, a thing perhaps not very difficult to perpetrate during the weaver's absorbed moments when busy with the flowers.

Many of John's transformations of the sounding technicalities with which Botany abounds were simply irresistible, and raised a hundred bursts of laughter, which *would not* be suppressed. So comical were they sometimes in their new forms, that even the dark-browed house-keeper was fain herself to smile; yet, as Charles says, "I was aften little better at them mysel'."

John was always a strenuous, over-earnest debater, especially on ecclesiastical and political subjects. In the midst of his gravest arguments, when his temper was beginning to wax a little warm, Charles, who was a phrenologist and could "read bumps," used to rise, and putting his hand behind John's ears where energy is lodged, and on his occiput where self-esteem is located—both of which in John were high—he would solemnly declare, "O John, John! ye canna help it, canna help it!" John, who had at that time had the religious horror long entertained of this subject in the country, would stand up at once and push his hands away, exclaiming, "Na, na na! gae 'wa wi' ye, Charlie. Nane o' that noo; I'll hae nane o't. It's sinfu', man; it's sinfu'!"—a common opinion then entertained regarding phrenology amongst the orthodox in Scotland. But, overcome by Charles's intense comicality, every annoyance was quickly dispersed, and John would break into laughter in spite of himself.

Thus were dangerous arguments wisely terminated, and gathering clouds dispelled, by gay, good-hearted humour.

The hardness of botanical work at Whitehouse, with all its joys, was also not unfrequently relieved by the genialities of friendly visits; for man's social instincts cannot be satisfied even with the delights of intellectual enthusiasm. Charles's relish of friendly society was then very strong, and John's was greater than his retiring self-containedness would indicate. Friends dropped in not unfrequently, to talk over the news of the day, especially the stirring questions that ushered in Disruption times, and the various social and political movements rising in the country. Plants were then thrown aside, for few of the visitors were botanists. Games were started, and very frequently, those "high jinks" were played in which youthful vigour and fun seem naturally to seek relief, especially during the stormy winter of 1838, when outdoor exercise became impossible.

The old-fashioned game of "catch the ten" gave pleasant excitement to many a quartette. John was generally Charles's weak but willing partner, and the house-keeper sometimes condescended to relax her severities by taking a hand—for in Aberdeen "the deil's books," as the innocent cards are called in puritanic Scotland, never were viewed with the instinctive horror of other over-Calvinistic regions. The big house would then ring with the sallies of good-humoured fun and kindly poking at each other's foibles. Sober John, earnest in play as in work, received perhaps the larger share of such attentions. But the philosopher, sad with silent griefs they knew not of, could

unbend under the genial sunshine of the heart, and could give thrust for thrust, sally for sally. He could sing his song with the best, though the organ pipes were not of the clearest, and even discourse sweet music for the dance. This he did on the Jew's harp, which he carried when he went from home fastened on a cork, with a slit cut at the end for the thin tongue, and which he used to keep in salt to preserve it from rust—for he was careful and methodical in the minutest item of his life.

At times, John did become not a little cross, and, from his painful history, it is a wonder his temper was not worse than it was. But Charles "never fell oot wi' 'im, and," as he added with generous appreciation, "I never had ony occasion." Sometimes, as he confessed, he would give John a sharp retort, but he was immediately sorry for it, and said so; for, as he felt and still feels, "John's love for me was an enduring love."

These reminiscences are sufficient to prove that, as John sometimes phrased it, Charles was at that time "a gae sportsman chappie" and "awfu' merry." But then he was, as he said, "a steady honest man," and "meant and said and did nae hairm," for "I aye liked Charlie Black, and sae did he me."

As for Charles, he would not have hurt even a hair of John's head, much less ruffled his feelings of set purpose to pain him; his love and respect for him were too deep. As he says, "a more truly honest man than John Duncan never lived. I did try him at times, from sheer fun and suppressed steam, but the dear, kind soul seldom got angry with me on these occasions, but would in general only remonstrate with me on what he considered my daftness!"

How happy such confidential intimacy, and how human these simple details! Too earnest men like John would sometimes be inclined to censure even the sun for dancing on a dimpling pool, or laughing on a waterfall, or sparkling on a leaf spray. But what would life be, if the sense of the ludicrous and incongruous were banished from it?

CHAPTER XVII.

JOHN'S EARLY EXPERIENCES IN HIS OWN BOTANICAL RAMBLES.

JOHN DUNCAN resided at Netherton, in Tough, for thirteen years in all, from 1836 to 1849, varied by visits to friends at a distance and by harvesting in different districts.

His botanical enthusiasm soon became too deep, and his practical command of the subject too great, to require the presence of his "father in Botany," as he gratefully called his young teacher, who left the Vale temporarily for some time and finally in 1842. His love for it had already risen to the strength and permanence of a life-long passion.

He now set himself to complete his survey of the Vale and its surrounding valleys and hills. Guided greatly by Dickie's "Flora," he also began a systematic examination of Aberdeenshire, commencing with the coast line, which he explored from Belhelvie, north of Aberdeen, to Portlethen, south of it; going up the Dee by the Loch of Drum to Tarland, and above it; and conquering the valley of the Don up to near its source at Corgarf Castle, from which he obtained one of his earliest finds of sub-Alpine plants unknown on the lower grounds, the *Vaccinium oxycoccos* or

cranberry, which he brought home in triumph, announcing the discovery to Charles in a wonderful transformation of the strange-looking name, and which they then counted a treasure.

His botanical explorations in his own neighbourhood were the astonishment of the people. Being very short-sighted, the little man was obliged to grope along the ground in order to see the plants, and when this was done in bogs and mosses, it was not very pleasant work. But no place was too wet, no peat moss too dirty, no boghole too disagreeable for the enthusiast, who was often seen crawling along on hands and knees in such places till his neighbours really thought him becoming demented. To secure time for these outdoor pursuits, he used to get up in the early morning while others were asleep, even in that early-rising community, or work at his loom late at night, to complete his day's "stent" at the loom; for, with all his love of rambling, he never neglected his daily business, though he never made money like some of his contemporaries at the loom, as his friends Hunter and Cameron did at Netherton.

One morning in June, John rose before the lark to carry home to a customer, who lived at some distance, a web that he had just finished. Having delivered it, and got a kindly breakfast from the good lady of the house to speed him on his way homewards, he left the high-road and descended into the Moss of Tillyfourie, near the head of the pass through which the railway now runs, above Netherton, then an extensive peat bog, now greatly reclaimed for the plough. He wished to examine the numerous aquatic plants that grew in its black haggs and pools. He wore his tall hat, as he always did when visiting, and carried a

small homely, portable herbarium under his arm, and a stick in his hand, both of the last being his constant companions in his travels. In one of the deep peat holes filled with water that abounded there, he observed floating on its surface a somewhat rare plant, in beautiful flower, then found only at one or two spots in the Vale, stations that have disappeared with the mosses in which they grew. This was the Greater bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris*), a botanical and physiological curiosity with interesting habits.

During the greater part of the year, it lies in a confused mass upon, but quite detached from, the bottom of the pool in which it lives. It is held down by the utricles or bladderets that give it its name, which are then filled with heavy mucus. When flowering time arrives in June, this mucus becomes replaced by a kind of light gas, which bears the plant to the surface, to enable its golden-yellow flowers—which stand erect half a foot above the water—to feel the sun and air, and fructify their seeds. This done, the mucus re-forms in the bladders and sinks the plant again to the bottom, where the ripened seeds are deposited in the soft mud, to propagate the race when the parent has died. These little bladders are otherwise very curious, opening inwards with an elastic valve, and catching water-beetles, which it is said to digest and consume. Like the *Vallisneria* and other plants, this species is often adduced as a striking illustration of the wonderful adaptations of nature for specific ends.*

* This plant also once grew, as Mr. J. M. B. Taylor informs me, in the old moss at Balfuig, near Alford, where also was found the smaller species, the *U. minor*. But this moss is now cultivated land.

There happened to be in the Tillyfourie moss that day a large number of people engaged in cutting peats, who saw John leave the road and enter the bog. Thinking, like practical folks, that a traveller with a tall hat could have done so only to shorten his way, and seeing him disappear from view in an old part of the moss honeycombed with dangerous peat hags, one of the workers kindly sent a lad to show him a better path, and, if necessary, to help him on his way. The boy found him on the edge of a deep black pool, hat off, and stick in hand, trying with its crooked end to draw the floating plant towards him. The botanist was so intent that he did not notice the lad, who, coming close to the pool, shouted at the pitch of his voice, after trying in vain to draw his attention once or twice before, "Hey, man! I was bidden tell ye, ye wu'd get a better road oot this way." Startled at the sudden cry, for he thought himself alone, John raised himself to reply, and with the quick movement sank ankle-deep in the mud. He told him that he was not seeking a road, and then resumed his novel fishing. When the boy returned to his companions, he was asked if he had put the man on the right way. "Na, na," said he; "he's a queer chap yon. He doesna want to ken a gweed road; and yonder he is, up till the knees in watter, working in a peat hole wi' his stick!" "The man maun be daft," said his father; and so said all the rest, who dropped work to gaze in the direction in which John had gone out of sight. Their opinion of his sanity was only confirmed when he speedily reappeared on the bank above the pool, with the dripping, dirty weed in the one hand, and his hat, bundle and staff in the other. They were, however, greatly relieved when they saw him walk

quietly away in this curious guise, the workers pitying his madness or folly, he proud beyond expression of his treasure. But so frail are the flowers of this plant that they would scarcely survive till he reached the edge of the moss. There he pressed them as well as he could in the paper he carried for the purpose, and he found, when dried, that their golden colour had been replaced by a dark purple hue.

Sometimes his search for plants was accompanied by no little danger. In one of his longer journeys from Netherton, he visited the Loch of Drum, near the ancient castle of Drum, to the east of Banchory, on the Dee. He had been told by Charles Black that it was a station for that magnificent plant, the white water-lily (*Nymphæa alba*), of which he had not yet secured a specimen.

This exquisite species, as all know who have tried to pluck its alabaster blossom, is shy and retiring, like the modest nymphs after whom Linnæus poetically named it, and keeps well off from the shore, generally out of reach of the spoiler. Devoted also to solitude and peace, it frequents only calm river pools and placid lakes, its flat leaves smoothing the surface where they grow, like the ancient halcyon, even in a stiff breeze, as if in return for their shelter. The root stocks require a soft, deep soil, so that they are found only in places with a very muddy bottom, which acts as a further protection to the plants and makes them very difficult to reach from the shore.

John was once asked by William Mortimer if he had visited the Loch of Drum, then famous for its plants. "Ay," says he; "and, mair than that, I hae been in't!" It happened on this wise. John found the lilies in full and

tempting flower, and, like Cowper on a similar occasion on the banks of the Ouse,

“ Their beauties he intent surveyed,
And one he wished his own.
With staff extended far, he sought
To steer it close to land,
But still the prize, though nearly caught,
Escaped his eager hand.”

Having no kindly spaniel, like Beau, to bring it to his master, John did what the gentle poet would never have thought of doing, and would have been shocked to attempt had the idea occurred to him; he stripped himself of his nether integuments—called by him “his breeks”—and waded into the loch! It was a risk he should not have run on an unknown muddy shore like that of the Loch of Drum. He soon felt the bottom to be none of the safest, but loth to give up when he had gone so far, he advanced, and had just clutched the prize, when he sank irretrievably in the soft, tenacious mud, every step only increasing his danger. He would undoubtedly have perished, had not his involuntary cries attracted the attention of a gentleman who was fishing from a boat at some distance. Pulling with all his might, he was just in time to save the too venturous and ardent botanist from a watery grave, and bring him soaking, but grateful, to the banks.

After John had related the adventure to his friend, with great dramatic detail, William naturally remarked, “But ye had lost yer lily aifter a’.” “Na, na,” at once replied the mettlesome little man, “I brocht it along wi’ me!” speaking in tones that revealed no end of the courage and will that formed such strong features in his character. He had never relinquished his hold of what he sought even

in extremis, and he brought the plant, leaf and blossom, home with him to Netherton!

The Loch of Drum, which still covers eighty-five acres, is now little better than a morass, fringed with birch and alder bushes, and is not more than four feet in depth at any place. At John's visit, it formed a very different scene, and was a deep lake surrounded by picturesque wood, now cut down.

The danger he had run made a strong and lasting impression on Duncan, and he naturally and firmly resented any flippant allusions to the subject, which some of his acquaintances were mischievously inclined to make, for he felt too serious for joking and too grateful for fun.

When Mr. John Taylor was arranging his herbarium for presentation to the Aberdeen University, some months before John's death, he came on a broken leaf of the water-lily, the rest of it and the whole of the flower having been eaten by the moths, in spite of care and protective camphor. That was all that remained of the memorable plant, gathered forty years before, which the old man spoke solemnly of, as a soldier would of a sword that might have killed him had he not been rescued. The leaf was too much destroyed to be sent to the university with the rest. But it was a pity it was not sent, however imperfect, if only as a proof and memento of pluck that every student might be proud to emulate.

During this same journey, John brought home a root of the Royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*), which he obtained from the banks of the stream that flowed from the Loch of Park, a habitat from which it has since been rooted out.*

* It is mentioned, along with the water-lily and other rare aquatic

This he gave to his friend, the schoolmaster of Coulterneuk, in whose garden it remained for years, till Mr. Forbes presented it to the Rev. Mr. Milne, parish minister of Tough. In the splendid rockery at the manse—one of the best of its kind, worth going far to see—it still flourishes in luxuriant beauty. It is a specimen specially prized by Mr. Milne, because it once belonged to the old botanist, whom he knew and respected but thought peculiar, and because he says that that truly kingly fern is now exterminated from the county. So that our hero unexpectedly did royal service for the royal plant that day.

In this rockery, there long grew a specimen of the curious moonwort (*Botrychia lunaria*), carried by John in an old napkin with his usual care. It was found by him in the valley of the Leochel, near Droughsburn, where the minister called on him to ask him to get a specimen, as it could not be got about Tough. The plant died, however, in less than a year, the species being somewhat fastidious as to soil and situation.

John's ardour and endurance were something quite remarkable. He was frequently out on the hills all night, coming home in the early morning when his neighbours were getting up. One of his friends recalls having seen him pass his house at dawn, after a night of storm and rain, drenched to the skin, but blithe and joyous, from having succeeded in obtaining some rarer species over the Coreen Hills, north of the Bridge of Alford. Several

plants, as found there, in the list published in 1842 in the Statistical account of the parish of Drumoak, by the Rev. Dr. Corbet, then parish minister. Dr. Dickie mentions that in 1860 it had become extinct near the Loch of Park.

remember his being out all night on Benachie, when he lived at Auchleven at its northern base. If he had an unusually long journey before him, to some wild or unfrequented region, he used to set out very early in the morning, with bread and cheese in his pockets, his portable plant-preserving sheets under his arm, his broad bonnet on his head, and his constant staff in his hand. He carried also a bag of oatmeal, which he used to pour out in quantities on any flat stone and make a kind of "crowdie" of, with pure water from the rippling brook—the plainest and simplest of fare, but thoroughly substantial and nourishing. He would remain in the open air all that day and the following night, and then return home early next morning, to begin his weaving and make up for lost time. When absent for longer periods, where he had no house to shelter him in solitary spots whither his explorations often led him, he has frequently "slept the furth,"* as one of his friends expressed it in local phrase, that is, under the heavens, during the warmer nights of summer.

The distances walked on foot by our brother botanists may seem to some incredible, but, at that time, a journey that would now be quoted as memorable was thought nothing of, and was not uncommon. When on his travels to the south, Duncan would walk some thirty miles continuously, day after day, with no fatigue whatever. Many of his early friends used to accomplish fifty miles without thinking it anything to boast of. More than once, Charles Black left Whitehouse, and walked over Corennie Forest, down into the valley of the Dee, across the hill road

* That is, forth of or outside of a house.

by the Cairn-o-Mount, and on to Lochlee, near the source of the North Esk, to visit his wife's relatives, some forty or fifty hard mountainous miles, every step of them in one day; and then return the next or following day, with little trouble. Even in those pre-railroad days, John was famous for his speed and endurance on foot, one of his characteristics being an unusually rapid, light and long step in walking. As he used to say, "I was terrible fine i' the fit; aye a gran' walker"—so that in his day, he "gaed ower a lot o' grund, a terrible heap o' miles."

His wanderings in unfrequented places, often the best stations for plants, frequently subjected him to the charge of trespassing, and brought him into unpleasant contact with the guardians of game and forests, whose rude exercise of authority was often quite mollified by John's kindly humour, and their haughty anger turned into smiles. In more difficult circumstances, his mother wit was more than a match for these mighty custodiers of the moor.

Many of John's experiences in his botanical excursions were entertaining and humorous. On one occasion, John went a-plant-hunting along a burn-side not far from the church of Tough, with James Black, Charles's brother, who often accompanied him on such rambles. After gathering a large bundle, they began to return home. As they were passing a small farm above the stream along which they walked, they were hailed by the farmer, who knew John well, and who thought he would have some amusement for himself at the mild man's expense. They accepted the invitation. "Weel, Johnnie man," cried he, "ye hae been bot'neezin', as ye ca't. Come noo, lat's see the weyds ye hae gaithered i' yer hand there." They

were at once spread out on the ground, amidst the immoderate laughter of the farmer, an easy-going, stout young man of the true bucolic type. This brought out the rest of the family, including his brother, and his father, Joseph. While they stood round, the son took up the largest specimen in the group, one of the Knotted figwort, a handsome plant, with peculiar, dull-coloured flowers, and no very pleasant odour. "Noo, John," says he, "i' yer ain grand lingo, fat ca' ye that grite trailipus o' a thing?" "Knotty-rooted figwort, *Scrophularia nodosa*," replied John, all in one continuous run of knotted syllables, the Latin words being scarcely pronounced like an ancient Roman. "Fat, fat!" cried the dumfounded man, with bursting laughter; "fat said ye, man? Sic gibberish I never heard! Say't ower again." The strain was repeated in its long-drawn concatenation, and re-repeated at request, amidst the merriment of the whole assembly at the "lang-nibbit"* words, John smiling, and James joining in the irresistible mirth with heart and soul, as he tells.

Old Joseph, the father, till now a mere spectator, prided himself on his intelligence, having served his apprenticeship, as he often told, "in the heed boro' toon o' Aiberdeen." He determined to come to John's aid; affronted, as he said, that his son, "a grown man, was so confounded dull i' the uptak'."† "Though I'm noo an auld man o' near fowr score," remonstrated he, addressing his son, "I ken ilka wird the man's sayin'. Can ye no tak' tent to

* Long-nebbed, or long-beaked, applied to long-sounding words in Scotland, with picturesque expressiveness.

† Up-take, that is, power of taking up mentally, understanding.

fat's tauld ye, man?" The son completed the measure of his father's contempt by saying that he did not believe a word of what John had been saying. Taking from his mouth his cutty-pipe—which he had till then been smoking—and clearing his throat by spitting fiercely on the ground, while he gazed with evident anger on the round, rubicund, meaningless face of his son, the disgusted old man shouted out, "Do ye no ken fat the man says yet? It's *Scotch larchia Joseph's ear!* ye stupid gowk* that ye are, speering at John sae afen." Thinking that he had solved the problem once and for all, and silenced his son, he turned and entered the house, with a look of scorn at such stupidity being exhibited by a child of his.

The young man was speechless, awed by the learning of his father and rebuked by his angry disdain. No further questions were asked. The plants were speedily gathered up again, and the two botanists passed onwards, to ruminate and talk over the odd encounter, John laughing more than usual on the way homewards. When he called at Whitehouse that night, according to custom, to show the plants he had found, he told Charles the story "with great birr."† He never afterwards forgot the scene.

It is but a specimen of numberless similar encounters with his neighbours. They seldom got the best of it, however; though the apparent simplicity of the weaver was a never-failing provocative to bucolic wit and contemptuous ignorance.

* Gowk is the Scotch for cuckoo, of which it is the first syllable a little changed.

† Strength and glee combined. Another form of the word is *virr*, which suggests some possible relation to the root of the Latin *vis*, strength, and *vir*, a strong man.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FURTHER INTERCOURSE WITH CHARLES BLACK.

CHARLES BLACK left Whitehouse in 1838, after four years' residence, in prospect of a better situation at Bradford, in Yorkshire. As the new place required a married man, he took to himself a wife in his twenty-fifth year; for devotion to Botany had not dried up his affections, and he had found time at Whitehouse for both love-making and plant-gathering. His choice fell upon fair and sprightly Annie Gall, for some years house and lady's-maid to Mrs. Farquharson, of Whitehouse; Annie's tact and attentiveness being proved by her retaining that service so long. They were married in Aberdeen in July. As John Duncan said, "Chairlie got a guid wife—a fine reconcilin' woman," the turn of the characterisation evidently indicating painful memories of the reverse. Charles never reached England, however, for the situation there was filled up by its former occupant, who unexpectedly remained. He immediately removed with his young wife to Edinburgh, for the chief purpose of perfecting his knowledge of Botany, by getting employment, if he could, in the Botanic Gardens there. This he succeeded in obtaining before the close of the year, after enduring considerable privation from the want of work, then difficult to get. There his wages were only ten

shillings a week ; but to Charles the new chances of increased insight into Botany were more than money, which he has always had a tendency, perhaps, to under-estimate. During the previous trying time of forced idleness in business, but not in Botany, his good wife not only proved herself to be a thrifty and hard-working housekeeper, but a willing and efficient assistant in her husband's botanical studies—helping him to select, spread, iron, press, dry, and arrange the plants he gathered.

It is unnecessary to tell the reader that Charles Black took the fullest advantage of the rare opportunities he enjoyed in the Gardens. He speedily showed himself so capable and intelligent in the science, that he was employed to gather the plants required for illustrating the prelections of the Professor of Botany, with the additional advantages of hearing the lectures given to the students, and accompanying them in their outdoor excursions over the interesting botanical country that surrounds that most beautiful and exquisitely situated of cities.

In 1839, the year after Charles had settled there, John Duncan paid him a long-anticipated visit, going there from Dundee, where he had been harvesting. This was not the first time, however, that he had stayed in the capital, for he had been there before when he went through the Lothians to the harvest.

Far, far above all the lions of the town, interesting as Edinburgh is in sights and memories to stir the heart of every Scotchman, especially a patriot like John, was the garden down in Inverleith Row, known as the Royal Botanic. During all the time he was in town, John spent the whole or chief part of the day in that enchanted land, in

Edenic felicity, from early morn till dewy eve. Sometimes he did not even take time to go home with Charles for his food, bringing with him his old bag of oatmeal, which, in more primitive simplicity than the oldest gardener and his wife no doubt indulged, he ate with relish, moistened with water and sweetened with appetite. If the reader should imagine that John Duncan had no pride of appearance, judging from his odd, old-fashioned dress, he would be mistaken, for he was most particular regarding his personal looks and tidiness in clothes. Thinking his own home-made attire not fine enough for such an important occasion, he donned Charles's long-tailed surtout and vest, to look more, as he deemed it, like the time and place. In this change of apparel, he was, no doubt, quietly backed by Charles himself, for he wished the ancient-looking weaver, as became a friend of his, to appear as like other people as possible.

Saturday was the only free time for the public, but Charles obtained leave for John to enter every day, under his care. He showed him round the whole garden, with no small pride and with mutual pleasure. John's surprise and delight were expressed in child-like phrase, as each new point of beauty and interest met his view. He was taken into the various hothouses, where he saw plants he had never seen before, though he had visited every gardener he knew in the north. He entered the great palm houses, where he first gained a practical realisation of the gigantic and luxuriant vegetation of the tropics. The sensitive plant (*Mimosa sensitiva*), seen for the first time, specially drew his notice and fixed itself in his memory. He was also greatly surprised at the remarkable size of the leaves of some of the palm trees. Seeing a leaf of special expan-

siveness from the gallery above it, he remarked to his friend, "Man, Chairlie, ye cu'd be rowed * inside that, like a pund o' butter in a doken!" †

He also was silently impressed when he was privileged to see and consult the large herbarium gathered by the professor and students, from which he took many a note, and on the plan of which he tried to frame his own in after years. He also followed the students, as they listened to the discourses of Professor Graham, and moved about amongst the plants while he explained the peculiarities of each flower on the spot; making John think how happy they were to have such opportunities, which he, poor man, never had enjoyed. Would that more of the young men that pass through this admirable practical course, would cherish a little more of the old botanist's feelings!

He was also deeply moved at seeing the monument erected in the gardens to his great master, Linnæus, mentioning his visits to see it with special emphasis; ‡ for the famous Swede was one of his greatest men, and he never mentioned his name but with the profoundest respect and reverence. He knew his life minutely, and used to tell stories about him in capital Scotch, with ecstatic, friendly detail, as if he knew and loved him with a personal affection. One of his most cherished possessions was a portrait of Linnæus, afterwards sent him by a friend as an expression of respect.

* Rolled.

† The leaf of the dock, once much used in country places for holding butter when sent to market. The *o* is pronounced long.

‡ It was erected by Professor Hope in 1779. It is about eight feet high, and is surmounted by a large stone urn.

But the part of the garden in which John spent the most of his time was the British section, where the plants were classified according to the Linnæan system, and grew in plots, with their orders, species, and names attached. These were, to a keen amateur like him, the Elysian fields themselves. There John spent many charmed hours.

From his short-sightedness, he was obliged to kneel on the grass and stretch far over into the plots to see the names. Being shy and fearful of offence, he could not think of taking the liberty of lifting the labels in his hand, reading and carefully replacing them, as most men would have done. Stepping on the cultivated ground being forbidden, and his curiosity about the names demanding satisfaction at all hazards, he would look furtively round before venturing to peer so closely at the painted tickets, in order to see if any one was observing him ; then cautiously step into the plot to read them ; and then religiously rearrange the earth where his foot had left its print. He was observed doing this by the head gardener, Lawson, who knew him as Black's friend and an ardent botanist. Lawson told Charles, out of kindness to John, to go to him and say that "if he wasn't a thief, he shouldn't look so damned thief-like !" but boldly lift the labels and replace them ; as the director might be walking about, and might misunderstand his movements.

By that time, having gained considerable practical power over the science, John knew enough to be able to direct his attention profitably to the parts new to him, and benefited greatly by the days he spent in the Botanic Gardens. As he said afterwards, "In Edinburgh, I was gae expert aboot the plants, I can tell you ;" for his self-esteem was never

very latent, bashful as he looked. "Ay, ay, I had my e'en a' about me there!" and there was not the slightest doubt that he had; for his short sight served him better than the long sight of most of us.

In Duddingston Loch, at the back of Arthur's Seat, John's keen eyes were rewarded by the discovery of a rare and beautiful white flower rising out of the water, erect as a soldier on duty, surrounded by dark-green, flag-like, sharp-toothed leaves, called from its appearance the Water Soldier (*Stratiotes Aloides*)—the first part of the technical name meaning the same as the English, and the second denoting its general resemblance to the aloe. Like his old friend of the Tillyfourie moss holes, this plant is a vegetable curiosity, with similar instincts, remaining under water for the most of the year, and rising to the surface during fructification. It grew too far from the side of the loch to be drawn to shore with his stick, like the bladderwort. His caution had been increased since his experience at the Loch of Drum; but the plant must be got, at whatever cost. John doffed his nether garment as before, got some old planks, floated in on them, supported by an overhanging willow which stretched out its branches conveniently at the spot, and successfully secured his prize! He carried it home to Charles Black's, proud as a soldier after victory, and erect as the "Soldier" he bore, as if he were himself once more on parade.

He also obtained another rarity in this loch, its only Scotch station,* the Common flowering rush (*Butomus*

* It now flourishes also in one of the reservoirs near Paisley, having been brought there from Duddingston about twenty years ago by a botanist of local fame, Mr. Thomas Henry.

umbellatus), called also the Water gladiole, then in flower. It is a most beautiful plant, with large, delicate, pink and rosy blossoms, which rise out of the water and adorn it after the water-lily has gone. It derives its technical name* from its sharp triangular leaves, which guard it from the rude intrusion of both animals and men.

John climbed to the top of Arthur's Seat, like the good mountaineer he was, and got there a kind of "fog" or moss new to him, which he afterwards found on the hills above the Vale of Alford. He walked round the Radical Road that skirts the base of Salisbury Crags, where he looked down on the undulating, smoky city, in admiration of "the gran' view." He went, like all visitors, to see the Castle, enthroned on its picturesque crags. There the number of soldiers on guard at every corner, and the prohibition to touch nothing, specially struck him, showing that his shortsightedness had received some check. He was much interested in "the great iron murderer" known as "Muckle Meg" or "Mons Meg;" because a similar—some say the same—large cannon, one of "seven sisters," used to guard Dunnottar Castle. This sent his heart back to the braes and cliffs of his youth and their splendid scenery. For the time, these became more vivid than the great city that lay under the battlements of the castle on which he stood. He visited Leith, where he was interested in the ship-building and the carpenters, and these also recalled early years.

Then each day closed with long and pleasant talks in the one large room which formed the happy home of his friends, when the gathered plants were spread out, de-

* From *bous*, an ox, and *temno*, I cut.

ciphered and pressed, amidst a thousand delightful memories of the dear Vale of Alford.

The sight of books in the booksellers' windows was a sore temptation to the weaver. In Edinburgh, however, he withstood it well, for he bought only one volume, on Botany, which he found on an old bookstall in the street.

That Edinburgh visit remained with him one of the bright chapters in his life, and shone with a happy light in his after years when other things became dark.

He returned by steamer from Leith to Aberdeen, walking thence to his old home at Netherton. There his advent caused his friends to flock to the weaving shop and the shoemaker's, "to hear the news and ca' the crack," as at "the Rockin'" at Mossgiel, and to learn all about Edinburgh, the very name of which was a charm in that rural region—and, not least, about their old favourite, Charles Black, and about his young wife.

Charles returned to Whitehouse as gardener once more, in the year after John's visit to Edinburgh, and renewed old work and old associations in the Vale, botanical and friendly. When the Farquharsons were in town during winter, he occupied the "big house," Mrs. Black doing the duties of housekeeper; in summer, when they retired to the country, he removed to a house of his own at the offices behind. Charles had come back to his old quarters in the vigour of manhood, in his thirtieth year, with immensely increased knowledge of Botany and other subjects, and a splendid collection of native plants. These he set himself, during the winter of 1840, to classify according to the Linnæan system, then the only one in vogue in the country, and the one on which all our botanical text-books were

then based. The Natural System of the Jussieus, though established in 1789, did not make any practical way in this conservative country till forced upon it ; "Hooker" not being rearranged according to the new system till 1855. Both of our botanists remained attached till the last to the system of their early studies, from reverence for the name and genius of its founder, and from the difficulty men old in science and in years have of revolutionising the habits and thoughts of a lifetime.

With the ever ready and efficient assistance of John and Mrs. Black, the great labour of selecting the best specimens from the immense mass of materials accumulated for years, and arranging them according to the twenty-four Linnæan classes, was successfully accomplished during that winter, though it took many months to do it. John was freely presented with duplicates of such species as he did not then possess, and his own herbarium was thus rendered gradually more perfect. The joint working of these two friends was that of a mutual-help society, each foraging for the other and fairly dividing the spoils ; and John had added, in no small degree, to Charles's herbarium, with his wider wanderings and greater leisure.

Their mode of working was this. As the Blacks had, in winter, the use of the whole area flat of the mansion, they did not require to do their botanical work in the kitchen, the scene of former labours under the housekeeper's trying *régime*. They carried out the classification in a large room at the other end of the house. The floor of this room was chalked into twenty-four divisions, numbered according to the Linnæan system. Charles worked at one end of the apartment, on the heterogeneous mass of plants—which had

already been dried, named, and fastened on their protecting papers. He carefully selected the best, and checked former determinations, so as to render the herbarium as perfect as possible. John came to the rescue in case of difficulty or dispute. A learned consultation would then take place round some outrageous flower, which would not quietly submit to imprisonment like its meeker and more *orderly* companions, though obliged ultimately to succumb. When determined, each plant was handed to one of the attendant warders—to Mrs. Black, who was free from domestic duties when the children were in bed, or to John—who were in readiness in their stockings to consign it to its appropriate compartment. The lady was as obedient and silent as a mute, according to orders issued by the governor; but John, with the instinct to scepticism and self-conducted observation of the true rebellious scientist, was inclined not unfrequently to dispute the justice of the imperial ukase, and would stand to examine every specimen of which he had the slightest doubt. In spite of remonstrance and assurance, he would insist on being fully convinced in his own mind—a habit which, however commendable in itself, was sometimes deemed out of place, with the mass of work before them to be done, and which led to pretty little comedies that varied the severities of the evening.

When the general arrangement into classes had been in this way completed, the bundles were carefully tied up and numbered. Each class had then to be examined again in succession, and divided into the requisite orders and species, which were marked on the floor, till the whole herbarium was finally completed. Only two of the best specimens in each case were kept, and the rest were put

aside for John, and for future barter with other botanists for rarer species. It was a heavy piece of work, "a most terrible labour," as Charles says, labour of love though it was, for this pair of humble students to attempt in the leisure hours of a single winter; but it was successfully accomplished. Many were the nights they worked far on into the morning, impelled by unquenchable love of the science, and being loth to leave uncompleted any large and troublesome class till another time, with the chance of interruption from business, and on account of the litter in which the room would be left. On this last point, our notable housekeeper was particular if not peremptory, as every tidy wife has a right in such circumstances to be. At "long last," before the "big folks" returned, the *magnum opus* was finished, and proudly deposited in the driest place at command—a monument of patient industry and scientific skill of which any one might be justly proud.

The history of this splendid herbarium, which with subsequent accretions really became remarkably perfect, was a sad one. It fell a victim, along with a collection of seaweeds, not to the implacable enemies of the naturalist—the moths and their destructive insect allies, for their attacks were effectively repelled by the friendly odours of camphor and other essences—but to a more insidious foe, damp, with its vegetable accomplices, the fungi. House after house in which they were compelled to live was infected to the core with this enemy of health and natural history. Notwithstanding every precaution of watching, spreading out, warming, and expelling the infected, this fine collection of dearly won treasures was gradually decimated, year after year. Every plant thrown out, poetic with glad or interesting

memories and dear as a drop of heart's blood, cost a pang known only to the initiated in such studies ; until now, after over forty years' constant care, not one specimen remains of the labours of all these hardworking days. It was a sadder loss to their enthusiastic gatherer than even the most sympathetic reader can well realise, and it cannot be referred to by him without emotion.

It was a loss to science also, for it would have been a valuable possession to any institution that owned it. This only furnishes another proof of the unwisdom of private persons hoarding up such treasures, whether frail as plants or hard as stones ; instead of making them, in their best state, public property, for public instruction and for the progress of popular and exact science. Happily, this refined kind of selfishness is becoming less common than it has been. Both private endowments and private collections are now being more wisely and generously gifted during life to some of our numerous and yearly increasing scientific and educational institutions, for permanent preservation and for the immediate education of our people. The fate of Charles Black's herbarium should be a renewed warning of the loss to science and to self incurred by this common form of scientific selfishness, or, as in Black's case, of intense retiredness and superabundant humility.

John's herbarium was not then arranged. Before it could be attempted, the friends were permanently separated, and it was not systematically classed and named till several years afterwards, by John himself. Happily, however, it has not shared the fate of its fellow collection, being just rescued in time, to remain as an imperfect but worthy memorial of the man and his work.

Charles Black's return to Whitehouse was a mistake. Had he remained at the Botanic Gardens, he would very soon, no doubt, have obtained a superior situation, if not a high position, more worthy of a man of his character and scientific attainments. But he has always been burdened and obstructed by over-modesty and under-worldliness, and swayed by what most people would call absurd sentiment—a poor name for what in him has been something much higher and deeper.

His chief inducement to return to the Howe of Alford was the poetic desire to renew delightful times spent in friendship and science, and to walk amongst his own people along the sequestered vale of life until its close. But it was an expectation never to be realised. Matters at Whitehouse became less bearable as its mistress advanced in years, and in May, 1842, he left the Howe, never more to reside within its bounds. John was thus once more parted from his more than foster brother, happily, however, to be for a time within easy reach; but the dear, bright days and charming nights at Whitehouse never again returned.

After serving for some time as foreman with Reid the nurseryman at Gilcomston, in Aberdeen, Charles settled down at Raeden, not far from that town, in 1842, memorable for the first visit to Scotland of her Majesty and her consort, Albert the Good. Raeden is a small estate situated on what is called the Stockit Road, or Old Skene turnpike. It occupies an elevated slope commanding a very striking view of Aberdeen, with its numerous churches and chimneys—types of the religiousness and the trade that are its distinguishing characteristics—and of the open sea beyond. Its former proprietor had become bankrupt,

and Black rented the whole place from the trustees except the mansion, which was let to others. He lived in a small thatched cottage close by the Skene Road, standing between it and a large enclosed garden. He cultivated that for the market. In this kind of life, he was pretty successful for four years, till the estate was bought by a Mr. Gordon, who employed him as his own gardener for two years more, till he also failed. Black left in 1848, and became gardener to Sir Andrew Leith Hay, of Leithhall, near Kinnethmont.

While at Raeden, Charles still carried on his botanical studies, and to these added several others, which he pursued with his usual ardour, especially Ornithology. In this he rapidly became proficient. In 1842, for instance, he was the first to obtain that rare bird in northern regions, the honey buzzard, which he shot near his house, the first recorded notice of it in Aberdeenshire. In 1846, when Thomas Edwards made his unfortunate and distressing journey to Aberdeen, Charles and he became very intimate, united by that instinctive freemasonry felt by all kindred souls engaged in higher pursuits. They visited each other during the whole time of Edwards' stay in town. Charles called almost daily at the deserted Exhibition, and did his best to cheer and strengthen the downcast naturalist; while Edwards came out to tea at Raeden, to his brother scientist, for sympathy and support, when the Exhibition was closed on Sundays. Before Edwards returned to Banff, he presented Charles, as a parting gift, with a beautifully stuffed specimen of the land-rail. He received in return the first specimen then discovered in the county, or in the north, of the true Egyptian locust, which Black

had caught in some hay, in a field opposite his house. These two naturalists have not met since.

To Raeden, John Duncan came very frequently during the six years of Charles's stay. Every time he visited Aberdeen on business, to buy yarn or books, or on any of his botanical rambles, he made a resting-place there, generally remaining a week. Raeden was a new centre from which to extend his knowledge of the flora of the county. He brought home his discoveries every evening, and got them jointly determined, as in the old days by the Don. When weaving became dull during summer and autumn, as it always did more or less, he took employment from Charles at gardening, in which he had already had considerable practice in many places. His delight in his friend's elevating society grew with the years and daily became dearer to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

OTHER FRIENDS OF THE WEAVER AT NETHERTON.

DURING Duncan's thirteen years' stay in the parish of Tough, his life was spent chiefly in and round Netherton, where his home and workshop were, and to that hamlet and its immediate vicinity his personal friends were mostly confined. Never much given to the cultivation of barren socialities, his intellectual pursuits had always made him greatly independent of external excitements and the pleasures of mere acquaintanceship; while his new botanical enthusiasm and its consequent ramblings tended to make him still more self-contained and solitary. Hence his friends in the district were comparatively few, and they were chiefly found amongst those of similar tastes in science, theology, or politics. In this way, also, he failed to be intimate with several persons then in the parish who possessed intellectual tastes, but of a different kind from his own. But the friends he had were much attached to him, and with them he was content.

One of these was the schoolmaster at Coulterneuk,* or Newbigging, a little north of Whitehouse station. He was an intelligent, well-informed man; a great reader, being one

* Called *Cooterneuk*.

of the newspaper club of the place; and a genial companion—"a fine body," as John said, or, as Charles Hunter antithetically put it, "a terrible nice man." Though his own education had been more limited than that of the general run of teachers—for he was originally a labourer—he was very successful in the elementary stages, and his little school was crowded with pupils. The schoolmaster was nothing of a botanist, but he was somewhat of a florist, and prided himself on the neat garden that adorned his thatched cottage, where Duncan used to work a great deal. As John said, "Forbes never gaithered plants wi' me, but I hae ta'en mony ane to *him*, and tell't him their names." Being a bachelor of the sunny sort, nothing delighted the dominie more than to gather round him, in his snug parlour, a few congenial souls, whose intelligence and brightness illumined "the tenebrific scene."

Here of an evening might be seen assembled John Duncan, Charles Black, Charles Hunter, and a few others still mentioned with respect and affection by their survivors. Here the newspapers were read, burning church questions discussed (and Black and Forbes stuck to the Establishment, while Duncan and Hunter went over to the dissentients), and happy evenings passed in the flow of soul. Charles Black's irrepressible spirit of fun burst out in such genial society, and many were the practical jokes played on each other, and not least on the good weaver.

According to his custom, when the room was finer than his stout boots were in his opinion worthy of, John took them off on entering, not to dirty the floor, especially after he had been out plant-hunting in the ditches. These some one would hide, unknown to their owner. Then came the

"hustle" when it was time to separate, the various plans *kindly* suggested to the discomfited weaver to get him home unharmed to Netherton, the final discovery of the lost sandals, and the non-discovery of the culprit. Sometimes they were found in odd places. One night, after a pleasant intellectual *sederunt*, Charlie entered, when parting time came, in the guise of a wandering hunchback, and paraded the room with a great bunch between his shoulders, amidst the hilarious laughter of his companions. John meantime was silently searching for his boots, carefully secreted from possible theft as he deemed them, now nowhere to be seen; unwitting, from his short-sightedness, of the merry mischief that twinkled in the eyes of his friend. A simultaneous search was ostentatiously made by his companions, including the new hunchback, and for a time in vain. Just when it was decided that John must doff his stockings and trip home barefooted, the hunchback's burden suddenly dropped, and the missing brogues were revealed!

"O happy, happy days! O merry, merry times! with a vast o' fun!" Their memory lighted up the old man's face, touching it also with sadness, as he related the story to me, in his eighty-seventh year.

Forbes remained teaching in the same cottage long after the Disruption, and was session clerk of the parish of Tough for many years. After retiring from active labour, he continued to live there, his house being kindly granted him by the proprietor, Farquharson of Haughton, and there he died, long after his friends had been scattered far and wide.

Another friend of John's was James Black, a younger brother of Charles, then a lad, acting as farm servant at

Funchrie south of Netherton, and at Bents a little to the west. He possessed much of the uncommon ability of his brother, and the same love of nature and predilection for naturalistic studies. He was full of geniality and brightness, and glowed with quiet, lambent, genuine humour, combined with much self-contained reticence. He first made John's acquaintance at Whitehouse, after Charles had returned to it with his wife and children, in the winter of 1840. When he entered the room that night, he found the trio—Charles, John, and Mrs. Black—at work on the herbarium, arranging the plants and distributing them into their various classes. After friendly greeting, the young man took his seat in silent wonderment, to watch the unusual scene, unique in his experience and uncommon in the country. John and Charles were on their stocking soles, for the sake of silence and despatch, and not a word was spoken in the process, except when John would insist on examining some specimen he was not sure of, and on protesting when necessary, which led to argument between the botanists. Night after night, he saw them at the same work, and the impressions then produced influenced him for life, and still remain vivid in his imagination.

John and James became great friends, and after Charles left the place, his brother used to be the weaver's frequent companion in his botanical rambles in the district, during the two and a half years in which he remained there. The memories of these pleasant experiences he can still relate, with unusual dramatic power and picturesqueness. One of these has already been given, when the two had the humorous encounter with the old farmer and his son, in connection with the *Scrophularia nodosa*. John tried hard,

as he did with all the young hopeful subjects he met, to make James a botanist; but, although James always delighted in the wild flowers in their varied native haunts and afterwards became no mean florist, he never took up that study as he did several others. He was more devoted to the observation of animal than vegetable life, and became an ardent ornithologist like Charles, and a skilful taxidermatist, stuffing birds with a taste and perfection rarely equalled in amateurs. He also prosecuted entomology to a considerable extent, caring less, however, for insects than for their winged companions of the air. But though not prosecuting Botany as a special study, nothing pleased the young man more than to accompany our enthusiast in his wanderings, and to gather specimens for him on all occasions, to be named and described.

At that time, two things impressed him greatly in connection with John. The one was the ignorance of the country folks, in general, regarding the natural objects amidst which they daily worked, especially wild flowers—an impression strengthened by subsequent observation. In going about with Duncan, he found that plants of even unusual size were unknown or unobserved by them, in the general confusion of verdure, from the want of their attention being early directed to them, and from their faculties not being trained to observe. To this ignorance, he saw, was added an intense indifference to such things, except in so far as they were of practical use in their daily life. The second point then noted by Mr. Black was the surprise, combined with contempt, with which they viewed the man who studied these common objects, and tried to direct their attention to their structure and beauty. John

was in this way subjected to a good deal of ridicule on account of his peculiar pursuits. Yet, in spite of it all, James testifies that his equanimity was seldom or never ruffled, even in trying circumstances; so that in time their silly annoyances never went beyond a "fling" at the eccentric weaver, as he passed with his treasures, weeds, nasty weeds, as they were in their eyes.

After James Black left Tough, he passed through not a few remarkable experiences, was a successful man of business, and has now retired to enjoy his well-earned leisure. He felt high esteem and affection for his old friend during their intercourse at Netherton, and these increased with after years. They met frequently at Charles Black's, at Raeden, where James accompanied the old botanist in rambles round Aberdeen. To the last, John continued to visit James after he had settled down near the bridge of Dee, and their intercourse there will in due time appear in our story.

A little above the parish church of Tough and the mansion of Tonley* amongst its trees, a short distance to the south-west of Netherton, lay the hamlet of the Craigh. It then contained five families, with their houses and small crofts of land, and formed a comfortable and happy community, now altogether changed from what it was forty years ago. The largest holding there, of some fifty acres, belonged to a farmer called William Beveridge, an industrious, worthy and successful man, who improved his farm till it became one of the best in the district, and was able to follow the plough till above seventy. He had a son named after himself, a bright, vigorous boy, who in his eighth year

* Pronounced *Ton-léy*, with accent on the second syllable.

received a severe accident that left him disfigured for life. Willie possessed rare ability in several directions, and received an education better than common. His enjoyment of external nature was intense, and he spent his early years in the closest observation of animal life, which his surroundings gave him unwonted opportunities of doing, especially of the varied bird-world on the mosses braes and moors near his home, and on the hill pastures where in summer he herded the cows. Art also claimed his attention, and the lad became famous for the fine carvings he executed with his pocket knife and for his skill as a violinist. The father wished him to aspire to one of the professions, but his son's love of nature became too enthusiastic for that, and he settled down at the Craigh, to become in time his father's successor and a famous farmer.

When Duncan came to Netherton, the boy was in his teens, and the two took to each other with instinctive attraction. The quaint weaver, with his love of nature and plants so much akin to his own, at once drew the lad's attention, and Willie became a frequent visitor at the weaving shop at Marnock's. They were soon fast friends, and they continued so, with growing respect and affection, throughout life. John made the Craigh one of his haunts, and their intercourse increased with mutual benefit, during the thirteen years in which they lived together in that neighbourhood. With his taste for mechanics, Willie had peculiar pleasure in watching John at work, hands, feet and eyes being all equally and actively engaged ; while John instructed him in the mysteries of the craft. They talked about the flowers—a collection of which lay preserved on the top of the loom above his head—and other natural

productions so interesting to both, for, as he tells, the weaver was then in the heyday of life, full of vigour, physically and mentally. The boy also made Charles Black's acquaintance, and was shown by him through his well-kept garden and greenhouse, and he retains the liveliest recollection of the man.

John visited his father's house, and never passed it in his rambles without calling there and being hospitably entertained. When he came to the door, he was accustomed to announce his presence with the bright exclamation "Here's the weyver!" On his return from plant-hunting on the braes of Tough, he frequently stayed for the evening. The family would then cluster round him, to look at the plants he had gathered and listen to his dissertations upon them, and his many stories connected with his wanderings, to which, Mr. Beveridge says, they were never indifferent. As neighbours dropped in—for the Craigh was a pleasant, hospitable house—Willie would take down his fiddle, and speedily, under his inspiring strains, the lasses would fling aside their knitting and take to the floor in their wincey petticoats and short wrappers, mingling with their partners in the mazy dance. Though John, as his friend says, held in derision "the capers of a dancing-master and the light fantastic toe," yet, roused by the spirit of the merry scene, he would by-and-by rise to his feet quite abruptly. Calling to the fiddler, "Come, then, Willie, play up 'Jenny, dang the weyver!'" he would go through the reel with the greatest spirit, to the intense amusement of beholders.

At the Craigh, there was a well-stocked, well-kept garden, tended by the son, who made a hobby also of breeding bees. The hives were placed between a long row

of gooseberry bushes, and it required no little courage to venture near them to gather the tempting fruit. John's intrepidity in regard to bees was surprising. He would coolly sit beside the hives, eating the berries and handing them to others who were too much afraid to venture near, while the swarms flew round his head in clouds without touching him. He seemed to have a special influence over them, Willie standing at a distance in astonishment, and expecting, but in vain, to see him stung. "Puir things!" John would say, "the bees winna touch onybody, if ye dinna touch them,"—an immunity largely dependent, however, on the sympathies of their companion.

Mr. Beveridge never took up the study of Botany, though his friend tried to induce him. He had always the greatest pleasure, however, in listening to all John said about plants, as extending his knowledge of nature. He constantly had his eyes open in his ornithological wanderings, and picked up for the botanist every unusual plant he saw. One day he came upon a rarity there, the *Briza media*, the common quaking grass, with its ever-tremulous spikes, which grew on a marshy flat on the face of the Red Hill, above the farm of Culthibert. When he handed it to John, the weaver brightened up, as he always did on such occasions, and told him the family it belonged to and the kind of places it grew in. "Yes; but the name, John, tell me that," said William, delighted, in friendly malice, to see him at fault. John hesitated, and scratched his head. "Ou, man," persisted his teaser, "I never saw ye puzzled afore!" The honour of the sensitive student being at stake, a touch of temper came to his aid, and he exclaimed, "The deil a ken, ken I. A body canna hae a' thing at their finger ends!"

"Honest man," says his friend, "he could not even turn me off with some grand name, as he might easily have done." John soon found out and told all about it. He would scarcely believe it grew so near Tough, till he went to the spot, "Ann Watson's moss," and got it for himself; announcing the find in a letter to Charles Black of July, 1842, along with that of the *Linnaea borealis*, his first discovery of the favourite, obtained "to the west of Tullynessle hills, above Dalpersie Castle."

In after years, William Beveridge distinguished himself in several departments. He became eminent, as an ornithologist, his knowledge of birds, studied personally in the fields, being unusually minute; as a bird-stuffer, with a power of representing them in grace of form and attitude that is acknowledged by the highest authorities to be amongst the first, of which a beautiful case of sixty-seven Aberdeenshire birds prepared by him, now in the Free Church College Museum, Aberdeen, is sufficient proof; as a carver in wood, his skill being such that he was employed for many years in the interior decoration of Balmoral by Prince Albert; and as a maker of violins, in which he introduced some improvements, the taste and timbre of his instruments being attested by experts, one of them being ordered by the Prince. He also possessed no mean skill as a violinist. Amongst other works connected with wood carving, he made neat snuff-boxes, and presented one of these, finely painted with leaf and stem all over its outer surface, and with the weaver's arms on the lid, to Duncan. John prized it greatly. Though no snuffer himself, he carried it on high occasions, and indulged his friends with a pinch.

In 1873, Mr. Beveridge removed to Aberdeen, to be curator of the Free Church College and Museum, having been compelled to leave his natal spot through the action of a subsequent proprietor, and there he still labours at his old pursuits. John visited him regularly in Aberdeen, for the two kept their old friendship undimmed to the last. Though amidst congenial surroundings, a happy family, and appreciative friends, William feels, in spite of his buoyancy and humour, like a caged mountain bird in the confinement of the city, and deeply sighs for the free and natural life of the country, in the home of his fathers on the breezy uplands of Tough.

To that parish there came, in 1836, the year of Duncan's arrival, a house-painter and fellow-townsmen of his, called James Barclay, then thirty years of age. He settled down with his wife and family at the Backloaning, not far from the parish school and the hamlet of the Craigh, and there he lived for four years. Like William Beveridge, he was a born genius in several lines. Being highly intelligent, humorous, waggish, and genial, he speedily became a general favourite, both in business and social life. He was the soul of all merrymakings, where he could tell a good story, sing a capital song, and play well on the violincello. His intellectual life was equally active. He soon became a member of the Debating Club that then existed at Tough—another being Mr. McCombie, of Cairnballoch in that neighbourhood, founder of the Aberdeen *Free Press*. He was also a promoter of the circulating library, recently founded there. Beveridge and Barclay became very intimate, and it was Barclay that introduced Willie to fiddle-making, and stained

his first fiddle. Barclay also joined a scientific plasterer called James Murray in his pursuits, amongst others the making of terrestrial globes. Beveridge also assisted in that work, and now possesses a specimen. Murray, who lived at the farm of Stonefold, was a man of great ability and higher tastes. He was also a dial-maker of unusual skill, a fine example of which stood in his garden; a mathematician, famed for his solutions of difficult problems; a land surveyor, much employed; and a worthy man.

The painter soon became acquainted with John Duncan and Charles Black, first meeting John when painting the greenhouse at Whitehouse. Barclay was at that time taking out, in parts, "Pinnock's Guide to Knowledge," and hearing of their difficulties in the want of suitable textbooks, recommended to them "Pinnock's Catechism of Botany," which John soon afterwards bought in Aberdeen. He had no special interest in Botany, beyond a strong and intelligent desire to know something of the world around him, for his tastes lay more in Art than in Nature. He had a high appreciation of the two enthusiasts, who, he said, were simply "wild" about plants, and he liked to listen to their talk regarding them. John and he frequently met at the Craigh, and elsewhere. They were often seen walking together on the public road, the one carrying a web under his arm and plants in his hand, and the other his paint-pot and brushes, while talking on botanical and other subjects. Barclay was also a student of astronomy, and saw John's "horologe," which the weaver still used.

He removed from Tough in 1840, to Mountgarrie on the Don near Alford, where he still survives, the brightest and heartiest of old men, in his seventy-seventh year. He

gradually developed almost universal capacities in practical work ; being a painter, clock and watch repairer, violin maker, turner, plumber, plasterer, slater, bellhanger, upholsterer, and stone-cutter. In all these occupations, he has carried on regular employment, and left successful examples all over the Vale of Alford. His house, exquisitely kept by a poetical daughter who inherits much of her father's talent, is at once a nest of cosiness and taste and a museum of curiosities.

Duncan and he kept up their intimacy to the end, living as they did latterly only a few miles apart. John used to drop in at Mountgarrie in passing, to talk over scientific and political events, and was counted by his friend "a great treat," and, contrary to the general opinion, a "wide-awake" man.

Another friend of John's was James Lamont, the farmer of Mosshead, close by Netherton, now removed to Summerhill, New Machar, near Aberdeen. He was a conscientious, estimable man, greatly respected in the parish, and his advice was sought and valued by his neighbours. His house was one of the few much frequented by the weaver. Mr. Lamont admired John's devotion to his favourite study, having seen him, with surprise, groping on hands and knees in his search for plants in the neighbouring ditches and marshes, now all drained. He still retains the greatest respect for the man.

John continued to visit Whitehouse after Black left it, being acquainted with his successor in the garden, Lewis Scott, and with the overseer, John May, who still survives in Aberdeen, with pleasant memories of the botanist. Mr.

May was astonished at his pedestrian powers, and can give details of his long evening walks, which extended late into the night. He was struck with his desire to avoid giving offence to any one, in his calls at the big house, where he used to bring new grasses and ferns to show them to his friends; and with his extreme modesty, his geniality, and his power of giving and taking a joke, combined with quick though quiet resentment of any attempt to take undue advantage of him, suppressing all such with pointed and telling rebuke.

In the parish of Tough, there seems to have existed at that time more than common intellectual activity. The circulating library, which was kept in the house of an intelligent merchant at Torries, was well selected, and contained in it, by-and-by, after some rigid opposition, such astounding innovations as Scott's and Dickens' novels. Mr. Beveridge urged John to join it in vain, for John said it did not have the books he wished. "I hae a leebrary o' my ain," he would say, "and what money I can spare will gae to increasing it; that's my way."

There also lived then in the district several very intelligent men, such as Beveridge, Barclay, McCombie, of Cairnballoch; the parish schoolmaster, Mr. Ingram, who sent forth many good pupils; the plasterer, Murray; the merchant, Matthews; the blacksmith of Torries, William Law, a self-taught and successful veterinary surgeon, who could assist the boys with their Latin exercises; the farmer of Boghead, Moses Copland, and his son and successor, who was college bred; and the genial and highly respected parish minister, Mr. Gillan, the promoter of every good

object. Except the first three, these do not seem to have taken much notice of the quiet botanical weaver. As Mr. Beveridge says of him in *Tough*, "Few, very few appreciated the man for his talents, so as to bring him into any prominence ; and being poor made all the difference in the world. He fought his battles all alone. Unheeded, uncared for, he was truly one of Nature's own children, of whom the world knows but little. I have often thought that if ever there was a flower born to blush unseen, it was John Duncan."

CHAPTER XX.

ECCLESIASTICAL MOVEMENTS IN THE COUNTRY ; AND DUNCAN'S RELIGION.

JOHN DUNCAN was constitutionally religious. He threw into religion the same ardour as into science, his enthusiasm in Theology being as marked as in Botany or Astronomy. Of the deep and genuine piety of the man, all that knew him with any intimacy speak in the highest terms. As Mr. Lamont of Mosshead, who was impressed with the high tone of his inner life more than with anything else in his character and studies, expressed it, "Many a man got a good character from others, but to none would I be so willing to say 'amen' as to John's." On this point, from those that had any means of forming an opinion, there is but one voice, and that is all the stronger the more intimate the relations between them.

His special phase of religious feeling was that of the old Covenanting type, inherited from his mother, whose ancestors, he was always proud to tell, had borne the Covenanting name of Burley, and had fought against "the bluidy Claver'se." It was strengthened by the early deep impressions gathered at Dunnottar, and was increased by his extensive reading of the terrible history of Scotch persecuting times. In all things John undertook or studied,

as has been abundantly seen, he was intense, and on the the religious side, even more so than on any other; reaching deeper as the religious faculties do into the central forces of life. If occasion had required, John would have once more taken to the moors and mountains, like his ancestors at Aird's Moss and Drumclog, to put down ecclesiastical tyranny of every kind; and, if need had been, he would have cheerfully died at the stake for his opinions—there is no doubt of it.

His historical and inherited sympathies inspired him with an almost fierce hate of priestcraft in all forms, especially as Prelacy and Roman Catholicism—being, as one expressed it, “horrid at them.” While arguing with a friend, on one occasion, on Popery and Erastianism, he insisted, in the spirit of the old Scot and the ancient Jew, that as it was impossible to convert the Catholics, they should be shot. “You surely would not take the gun to them, John?” replied his friend; “should you not try preaching and reasoning with them?” “Weel, weel,” said John; “but if they winna hear, what then? There’s naething for ’t but shootin’!” In all these prelatie and papal antipathies, Duncan was merely a representative of the once universal feeling in Scotland, scorched deep into the national heart by its bloody religious history. He retained, however, more of the strength and gloom of the old Cameronian days than most, and was an example of survival, into modern broader religious times, of the old Covenanting, red-handed period.

In this respect, he was a great contrast to his friend Charles Black, whose womanly tenderness made him look upon the use of the sword in religion as not of Christ,

though wielded in his name; and who could not hate Catholics or even atheists, because he loves all men, as he loves all God's creatures. Their arguments on such subjects were consequently frequent, and on John's side almost fierce, so dead-earnest was he in what he identified at once with patriotism and piety; and it was then only that they ever came near to inflicting pain on each other, if not to quarrelling, for these subjects have caused division between friends, families, and nations, when nothing else could have done it.

With such sympathies and such opposition to all State interference in religious affairs, it would not have been difficult to predict what side John would take in the long and fiery disputes that culminated in the Disruption of '43. He became a strenuous anti-patronage, anti-Erastian advocate, a keen sympathizer with the dissentients, and an ardent adherent of the party that formed the Free Church of Scotland.

The history of the remarkable struggle that issued in the ecclesiastical revolution of 1843, in which four hundred and seventy-four ministers of the Established Church separated from her communion in one day, need here be referred to only as far as John Duncan and his friends were concerned in it, for it has been often written from all points of view. It was a period of intense religious and social excitement; as John, speaking of it forty years after, said, "Oh, it *was* a terrible time!" In the Vale of Alford, John lived near some of the scenes which are now historic in connection with it. At Netherton, he followed its movements with the deepest interest, visiting the places where forced intrusions occurred, and keeping himself conversant

with its abundant and fleeting literature—his collection of pamphlets and books then issued on the subject being unusually large, especially for a poor man.

Along with his friend Charles Hunter, the shoemaker, a strong non-intrusionist like himself, he walked through deep snow all the way to Marnock in Strathbogie, in the severe winter of 1841, when the suspended seven of that famous presbytery inducted Mr. Edwards, on the 21st of January, at the point of the bayonet. He long preserved a copy of the supplement to the *Aberdeen Banner*, which contained an extended account of the case, and which he often used to read to others, to show the untenableness of the position of the intrusionists. He also went north to the famous induction at Culsalmond, where the minister was settled with the aid of policemen and other guardians of the peace.

The controversies in the weaver's and shoemaker's shops at Netherton now became hotter than ever, and the contests between the opposing parties, especially between the weaver and the eloquent tailor, Sandy Cameron, the representatives of the contending factions, more vehement than before. John's advocacy of non-intrusion principles, even at Whitehouse, was so earnest and continuous that Charles Black, who belonged to the moderate party, had great difficulty in withstanding his persistency, from pure sympathy, in spite of his convictions. At first he tried to reply to John's arguments, but in vain. Then he resorted to banter to win him to silence, by quoting some of the doggerel rhymes born of the excitements of the day, such as :—

“Free Kirkers neither curse nor ban ;
But cheat and lee wi' ony man,”

—a skittish allusion to the sanctity claimed by the dissenters. But banter on such important subjects was a grievance with John, and at last they had to agree, for the sake of peace and friendship, to let theology become a moot subject between them.

Aberdeenshire was one of the strongholds of the Establishment, and the Vale of Alford was as conservative as any part of the county. As John used to say, "they were terrible bun' up to the Establishment." The keenness of feeling between the adherents of the two parties in the district was so great that, for a long time, as he remarked, "they had eneuch ado to speak to each other;" and this was the case all over the country for many years. In the whole presbytery of Alford, not a single clergyman left the Church except one, the Rev. Harry Nicol, then a school-master and now Free Church minister at Lumsden in Auchindore. In the parish of Tough, the popularity of the clergyman, the late Mr. Gillan of Alford, was such that very few seceded, and of these only one elder, Moses Copland, the farmer of Boghead. The opposition of the Aberdeenshire proprietors was so great that, in most places, they would not grant sites for the new Free churches, and even, in many cases, threatened eviction to seceding tenants. It was the same in the Vale, and the Free Church congregation of Tough and Keig long worshipped in the barns of Boghead and of Tillykeerie, where Charles Hunter's father lived, on the slopes south of Netherton. Meetings were held in various parts of the district by the friends of the Free Church, which were addressed by several of their most popular orators. Amongst others came Dr. Guthrie, who held a large gathering at the inn of Muggart Haugh,

on the Leochel, which John attended, as he did all others far and near ; for he would walk any distance to see and hear a popular speaker on the side he had espoused.

To organize the new seceders round Tough, there arrived, in the Disruption year, a worthy man, the Rev. William P. Smith, who has been rendered famous through his remarkable son, W. Robertson Smith, recently expelled from a professorship in the church his father then entered. The prospects of the Free Church in the Vale of Alford were long very dark. For a considerable time, Mr. Smith was obliged to preach to his people in the barns above Tough, till Sir Andrew Leith Hay allowed them a site at Brindy, above the church of Keig, where they erected a wooden house in which they worshipped for some time. At last, the late Lord Forbes granted them the present beautiful site between Whitehouse and the Bridge of Don, where the existing church and manse, tasteful, picturesque and comfortable, were erected amidst surrounding trees, with Cairn William and Benachie behind, and there Mr. Smith was ordained in 1845.

Religious activity amongst the small band of seceders was very great, and unwonted life and zeal were infused into all church work and worship, in both preachers and people. John Duncan was one of the most earnest labourers in the cause. Prayer meetings were held at many places before and after the Disruption. In these he took his part along with other laymen, in reading and expounding scripture—very creditably, as one of his hearers tells, backward though he was in public appearances. His first attempt at public prayer at Tillykeerie was not very successful, however earnest ; his attitude, words, and utter-

ance, in this unwonted exercise, being such as to render the suppression of risible emotion on the part of his auditors extremely difficult. But John was not alone amongst his brother laymen in bordering on the ludicrous in such trying circumstances. One of his friends, a farmer who took a very active part in Free Church affairs in Tough, remarked on one occasion, when a woman was publicly rebuked in the congregation, that "he never felt sorrier in his life for onybody than when the minister cam doon oot o' the poopit to *circumcise* her," meaning, good man, to admonish her!

John was one of the founders, in 1844, of what was called a "Church Defence Association" in Tough, to help in the foundation of churches throughout the country, with Charles Hunter as secretary, and himself as one of the most active collectors of funds. His collecting book still exists, containing about sixty names, with contributions from fourpence to four shillings and sixpence a month, the highest weekly sum being four shillings. John put himself down for fourpence a week, his small but willing mite, offered "out of his poverty," but valued as such by the Master of the temple.

John's churchism was not mere combative fervour or theological dogmatism. It was based on conviction, and was truly religious. When I asked him why he seceded when Charles Black and others whose opinion he valued, remained in the church, he replied, "Because I thought it was richt, and because the best ministers gaed awa wi't." He was of opinion that many more would have followed, "had they no feared for the laird, frae whom they had their grund." Like all over-enthusiastic men, his fault was, at that time at least, that he would hardly allow that his

opponents might have as deep convictions as himself, and think themselves in the right as much as he did. But when the heat of that controversy died out, the strength of which we can now scarcely realize, John became broader and more tolerant, as have even the bitterest of both parties. He thought that in the Old church "they were na sae weel tellt it;" that is, what was held to be evangelical doctrine was less firmly and unhesitatingly preached there than in the Free; and so far he was no doubt right.

The Moderatism of Aberdeenshire at that time was cold and worldly, and was wanting in the earnestness and reality that should be the soul of all vital religion, which certainly then characterised the new body more than the old, and by which the Free Church has done itself and the Establishment great good. Though this good has not been by any means unmixed, the Disruption of '43 was a great event, for which both parties should be thankful, and of which Scotland has reason to be proud.

Duncan's attendance at church was marked by the greatest regularity, and as one that knew him well says, "that day was a bad one when he was not to be seen walking to church, clean and tidy, dressed in a suit of his own weaving. His errand at church," he declares, "was not to see and be seen, but to worship, and to hear the sermon, of which, with his excellent memory, he brought a large part home with him. His religion was real and no hypocrisy, and I can see him now," he continues, "holding his well-worn pocket Bible very near his eyes, as he sat reverently in his accustomed seat in church."

He remained in connection with the Free Church of Keig till he left Netherton for Auchleven again, in 1849.

The Rev. Mr. Smith, his pastor during that time, in writing to the author, regrets that his now failing memory makes it impossible for him to recall any details of his intercourse with the man. "I retain," he says, "a quite distinct impression of his personal appearance. He was slow of speech, somewhat reserved, and altogether a man not likely to disclose his inner self to any but the most intimate acquaintances, if even to such. I hope," he continues, "you will ascribe the barrenness of my reply to its true cause—sheer inability, and not at all to any reluctance to bear a part in paying tribute to a man of singular modesty and untiring perseverance in the search after truth." On ceasing connection with this congregation, he received a certificate, dated May 29th and signed by the minister, of being in full communion with the church. This says that "he had long resided in that neighbourhood and borne an excellent character."

John continued attached to the Free Church all his days. After he settled down at Droughsburn, in 1852, he used to attend the Free church at Cushnie. The Rev. George Williams, now of the Free church at Thornhill, near Stirling, who knew John from boyhood and appreciated him as a man, speaking of his later religious life, says, "He was a firm Free churchman to the last. Although the Free church was in another parish, and a mile farther from Droughsburn than the other, besides being very far from popular as a place of worship, yet he came to the little kirk on the moor, good day and bad. He sat before us in church, and seemed to be always remarkably reverent and attentive. His religion was of the retiring Scotch type, that, like the violet, keeps itself

out of sight ; he never wore it on his sleeve. But I never heard even the most intolerant express any doubt as to his piety."

Throughout life, John regularly engaged in religious exercises before retiring to rest, sometimes with others, but generally alone, according to the good old Scotch habit, which is calculated to cherish higher life.

His study of religion and theology was as thorough and intelligent as of the other subjects he prosecuted, so that he could give, above most men, "a reason for the faith that was in him." His religious books included "Matthew Henry's Bible," bound in full calf ; "Matthew Henry on Prayer ;" "Brown's Dictionary of the Bible ;" "Stackhouse's History of the Bible," in two handsome volumes ; "Cassell's Biblical Educator ;" and "The Trees and Plants of Scripture,"—thus applying his science to the interpretation of the sacred book. For the history of his native land and church, and their gallant struggles for liberty and religion, he possessed "Scots Worthies," by John Howe, a fine large copy ; "The Cloud of Witnesses," and the cognate work, "Foxe's Book of Martyrs," once found in every cottage in the land ; the "History of Scotland," in two large volumes ; and the "Ten Years' Conflict," which gives the story of the religious contest culminating in 1843.

As was his custom in all things, he read and digested these books so thoroughly that their ideas and facts became all his own, and were fully grasped. He could thus speak of the actors in the dramas, their deeds and words, with the realism of everyday life and the known familiarity of dear friends. Melanchthon, for instance, whom he used to name "Meelaseethian," was one of his heroes,

standing higher in his estimation than even Knox. Luther he thought greatly of. He was once talking with Mr. Williams about the great German, when he wound up the conversation by the trenchant remark, "He's been a weel-pitten-thegither chield that, afore he cu'd hae gi'en and gotten sae mony knocks!"

CHAPTER XXI.

BOTANICAL WANDERINGS IN THE SOUTH.

FOR a great part of his life, as has been already told, John went to the harvest in different parts of the country, during the slack period of the year in weaving, to raise his finances, improve his health, and see the country. To these objects was added another after he was introduced to scientific Botany in 1836—the study of the Flora of Scotland. This he set himself systematically to conquer, as far as opportunity allowed and a strong will impelled. In pursuance of this scientific aim, he generally selected a new district every year, spending all his leisure during the harvest in gathering, deciphering, and pressing the plants. When snow began to powder Benachie, he returned home to Donside, with a happy burden of dried specimens, to add to his rapidly increasing herbarium. He also brought back with him some of the rarer and more interesting living plants he found. These he used to place in suitable spots near his house; and the banks of the Droichs-burn, where he last resided, are still crowded with such pleasant mementoes of his many wanderings.

During these visits to different regions, his main object latterly was the pursuit of his favourite science, and this wise and healthy practice he carried on year after year

till he reached seventy. He was compelled to desist only by increasing age and growing infirmity, but not before he had acquired an unusually extensive and practical acquaintance with the flora of his native land, and had completed his herbarium. In this way, he traversed a great part of Scotland, visiting most places between Banff and the Border, on to Glasgow in the west. He never went into Ayr or Galloway, or into the Highlands beyond Ben Macdhui and Banffshire, which were his utmost limits to the north.

Many were the scenes he saw, strange the adventures he had, and curious the company he was often obliged to keep, in this uncommon style of studying science. These he delighted, like a wandering sailor from foreign lands, to recount to his wondering friends, but chiefly to his intimates, with humorous picturesqueness and laughing glee. Some of these reminiscences I have been able to rescue, but the greater part are now for ever gone with their hero.

His observations on men, places, and things were by no means commonplace, as, with such a seer, they could hardly be. Even in his eighty-seventh year, when I talked with him of the places he had visited, these possessed surprising brevity, point and vividness for a man so aged, after his faculties had very greatly failed. A few of them may not be uninteresting as further interpreting their remarkable author.

In Glasgow, he "saw a heap o' things," mentioning specially the active Broomielaw, the bridges over the Clyde, and a visit he paid to a weaving factory. There he was greatly taken with "Anderson's great harness

loom," and the Jacquard machine in connection with it—for his interest in the mechanics and improvements of his trade was always strong and active—and he "took in his lesson pretty weel." Both here and at Paisley—"a pretty toon," where his fellow weavers Tannahill and Wilson had lived—he also examined recent improvements, recalling "the little bellie that rang up i' the riggin' at sick and sick pairts o' the figured shawl napkins" they were weaving. In these towns, also, he noticed for the first time, with commendation, the new practice of numbering the houses, which had not then been done in Aberdeen. At Dunfermline, he did not hear of Bruce's grave till he had left it, though he would have liked greatly to have visited the last resting-place of "that great Scottish chief, whom they hae guid reason to brag aboot." Here and at Tillicoultry and Kirkcaldy, he visited the weavers. They asked him if he knew what "ticking" was. "Ye're big aboot that, are ye?" said the Aberdeen workman, proud of his county; "I hae woven plenty o't'!"

Near Dundee, he visited Claverhouse Castle, on account of its Covenanting interest; but his indignation did not shut his eyes to the abundant flowers, for "there was a guid curn* there that are na i' the north," and, amongst these, rest harrow (*Ononis arvensis*).† At Perth, he climbed to the top of Kinnoul Hill, to see the splendid view of the Tay there. When near Perth, he would "never hae been

* This word seems to be another form of *corn*; and hence came to mean, in Scotch, a small quantity.

† John found this plant at the farm of Oldtown in Leochel-Cushnie, in 1872, a station unusually inland for it, and took a specimen of it to Professor Dickie. It grew in a seam of rotten granite in a field, and John thought the seed had been carried to the spot by a bird.

seen again, had he no borne a hand wi' the ferry boat." At Arbroath, "a gae close toon," as it certainly was then and still is, he "saw a heap o' plants on the sands." In Montrose, "a bonnie clean toonie," which it is, though too "close," like its neighbours, he got a month's work at the loom, living there when a woman was "hangit for killin' her man." "The nicht she and her mither broke his head, the toon was in an awfu' state. The mither got aff, as it wasna proved on her, but the dochter was hangit," the hangman saying "he wu'd be as canny wi' her as he cu'd!" John could not bear to witness the execution, and did not go to see it.

At St. Andrews, he was down in Wishart's dungeon, and saw the place where he was burned, with ever-living Covenanting enthusiasm. On the Links, he found the viper's bugloss (*Echium vulgare*), with its "very bonnie blue floor," "most stately, most brilliant of wild flowers," as it has been characterized, and with "sick a droll name." This John "rehearsed once or twice when he first heard it."* The plant, he said, "is countit a winder north here awa, but it is thocht naething o' doon yonder, whar there is plenty o't;" but he got it also in Tough. He went round by the "East Neuk o' Fife," where he saw the collieries, and where beans and peas were very cheap and were used by him as a change from the everlasting porridge. He wandered as far south as Kelso, "a sma' boro' toonie;"

* It is called *Echium* from the Greek *echis*, a viper; and *bugloss*, or ox tongue, from its bristly leaves, from *bous*, an ox, and *glossa*, a tongue. Another of the same class is called the *Cynoglossum* or hound's tongue, from the Greek *cyon*, a dog. The *Echium* was supposed to cure the bite of the viper.

and Coldstream, where the inhabitants were "terrible wi' the burr," which, however, he understood, though their speech was "a bit o' a rattle." He also went some distance into Northumberland.

He generally travelled south and returned home again on foot. Sometimes the harvesters went in a party on board ship or steamer to the place where they were to be employed. On occasions, he took steamer home; but he most frequently came back by land, doing weaving on the way, and often passed through Fettercairn, and home by the old hill road across the Cairn-o-Mount, down into Deeside, and so over to the Don.

In the harvest-field, John either worked at cutting the grain with the sickle or at binding the sheaves. His usual wages were only two shillings a day. Women also were hired to go south along with the men. Once or twice, the contractor who farmed the party in which he was, ran off with the earnings of all, a loss John felt very much. In this way and by non-payment of webs, he lost "guid puckles o' money noo and nan" (now and then), for he was "ower simple wi' them."

The style of life and work in such harvesting parties is well indicated by the narrative of a cousin of Mr. Beveridge, of the Craigh in Tough, who accompanied John to a harvest in Fife. The party that year was hired by a well-known contractor, John Angus, of Turriff. They assembled at Dundee, and crossed the Tay to Newburgh, in Fife, where they were met by the farmer's carts and conveyed to their destination, the Mains of Dunbog, some miles inland to the east. They arrived there about midnight, and had to take refuge for a time, late though

the hour was, in an open cart-shed till their sleeping-room was prepared. This was a long hay-loft, the men being accommodated at one end, and the women at the other. The women had thus to pass through the men's division in order to reach their own, and the consequence was, that "there were some gae rum (rough) nights" spent under these conditions.

John, of course, shared with the rest in all the labour and accommodation of the party during their month's stay at Dunbog, till harvest was finished. He had come supplied, as usual, with home-made books, formed of newspapers and grocers' tea-paper, to press and preserve the plants in. These he kept carefully protected in the big bundle containing his clothes. All his spare time was spent in exploring the neighbourhood for plants. In this work, he had many willing or curious assistants in his companions and in the farmer himself, who brought him all the plants they could lay their hands on. He counted petals and stamens and told their names, preserving all the rarer specimens for his herbarium. It was a picturesque and interesting sight to see these groups of amateur botanists gathered round the little man after the labours of the day, and engaged in such innocent, intellectual pursuits; while many a merry laugh was raised at the grand, jaw-breaking names the common weeds that grew in the ditches and hedges were dignified with, in their eyes.

The first Sunday, John and his friend walked to Cupar to church, a journey of between thirty and forty miles in all. The Sunday following, they went to Newburgh, fifteen miles. On the next, they purposed going to Perth, but were prevented by heavy rain. In these long Sabbath

walks, they gathered and preserved all the rare plants they found, and these went to swell the collection with which John returned to the north.

From this narrative, it will be seen that the temptations of the harvesters to a rough kind of life were very great, especially in regard to the relations of the sexes. Of the women he saw, John "thocht nae muckle;" and in regard to both men and women, he felt that "the best way was to keep himsel' as far as possible asunder frae them in their common intercourse with each other."

In walking from place to place, his fare was extremely simple, and his expenses were very small. As was then more the custom than now, he was generally treated with the greatest kindness and hospitality by the farmers and others he visited along the roads traversed by him, especially in the less frequented regions. Even when he stayed at an inn, his food and lodging generally cost about sixpence, sometimes more, and often even less. His chief dish was plain porridge and milk, and sometimes a little tea at night; but to that dish, in his younger days, he had little liking. His powers of endurance, in travel and work, on this simple fare were quite astonishing.

In these primitive times of little locomotion and secluded life, such a man as John Duncan was a god-send to his entertainers, with his plants, books and horological instruments—of which he always carried several—his varied knowledge, and his intelligent and, before attentive listeners, fervent and informing talk. His simple, unaffected, homely style, quaint ways, and evident honesty of character and purpose soon gained their interest and esteem; so that he was frequently asked to prolong his

visit, and to return when he passed that way another season. Many was the eager group that gathered round this uncommon type of tramp, as he sat by the "cheek" of the ample fire, in the great kitchen of any hospitable farmhouse he stayed at, to look at the plants he carried, hear their names and properties, and examine his curious horologe, with which he knew the hours.

By such intellectual repayment, he gave ample return for the kindness he received. He also conferred many an obligation, by treating the folks for various diseases with natural simples obtained from the plants, and by teaching them how to make "teas" and "saws" and "syrups" for the cure of their common ailments.

John's experiences in these countless wanderings were interesting, varied, and not seldom adventurous. He was one day travelling amongst the hills when he lost his way, and, darkness coming down, he was forced to ask for shelter for the night at a small Highland hut. The sole inmates were a young man and his wife, both well-favoured, healthy, and bronzed with outdoor labour. They received him with hearty kindness, their looks and manner saying more than words, for they spoke little English, though fluent in an unknown tongue, the Gaelic. Having walked all day, John had tasted nothing except the crust he always carried in his pocket, and he was famishing for food. He entreated them to give him something to eat, a request they understood. To his blank astonishment, they showed him that there was not a particle of food in the house.

The kindly pair were, however, more than equal to the emergency. The good woman whispered something to her

mate, proceeded to a corner of the cottage, and, seizing a small "cogie," went out into the dark. Her husband rose immediately, cleaned a large pot, and placed it *empty* on the fire, which he had replenished with peats, and he then followed his wife. John viewed the silent proceedings in utter amazement—increased by his thus being left alone in the picturesque hut—at the active preparations when there seemed nothing to be cooked, and at the unusual capacity of the pot, as it hung open and empty above the fire.

His host returned in all haste, with a large sheaf of yellow corn, which he had just cut with the sickle in his hand. The oats he held over the great pot, and in a short time, set them on fire. The chaff was speedily consumed in the bright blaze, and the grains dropped into the pot. There they were quickly dried and scorched as if in a kiln, when a pair of bellows was used to blow away the charred portions of the husks. A "quern," or handmill, was then carried from the back of the apartment. This consisted of two circular flat stones. The lower remained stationary while the other was made quickly to revolve, grinding into beautiful oatmeal the hard dry grain, which was poured into a hole in the centre by the dexterous mountaineer.

By this time, his wife entered, bright, smiling, and rosy from work in the byre, carrying a "cogie" full of reaming milk. Expert as her husband, with whom she talked with what seemed to John extraordinary volubility, she cleaned a smaller pot and put it on the fire, while addressing broken but reassuring words to the interested and astonished stranger. She soon had a large dish of excellent porridge and a bowl of sweetest milk placed before her guest, all in less than an hour from his entering the breadless hut!

While he enjoyed his nutritious and delicious repast, she crowned her kindly services by baking a great oaten cake, which she put before him, with a new supply of Highland creamy milk, elsewhere unknown.

John viewed the scene in wondering silence and with swelling gratitude. It was all so new, beautiful, unexpected and kindly, so eastern and biblical, so royal and abundant, in its simple hospitality and self-helpful independence. It became a favourite tale of his, and he concluded it, when he told it to James Black, by saying, that should James live to be an old man, it would be something to tell his friends that he had seen and known a man to whom all this was done, in bonnie Scotland, in the nineteenth century.

But it was not so uncommon as John thought, and is carried on even now, fifty years since that time, in some parts of the Highlands and Western Isles, where the "quern" may still be seen in use, and where a dish can be as rapidly and hospitably produced from the field, in some of the remoter corners there; as the author and some of his friends have more than once witnessed in these primitive regions.

John and James were once talking together about the modern adulterations in linen fabrics, when James remarked that in his youth, he had seen flax spun on a wheel by the fireside, a much more common sight in John's young days. John replied that that was nothing strange, for he had seen it spun with the distaff,* by the young maidens in the

* The author has never seen flax spun by the distaff. He has, however, seen wool so spun in the Highlands more than once. He

evenings, as they sat chatting round the fire, and he had woven into cloth the yarn thus produced. He then gave a circumstantial account of a practice, in connection with this home manufacture, which gives a vivid glimpse of old-world ways, and which he asserted was once not unusual ; and the narrator was truth itself.

He said the country lads and lasses used to adjourn to the barn, to talk and joke together, while the girls carried on their primitive spinning with the distaff. To do the whirling most effectively, the chaste young damsels—and he insisted strongly that they were so—used to take a position half-standing and half-sitting, and give the requisite rotatory motion to the distaff by rolling it on the bare thigh ; as it would not spin half so well on their clothes.*

“Well, John,” said his astonished friend, “I am afraid when next I read about the ‘blue, and purple, and fine-twined linen’ of the Jews, it will get mixed up in my mind with this distaff business of yours. Bother it, man, it’s outlandish and perfectly heathenish.” “Na, na,” replied John, “you are quite mista’en ; it was custom, only custom, pure and simple.” John then reminded him that they had both lived in a district where men and women forded the Don together in primitive fashion, and where also all heavy fabrics were cleaned by being trodden with the feet in a tub or a stream by kilted women—without a single

possesses a “clew” of worsted obtained from an old woman in the north of Sutherland, who spun it in his presence by means of a distaff, with the usual stone whorl at its end to draw out the twining thread.

* Mr. James Linn, of the Geological Survey, recently met an old man in the parish of Cairnie near Keith, who had seen this regularly done in his young days, and who said it was a general custom in Banffshire and the north.

suspicion or thought of immodesty in the doing of these things. "Right enough," said James, "but man is a creature, as you know, largely affected by circumstances. The river is no joke, nor the washing-tub either; but, given youth and beauty, a summer eve, and courting, all combined, with this whirling of the distaff of yours, and what then?" But John stuck to custom, to "use and wont," and held that the idea of immodesty was imported into the subject, and that, in the circumstances they had mentioned, there was not a particle of it present. Was he wrong?

Some of his adventures in the south were not without considerable danger.

One day, as he was quietly walking along the road near the East Neuk of Fife, he was accosted by two coarse-looking tramps, "rag-tag lads, nae very bonnie," whose dress and style did not reassure him. They first asked him to play "pitch and toss" with them, which he refused. Then they offered him a dram out of a black bottle they carried, which he would not taste. Becoming bolder, they threw off all disguise, and advanced menacingly to seize him. But John was prepared for them, and "putting his best fit first," as he said, told them to stand off. They then tried to trip him. John, seeing two to one, at once darted off along the road, in reliance on his fleetness of foot; and though they followed hard after him for a time, he soon out-distanced them and escaped, "running," he said, "just like a hare."

On another occasion, he fell among a fraternity certainly calculated to rouse suspicion—"a curran Hielant tinklers," the wandering gipsies of the country. They had just arrived, like himself, at a farm-steading where, from

the lateness of the hour, he was obliged to remain over night. The farmer refused to provide him with other accommodation, and used him very scurvily, perhaps annoyed by the presence of his companions, or identifying him with them. To his surprise, on the other hand, the tinklers treated him very kindly, giving him of the brose and milk they provided for themselves ; and though, in the Gaelic which they spoke, he expected them to be planning robbery or worse, while he slept in the same barn with the gang, he rose with all his possessions untouched. He got breakfast from them, and left them with a new and higher impression of the innate dignity and goodness of human nature, even with the most unlikely surroundings.

CHAPTER XXII.

JOHN RETURNS TO THE GADIE.

IN 1849, John Duncan returned once more to Auchleven, to which he seems to have taken a liking, and there he remained three years. He boarded as before with Sandy Smith. John now worked at a loom in Smith's house, and not, as at his last visit, in the mill. The poor, thatched cottage was in a much more dilapidated condition than when he had left it thirteen years before. It stood parallel to the road not far from "the philosopher," in what is now an open space, for the house was removed six years ago. The kitchen was at the south end, a barn and byre in the middle, opposite the door, and the workshop at the north. There were two looms there, the one for the master, and the other for John. The divisions between the apartments consisted only of thin deals. John's loom being next the byre, he could hear "crummie" chewing her grass, ruminating her cud, rubbing herself against the wall, breathing her long-drawn sighs and snorts through the board just behind him, and, when she became impatient, drowning the clatter of the shuttle with her loud bellow ; while the odours of the byre pervaded the whole dwelling. It was altogether a homely arrangement, somewhat in the primitive Highland and Irish style. But there were then no meddlesome sanitary inspectors to go poking about and

disturbing the sweet scents and sanctities of such communistic arrangements.

John slept, as before, in the cold "philosopher," with the near companionship of his equine and bovine fellows ; and his bed and possessions were disposed as on his last occupancy of the same delectable loft.

In Smith's house, there was only one fire, which was in the kitchen at the far end from the workshop. In the winter time, there was nothing for our weaver to do when he got cold, but to drive all the harder at the treddles and the shuttle. When his hands became too chilled even to do that, he would then take a run to the warm kitchen, to toast them at the peat fire which smouldered on the low hearthstone.

The kitchen was also the only dwelling-place in the building, and into it were crowded the man, his wife, and a large family.

Sandy Smith was himself a pleasant, intelligent fellow, a good deal of a wag, and a capital workman, but he relished other pursuits more than his loom. Though he had no great liking for general reading or scientific subjects, he was a keen politician and a great devourer of the newspapers. Here John and he being on common ground, they used to hold long confabulations on the stirring times in which they lived. Smith was kind and happy-tempered, and allowed his eccentric tradesman full liberty to do his work as he liked. He put no check on his wanderings, knowing that he was a workman worth having, who more than made up for any lost time, and that, as he was employed on piece-work, any loss fell only on himself.

John took an interest in the family, and one of the circle that grew up round that kitchen fire, who was named after his father,* recalls his father's scientific assistant with pleasure and high respect. On John's return to Auchleven, young Sandy was a lad of thirteen, and for two years was his bedfellow in "the philosopher." He was much impressed with the man and his unusual habits and studies, and received from him permanent impulses for good. His mother and John were great friends, and he regrets that she has passed away before her abundant memories of Duncan were recovered; for she was "full" of John and his ways, and read with pleasure the account of him given in "Good Words" in 1877. John was much interested in her and her many children, and used to cheer her with advice and assistance, in her praiseworthy struggles to bring them up worthily with the lightest of purses.

Mr. Smith testifies to John's remarkable temperance in both eating and drinking, and his simple tastes, which were satisfied with the plainest fare, if clean and wholesome. He never saw him dissipate even in tea; for porridge and brose were his staple dishes, varied at supper-time with "kail," in which a big "castock," or stalk of the cabbage, was counted by him a luxury. John's appetite in the morning was something remarkable; and no wonder, for early though it was, he had already done some hours' study and work. He soon appeared in the kitchen after the house-wife was astir, exclaiming, "Is the kettle boilin' yet, Betty?"—a consummation that was crowned by John making his own brose. His achievements in

* Mr. Alex Smith, of the wool mill, Knockando.

eating this dish used to astonish the youngsters, for he often took it without milk, when none was to be had, and, what seemed worse, used sour, unsavoury "sowens" as a substitute, which even their keen, healthy stomachs could not stand. But, as Mr. Smith says, "John could always suit himself to circumstances"—one of the most invaluable capacities any man can possess; a training for which should form a specific aim in the upbringing of all young people, but which, alas, is less common, with our growing luxury in all classes, than in the Spartan days of which we now speak.

Duncan's methodical, careful habits in all things surprised the children, and gave them lessons for life. Every Monday morning, for instance, it was a sight to see him brush and fold up his Sunday clothes with the greatest neatness, and deposit them tenderly in his chest, the opening of which filled the room with the odour of protecting camphor. His conscientiousness in all he did, and his deep religiousness even then impressed young Sandy.

The occasional flashings of John's quiet humour are still remembered. John used to tell his father, amongst other curious observations, that he could decide whether a man was "weel-aff or no," by the way he wore his night-cap!—for at that time, every elderly man in Auchleven wore during the day a red-striped "Kilmarnock." He said that the caps of "those who had siller stood stracht up on their heeds;" whereas "the caps of those that didna hae't, hung doon at the tap," in appropriate dejection at the impecuniosity of their owners, no doubt—a generalization which his young friend thought was borne out by the facts of the case as exhibited in the village.

Mr. Smith gratefully recalls John's kindly interest in himself, while he lived at home and after he left it for his first situation at Cothal Mills. There John walked twenty miles to see him. He also took him on a first visit to Aberdeen, to show him the "fairlies" there. On the way thither on foot, he delighted the young man's heart by his sincere and childlike sympathy with his own ecstatic raptures at his first view of the sea from near Woodside.

The crowded and miscellaneous kitchen in Sandy Smith's home was scarcely a place for a student to spend his spare time in. This forced John to seek quieter and more congenial quarters. Retiring as he was, he found in Auchleven kindly appreciators who understood and respected him, especially amongst the intelligent women he knew.

Just opposite the weaving shop and face to face with it on the other side of the road, stood the workshop and dwelling of Emslie, the village carpenter. He was himself a quiet man, with no pretensions to mental parts, doing his daily work with diligence, though varying it occasionally with a quiet scamper, gun in hand, over the moors and mosses of Benachie. His wife was an active woman of great intelligence, kind and neighbourly. She was a diligent reader and good talker, and had an excellent memory, which now in her old age is full of vivid recollections of the Auchleven of the time and the strange weaver. Her intelligence is well indicated by the fact, that the Mutual Instruction Class, of which more anon, used often to meet in her house before they got a proper room, and that she used to enjoy the papers read and the discussions that followed.

John and she became intimate, and her house was one of his few resorts, for the comfort, quietness and intellectual sympathies to be found in it. Scarcely a day passed without seeing him there. When he wished a change from the weary monotony of the everlasting click-clack of the shuttle, he would suddenly appear leaning over the lower half of the shop door, which was divided into two parts, like that of a barn. He would first gaze up to the skies, and then all round, while his hand shaded his eyes, in order to see the state of the weather. Then, making a sudden leap across the highway, for he was in the hey-day of health and spirits, he would burst into the carpenter's kitchen, as if he had flown there. He would remain for a little, talking, reading or having a romp with the children, and then return to his loom.

By Mrs. Emslie's quiet fireside, he often spent his evenings, away from the bustle of the Smiths. John's reading being laborious, he used to ask Mrs. Emslie to read to him. This she did with fluency and intelligence, while he sat enjoying the feast, and expressing his interest by frequent ejaculations of "Ay, ay," varied in tone according to the feelings of assent, surprise, doubt, or criticism the subject elicited. John's own style of reading raised her astonishment and respect, from his indomitable patience and determination to succeed. He had to spell all the longer words, and he read and re-read every sentence, accompanied by a running fire of "Ay, ay!" till he conquered both vocables and meaning. He used also to bring his books on Botany, many of them with finely coloured plates, to show and explain them to his friends; and he was so earnest and persistent in doing this, that he

sometimes became a "baather," that is, a bother or bore, to the busy woman.

She was surprised how he was able, in his poverty, to purchase so many books, some of them costly. This could only have been done, she knew, by the remarkable self-denial he practised in other things, of which she was a daily witness. She speaks of John as being then bright, blithesome, and companionable amongst those he was at home with, and she cherishes the highest respect for his character and disposition, as being, intellectually, intelligent and well informed, and, religiously, "full of the grace of God;" while his enthusiasm in science was something wonderful. She looked upon him as altogether an uncommon, and, in many respects, a superior man, and used at that time to notice the peculiar form of his head, as in correspondence with this fact.

She found him unusually shy and sensitive, even after long acquaintance, and remarkably so with strangers. He was very kind to her children. They were very fond of him, and one of the first places they went to, when able to toddle about, was the weaving shop. There he used to seat them on the loom beside himself till they fell asleep, lulled by the clatter of the shuttle, when he would carry them home in his arms to their mother and their cradle.

Another haunt of John's, chiefly in the evenings, was a comfortable cottage next door to the weaver's, belonging to Mrs. Lindsay. Her daughter still survives, about three-score, in the same pleasant, old-world home—a comely, placid-looking woman, beautifully patient and resigned under untold pangs, arising from a diseased limb, which

the strongest anodynes can only partially relieve. It was a delightful nest for any one to retreat to, after the chilling toils of a winter day, with its far-projecting fireplace, great open-armed chimney inviting to kindly warmth, and the luxurious nook beside it with its comfortable seat ; while the crusie, pendant from a cord above, mingled its light with the ruddy gleam of the fire and brightened the cheerful room, which was adorned with shining plates and well-burnished pans, and was redolent of peat reek—one of those interiors that charm the heart of a painter.

There in the cosy corner by the blazing hearth, John used to sit of an evening, pleasantly chatting to the kindly inmates, or reading, in his broken but expressive style, from the newspapers or from some of his numerous books. He was also accustomed to bring his gatherings of plants to arrange and press them, and tell about them and his wanderings for them to willing auditors—for there, as in Mrs. Emslie's, the man was appreciated and his learning admired. On Sunday nights, after returning from church, often at a very long distance during those stirring ecclesiastical times, he would come to Leezie Lindsay's to read his well-worn Bible, explain its contents, or give extracts from the numerous commentaries and dictionaries which helped him to understand its difficulties. Stretched from side to side of the projecting chimney still hangs a cord plaited and tied by him thirty years ago to hold the crusie, preserved, no doubt, by the protecting creosote of the peat smoke ; and there, inside the ample chimney, still rested, at my visit, the crusie itself which used to illumine the pages of the studious weaver.

There also he kept many of his better books, for more

ready reference and for protection from damp. When he read aloud at any time, no speaking was allowed or indulged in, for John liked to be listened to ; and who does not in such circumstances? When bed-time came, and he had to cross the road and climb the ladder to his crow's nest, he used to carry in his arms, as a kindly companion, a large single-lugged stone jar—an old "grey-beard" still preserved, originally intended for something stronger than the hot water with which it had been filled by his friends, to make his cold couch more comfortable in the winter nights : so that John slept with a "pig."*

As some sort of return for all this kindness, John never failed, when he went to Aberdeen, to bring home something for little Leezie, a sweet wee lassie, then the sunshine of the cottage, now a bright, good-looking woman. Chief amongst these gifts for the palate was that irresistible attraction to all youngsters, black-sugar, or "sugar ailie" as it is called in Scotland, varied sometimes with candy and barley sugar. He also brought more enduring toys to play with, which then somehow lasted longer than now. A pretty birdie and a white glass duck were both long extant, but are now gone. A small tin basin, one of John's gifts, is still played with by another child that runs about the same clay floor. Leezie has still blankets woven by Duncan's hand, and the bed he slept on in "the philosopher" was sewed by her kindly fingers.

* *Pig* is common Scotch for a bit of crockery, derived, it would seem, from the Gaelic.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STUDIES AND FRIENDS AT AUCHLEVEN.

DUNCAN continued his intellectual pursuits in Auchleven with a glowing ardour that nothing could extinguish. He kept some books always beside him in the workshop, and these were daily resorted to in the intervals necessary in such sedentary labour. He read much also, as we have seen, in the quietude of the cosy cottages he frequented. But "the philosopher" was the chief scene of his studies. Many a time, when wakened between two and three in the summer mornings by the rumble of the passing peat carts going to the moss, has his young bedfellow, Sandy Smith, seen John already dressed and seated on the top of his chest at the other side of the den, "mumbling and spelling" at the book he was engaged on, by the light that entered through the glass-less opening in the door, through which also blew the pleasant morning breeze. As he read in an audible monotone, the listener could generally make out the subject. John went over the same sentence or passage again and again till he had mastered it; but, as Sandy says, "when it did get in, it never got out again!" This was Duncan's daily practice all through the bright days of summer.

It was a strict rule of his that no light of any kind

should be used in "the philosopher," on account of the smallness of the place and the inflammable nature of the surrounding materials—a rule never once violated by himself, though sometimes broken by the boy, who got properly scolded for his indiscretion. In winter, therefore, they were obliged to ascend and descend the ladder from the road, dress and undress, go to bed and rise again, all in pitch darkness except on moonlight nights, and in constant danger of knocking their heads against the rafters, for they could scarcely stand erect even in the centre of the triangular space. On winter mornings, when it was of course impossible to read, John rose very early and went down to the shop. He worked diligently at his loom till breakfast, by the light of the weaver's oil lamp. After dinner about noon, he retired to "the philosopher." He first made his bed, and then studied for two or more hours, returning after daylight failed to work once more by lamplight. By this exemplary diligence, he traversed a wide field of reading and thought, in spite of his slow and laborious style of study. This was surely the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, if it ever was so pursued; but the difficulties only enhanced the student's delights, which have rarely been surpassed in intensity.

When Duncan returned to Auchleven, his devotion to the stars of heaven had been greatly eclipsed by his love of "the stars of earth, the golden flowers." When William Mortimer spoke to him of this change, saying, "O Johnnie! ye've laid by the meen, and ta'en up the floors!" "Yes," replied John, with great emphasis and practical sense, "yes, I can get my *hands* upo' *them*!" Though he

could not pluck the stars from the sky, he could pluck the plants from the ground!

That was the answer of the practical philosopher John always was. It also contains one of the chief pleas for the prosecution of outdoor nature studies by the young. In these, the student can examine, handle, and dissect with his own fingers the subjects of his study, and his work consists in real handling of the objects he deals with—not in matters of distant sight, where the hands can never touch the things investigated, as in astronomy, nor in matters of faith, as in history and geography. It embodies the sound principle which commends such subjects of practical research as important elements in early education, that by their means the whole senses—by eye, ear, nose, mouth touch and hand—are separately and jointly exercised along with the intellect, under skilled guidance, for scientific ends and careful induction.

John's new pleasure was to conquer the flora of his old haunts along the Gadie. As Charles Black explains, this stream is not botanically remarkable, unless for its abundant strong-smelling herbs, such as Meadow sweet and the like, whose odour still sends his heart back to Gadie side. John soon explored all its windings. He went up the pretty dell behind Castle Lickleyhead—then a picturesque ivied ruin, now a modern shooting-lodge—which adorns and centralises the view there, with Hermit Seat in the background. He climbed the northern front of Benachie and its sister peaks, from which he brought “a tall kind of girse with a big nodding head which they all laughed at”—of course, for “wha wu'd bother himsel' wi' a wheen girses?” as they sagely said.

He was often absent all day, and more than once all night, subsisting on his bag of meal and crust of bread. When he went on any of these wanderings, his master, Sandy Smith, would say, "I hae lost my man the day; I suppose he's awa' amang the floors as uswal." Few saw him return, for he could steal up the ladder to his bed above the byre, unnoticed by anybody. He always came back with a bundle of plants, and often with wet clothes and moss-coloured boots that told of many a scramble. A villager brought the news one day, that he had actually seen John away in Aberdeen, looking at the ships in the harbour, "wi' a nievefu' * o' girses" even there; concluding with the remark, "but Johnnie never was like onybody else."

Duncan generally went alone, but sometimes he had a companion. The shoemaker occasionally accompanied him, more for the sake of his general conversation than for the weeds; and they used to talk of the stars as they came home in the dark. As William says, John delighted to discourse to others of the subjects he studied, and was grateful to any one that would listen to him about those things he held so dear. But he confesses that he got few auditors—it was too often a mere waste of good time. His speech was not very fluent, but most abundant, for "he never had ony end" to what he had to say; there was so much in his mind that he could not express. He generally concluded any expositions to friendly ears by saying, "Oh, I cu'd tell ye a great heap, a great heap!"

John succeeded in interesting Sandy Smith's children not a little in flowers, and they used to gather them, to show them to him in the weaving shop. At these times,

* Handful. The Scotch nieve or neive means the fist.

however busy, he would at once stop work, elated at seeing the plants in their hands, and hopeful that it would lead to their study in after years. He would then tell their names and other interesting things about them.

In order to draw general attention to the neglected wild flowers that grew in beauty all around, unheeded and unknown, John had an Exhibition of plants, once if not oftener. This was, doubtless, one of the first Botanical Exhibitions ever held in the north of Scotland, somewhere about the year 1850. It took place in the upper loft of the Carding Mill, and all were invited to come and see. His specimens, gathered about Tough and Auchleven—for he had spent above a week in getting fresh plants—were spread out on tables round the room, and young Sandy Smith was honoured, as his assistant, to hand them to the audience, while John discoursed about them.

His opening sentence was certainly startling enough—“Some people think that Botany is a beast. But Botany is no beast. Botany is the science that treats of plants.” This is a curious proof of the general ignorance then existing on scientific matters; for John wished merely to correct a misconception he found prevalent on the subject. He described to them, amongst other things, the office of the pollen that stuck to their noses when they smelled a rose, and recited the story of the solitary juniper bush on the braes of Tough.* In showing the water-lily, he told of his adventure in the Loch of Drum in search of it. With these and similar narratives, and striking properties, he tried to enliven the subject and interest his audience. But in spite of all his earnestness, the words did not flow so

* See Chap. XXX.

smoothly in such unwonted circumstances as they would have done to a friend on the hill-side. His auditors soon became tired of it, much more from sheer inability to comprehend such unaccustomed ideas, however illustrated, than from the want of eloquence in the lecturer. As Mr. Smith says, "every one was twice wearied before John was half done." A few left the room, but the rest remained to the end, "out of deference to the man, for he was a universal favourite."

In 1851, his fame as a botanist had so begun to spread that he received a letter of invitation from Aberdeen, asking him to assist in forming a new Natural History Society there, and to bring some botanical specimens with him to exhibit at the meeting. Whether he was able to comply with the request is unknown, but it is pleasing to learn that his merits were beginning to be recognized.

He also continued his practice of medical botany, and prescribed for ailments of different kinds. He is still remembered as being very successful in the treatment of cuts, by means of the invaluable "Healing herb" (*Plantago media*); and, in the cure of toothache, with Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*) and with "Aligopane" (*Inula helenium*), and when toothache troubled any one, "John and his aligopane" became a proverb and a remedy.

But John did not neglect his old sublimer studies of the firmament, for these he never did or could forget. They were only subordinated to nearer studies which had eclipsed the more distant. On clear frosty nights, he still examined the heavens, and set his dials behind the house. His want of Mathematics prevented his pursuing the

higher parts of Astronomy, but his knowledge of the descriptive portion of the subject was great.

He gave lessons on it to a young friend of his, John Mackay, son of the proprietor of the mill, now Dr. Mackay, of Strathkinness, in Fife. He showed him also how to construct a telescope. They were able to complete it with the help of Dr. Thomas Dick's work on the "Solar System," which was then, along with the "Christian Philosopher" by the same author, one of the first and best of popular scientific text-books. The two had many a peep through this home-made instrument at the moons of Jupiter, the rings of Saturn, and the surface of our own satellite.

John read some papers on Astronomy before the Mutual Instruction Class that met in the village. One of these discourses was given in the carpenter's house, on the moon and the tides, and Mrs. Emslie remembers how he was "sadies put till't, because he cu'dna get them tae understan' him, in spite of all he cu'd say." When the Class held a *soirée* on entering into more comfortable quarters, John was in "grand trim," and came out quite strongly on Astronomy, as Dr. Mackay tells, though, with such celestial themes, it was feared he soon shot beyond the comprehension of his rustic audience. His cognomen of "Johnnie Meen" was now less used, however, than at his first stay in Auchleven. Dr. Mackay recalls how, on bright starry nights after the Class dismissed, led by John, they used to stand for hours gazing into the heavens and discussing the deepest problems in regard to man's future destiny—such as whether the planets were inhabited, with which of them the future state was connected, and similar abstruse but ever interesting themes, which have

exercised the hopes and aspirations of humanity since man first opened his eyes to the starry firmament.

Duncan also paid some attention at that time to Entomology, which Charles and James Black afterwards successfully pursued; and Dr. Mackay recollects an ingenious box he used, which had one compartment for his victims and another for burning sulphur, by the fumes of which he killed them. He also showed the young man the proper way of transfixing them with pins.

Duncan also studied Meteorology, and was counted a kind of weather prophet. His constantly taking observations of the state of the weather gave rise to a peculiar habit of his of looking upwards and round about, with his hand above his eyes.

But, next to Botany, Theology was then, as at all times, his chief study. He was noted as an ardent Free Churchman, and no one was more regular in his attendance at the plain, barn-like temple near Waukmill. He dressed on Sunday in a blue serge suit of his own weaving, with shining buttons, tall hat, and well-brushed boots, and sat in front of the pulpit in reverent attention. He also went on week days to missionary and Bible class meetings, which were held three miles distant, at Insch. He hoped to see in time a Free Church founded also in England, that is, he looked for a great secession from the establishment there; for, in his view, as well as in that of many others then and since, secession was held to be essential to religious freedom and progress.

He was also a diligent student of Biblical Criticism, which he pursued by the help of the numerous dictionaries and commentaries he possessed. In order that, as he said,

"he nicht gae to the oreeg'nal," he continued his study of Greek and made considerable progress. Dr. Mackay says that he was rather proud of his knowledge of that language, and "could spell out the words and get some idea of the meaning in Greek, in passages he wished to investigate."

He continued as anti-papal and anti-prelatic in religious sympathies as ever, and took out the ultra-protestant journal, called the "Bulwark." Its highly coloured narratives of popish errors and abuses he enjoyed and read to others. He talked earnestly on these subjects to all the young people he knew, in order to instil into them the traditional antagonism to those elements of error and religious slavery which he had so strongly imbibed with his mother's milk and teaching; which had been so deeply impressed on his own youthful heart by the braes of Dunnottar; and which, in the light of her history, he viewed as essential to Scotland's spiritual well-being.

Though highly respected by all, and perhaps more esteemed in Auchleven than anywhere else, he was very imperfectly understood by the people in general. As Dr. Mackay observes, "they were incapable of estimating his true character—at the time he lived among them, at least—for he was quite in advance of them in knowledge and aspirations. They thought him clever, no doubt," he continues, "but they could not understand or enter into the man's thorough earnestness and enthusiasm in the pursuit of knowledge."

In spite of their compelled appreciation of the man, their ideas of him were in a kind of bewilderment, which was increased by his great eccentricity. He was the only specimen of the kind they had ever seen. Many looked

upon him as "daft;" others viewed him at the best as "something silly."

A farmer's son in the neighbourhood, who was then at college and afterwards became a parish teacher, used to accompany John in his search for plants, to his father's great surprise. The practical farmer, judging only by outward appearances, remonstrated with his son "for takkin' up wi' yon cretur—he's a feel!" "Well," said the son, "if he's a fool, he knows far more than folks that think themselves wiser." The lad afterwards made considerable progress in such folly, and added not a little to his happiness while he pursued it.

To a favoured few, John used to show his herbarium, his "hibernia," as one of his good friends called it—shall we say by an Irishism? This he kept with the greatest care, preserved and scented, in his chest in "the philosopher." As Dr. Mackay remarks, Duncan believed and acted on the exoteric and esoteric in philosophy. It was not every one that was deemed worthy to be initiated into scientific mysteries. The candidate must show himself imbued with the true spirit necessary for such sacred rites; according to the Horatian hatred of the "*profanum vulgus*," and the Christian precept regarding "pearls before swine." But when these essentials were possessed, however dimly, John was ready to become their earnest high priest, to initiate and instruct the aspirant.

His chief candidate for such honours in Auchleven was Dr. John Mackay himself. He was a lad of about thirteen years when he first made John's acquaintance, and when about twenty, became a medical student at Aberdeen University. A sincere attachment sprang up

between the man and the boy. As Mrs. Emslie expresses it, young John "had a great wark" with old John, "and really loved him," and their friendship became the talk of the village. Dr. Mackay is now sorry that "fleeting years and the serious concerns of life have effaced from his memory much he could have wished to tell of his friend: *heu fugaces . . . labuntur anni.*" He confesses that he "owes to John, in great measure, the choice of a profession," for "he helped to flame the latent desire he had to acquire knowledge."

John of course introduced the young student to Botany. At his first lessons, he dissected for him a simple flower, and explained its component parts and structure. He pointed out, explained and named the common plants in the neighbourhood, and his pupil still recalls his early descriptions of the Germander speedwell, Woodruff, Lady's mantle, the Common Fox-tail grass (*Alopecurus pratensis*), and other flowers, grasses and trees, both forest and garden. They were accustomed to go to the field and hill together, John crowned with his Tam o' Shanter bonnet. He was then, the doctor says, muscular and sinewy, and in the prime of life. They also spent many happy hours alone in "the philosopher," "going over the herbarium and books." They had long talks, too, in the weaving shop on many subjects, scientific and religious. Amongst other matters, they "quite settled the future of church and state in Scotland!" Indeed, during college recess, when the young doctor was at home, they were constant companions. Dr. Mackay gratefully acknowledges that Duncan "influenced his mind powerfully." They met for the last time in 1860, some years after John had left the banks of the Gadie.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOHN BECOMES AN ESSAYIST.

ON the 18th of July, 1850, a society was formed in the village of Auchleven, called the Mutual Instruction Class.

The society was part of a vigorous and extensive intellectual movement which originated in the upland village of Rhynie, at the foot of the far-seen hill called the Tap o' Noth, and which spread thence to a large number of rural and village centres in the counties of Aberdeen and Banff. This movement was one of the earliest and most systematic of its kind in the north, and deserves to be better known.* Like many other good things, this Mutual Instruction organization had a very small beginning. The Rev. Robert Harvey Smith, M.A., then a young man of some twenty summers, who had enjoyed the usual education of the district, supplemented by a few years' business training in Aberdeen, returned to his native village to prepare for the grammar school and university. He collected eleven other young men at Rhynie, and submitted to them a draft of rules for the formation of a Mutual Instruction Class, and on the 9th of November, 1846, those

* For an account of this movement, I am indebted chiefly to the Rev. R. Harvey Smith, M.A., its founder; and to Mr. William Anderson, Wellhouse, Alford, an active promoter.

apostles of mutual instruction initiated, in a small hall in the village, the first "class." The hall was an upper room, to which access was obtained by an outside stair. It was seated with forms without backs, and lighted with gas above the fireplace, near to which the chairman sat, behind a small table bearing writing materials and papers. The founder occupied the chair, and, after a brief address, submitted to the meeting his draft of the proposed rules. They were discussed *seriatim*, and adopted with some alterations; an essayist was appointed for the next meeting; and thus the Mutual Instruction movement began. The "class" became popular, and rapidly grew in numbers and influence.

The rules which guided the Rhynie class for many years, and which formed the basis of the rules of most of the Mutual Instruction societies, were similar to those of all mutual improvement societies, with which, happily, the world has since become more familiar—the aim being "the mutual instruction" of the members, by the reading of essays and criticisms thereupon. One uncommon and commendable regulation was the fine of a penny from each member that came ten minutes late, "unless an excuse satisfactory to the majority were given."

About a month after the formation of the Rhynie class, its founder submitted a scheme for planting such classes in the districts around, and a sort of *propaganda fide*, under the name of "The Corresponding Committee" of the class, was constituted on January 1st, 1847. This committee was very active and successful in establishing societies, and its visits to various centres were numerous and full of interesting incident.

Meanwhile the parent society, while multiplying classes, continued to perfect its own organization, and increase its method of influencing those in its *immediate* neighbourhood. A class library was formed, scientific apparatus procured for the use of the members, public social meetings were held, and annual courses of public lectures delivered under its auspices.

In the spring of 1849, the class entered the field of authorship, and published a tract entitled "An Address to Farm Servants, on their Intellectual Condition, by the Rhynie Mutual Instruction Class," the joint production of the class. It passed through two editions, was favourably noticed by the press, and created no small stir among those to whom it was addressed, as well as directed public attention to the condition of farm servants. This led to considerable discussion of this important social question in the public press at that time, and many plans were proposed for their amelioration.

At a later date, the class published a very valuable lecture delivered under its auspices by Mr. William McCombie, of Cairnballoch, already mentioned, an honorary member of the society. The delivery of this lecture, which quickly passed through two large editions, was the occasion of Mr. McCombie's first appearance as a public lecturer, a function which he frequently thereafter discharged, to the great advantage of the country and city populations of Aberdeenshire.

Early in 1849, an important step was taken by the Rhynie class for the consolidation of the Mutual Instruction movement. This was the formation of "The Aberdeen and Banffshire Mutual Instruction Union." This institution

had a most beneficial influence on the various classes, combining and directing their energies, and rendering them a power in the two counties. The same hand that had to do with so many of the schemes of the Rhynie class, was active in the origination of this one. Aided by a committee, he submitted to the Rhynie class a draft of the constitution of the proposed Union, which, with slight alterations, was afterwards adopted by delegates from the various classes.

The object of the Union now instituted was to cultivate friendly co-operation in everything relating to the interests of the associated classes, and to promote these classes in favourable localities. Annual meetings of the Union took place at different centres, such as Rhynie, Gartly, Huntly, Forgue, Keith, and Alford. At these, the various classes were represented by delegates, and public *soirées* held, which seem for several years to have been enthusiastic and successful, under the honorary presidency of Mr. McCombie.

In the same year, the active Rhynie society considered the practicability of forming a Female Mutual Instruction Class. This was successfully accomplished, on lines somewhat similar to those of the other societies, combining, however, tutorial with mutual instruction. Somewhat later, evening schools for artisans and farm servants were organized by the same class.

In January, 1850, appeared the first number of a monthly periodical published by the Lynturk club. It was named "The Rural Echo and Magazine of the North of Scotland Mutual Instruction Associations."

During the next eight years, the Mutual Instruction

movement made steady and satisfactory progress, training through its various agencies a host of young men, who gradually found positions of influence at a distance from the limited rural village communities where they received their first intellectual stimulus. Authors, editors, physicians, ministers of various sections of the church, and business men rose from these classes and occupied important stations at home and abroad. In consequence of this removal of their best members, many of the societies were weakened; and the populations around them being sparse, there was a lack of young men to fill the places of those removed. Hence many of the classes decreased in numbers, and under such discouragements, a few were extinguished—their very success contributing to this result.

The Union ceased to meet in 1857, and thus a most important bond was dissolved. Still, not a few societies continued to flourish, and a number even now exist under slightly changed names and conditions. Young Men's Christian Associations and Science and Art classes absorbed a certain proportion. The parent Rhynie class continued to meet, with some slight interruptions, for twenty-eight years, a Science and Art class occupying its place down to the present time.

The Auchleven Instruction Class lasted six or seven years. Young Dr. Mackay took an active part in it, and the meetings were held fortnightly in a room in the mill, kindly allowed by his father, and sometimes in private houses, till a cottage was built by Mr. Mackay, partly for their accommodation. To Mr. R. H. Brewster, long secretary of the society, I am greatly indebted for assistance and information regarding John Duncan's life in Auchleven.

A pretty good library was also formed in connection with the society. This was kept in a three-cornered cupboard, in which the librarian, young Smith, had difficulty in arranging the books. They used to hold yearly *soirées* in the mill. Their grandest effort in this direction took place at their entering on new premises in the cottage, when a select choir discoursed sweet music and John Duncan held forth on Astronomy. The society had also its poet laureate, for they cultivated the muses as well as science and philosophy.

Duncan was a member from the first, and continued to be so during his stay in the village. He read essays there, and took his part in the criticisms. There were several elderly men connected with it, but John was the patriarch of the society, being then fifty-six. He was a steady attender, and was counted "quite a treat" when he read or spoke, on account of his wide knowledge, quaint aspect, and unusual style of speech. In reading his papers, which he did with his face close to the sheet, he was so absorbed in his subject that he became quite oblivious to the smiles of the members, excited by his unusual earnestness and style of reading; for he laboriously spelled aloud the more difficult technical words, and, though breaking down with some of them more than once, still attacked them till they were moulded to his mind, the final result being often queer enough.

His essays were counted "clever." In the discussions that followed the papers, he was frequently humorous, if not droll, but was always instructive. His speech, till he became animated, was slow and hesitating, and the ideas evidently crowded themselves so close that the words were

blocked up in their outward passage. He would generally conclude his observations, as on other occasions, by saying, "I cu'd tell ye a great deal, a great deal," though little came in spite of his sawing with his hands backwards and downwards, according to his custom when in vocal straits. To illustrate his essays, he brought collections of dried specimens, which he laboriously explained, and he was delighted to be questioned and listened to regarding them.

John's first paper was "An essay, or short discourse, on Botany," delivered on the 16th of August, 1850, very soon after the formation of the society. Some extracts may be interesting as showing our hero in a new phase. They are reproduced as written, having evidently been prepared with the greatest care, errors in spelling and punctuation only being corrected. They were written in the dim light and narrow bounds of "the philosopher."

"Botany," he began, "is that science which teaches us to distinguish one plant from another; and consists in associating together into classes or groups, such plants as possess certain permanent characters in common, and in separating and distinguishing those that are dissimilar in character and appearance by fixed rules correctly drawn from nature; thereby enabling us to distinguish the properties and uses of the multifarious and variously organized bodies in the vegetable kingdom. The purpose of this scheme, besides giving the nomenclature of Botany, is to guide the student, in the clearest and concisest manner, to an intimate acquaintance with the anatomy of a plant and the functions of its particular parts."

"When a plant is taken up for examination, it is an object to obtain several flowers, some of them fully

expanded, some just opening, others whose seed-vessels may be nearly ripe, and, if possible, an entire specimen of the plant."

After speaking of plants being characterised according to their habitats, as aquatic, marine, fluvial, palustrous, and fontinal, he divides the vegetable kingdom into the three grand divisions of grasses, trees, and the rest, and continues: "There are upwards of three hundred grasses upon the earth.* They furnish pasturage for cattle. The smaller seeds are food for birds, and the larger for man; such as corn and rye and wheat and barley for man, and oats and hay for horses." It is curious to find such a porridge eater as John practically adopting Dr. Johnson's famous description of oats—"Food for man in Scotland, and for horses in England."

"Our most important articles of food and clothing are derived from the grasses, such as bread to eat, beer, milk, butter, cheese; and leather and wool and all the advantages produced from the use of cattle would be lost without them."

He advocates the teaching of Natural History to children by the argument that, "the very first time that an infant exercises its feet upon the sward or grass, or stretches its arms in the open air, it is to chase butterflies or pull wild flowers."

After remarking that there were then "upwards of eighty botanists from one time to another," † he could not proceed without an enthusiastic reference to the greatest botanist of

* I cannot say what classification of grasses John adopts, but there are now almost 4000 known species of grasses; that is, about one-twentieth of phanerogamous plants.

† Pritzel enumerates 15,000 publications in his "Thesaurus" (1851)!

all in his estimation, and one of his chief heroes among men, Charles Linnæus. "He was born," John continues, "in Sweden, in the year 1707, and laid the foundation and arrangement of the science. While yet a mere youth, he was pitched upon by the Academy of Sciences of Upsala, to explore the dreary regions of Lapland. He underwent great hardships ["hargepes" John spells it] in want of books, in want of clothes, in want of bread to eat, even patching up old shoes with the bark of trees. I have even risked my life myself in rivers and lakes [the Loch of Drum being evidently present to his mind], all for knowledge [knowelg]." After speaking of the Linnæan and Jussieuan or Natural systems, and the classes of the former, he observes that in it, the flowers of plants were used as an index to the system "much in the same way as one consults the index of a book, to find a particular chapter or page." He concludes his essay by exclaiming that, in the study of Botany, they would find—

" 'Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.' "

He gave discourses more than once on Astronomy, but no notes of these now remain. There exists among his papers also an essay on Weaving, but whether it was prepared for this society or not, it is impossible now to say. After an introduction on the use of clothing "as an indispensable piece of decency, even though the exceeding calmness and serenity of the air might not oblige men to use any precaution against it," and on the need of clothing "which begins at the instant of birth;" he discovers the origin of weaving in "the pretty obvious expedient of interweaving the long and narrow leaves of plants of the grass kind in the

form of a mat." He then gives a history of weaving from the time of the ancient Egyptians, "with whom the first species of cloth invented in all likelihood originated," as did the sciences. In speaking of the once universal use of the distaff and spindle, he mentions that, at one time, he had himself woven sixty ells of sacking with yarn "spun with the rock and spindle." He traces the history of weaving in Britain from the Romans who "established a woollen and linen manufactory at Winchester for clothing their army," down to the improvements of Hargreaves and Arkwright and the modern power looms. He concludes, according to his custom, with two lines of verse, evidently, in this case, from some original source, personal or otherwise :

"But the weaving it is renowned so,
That pure* nor rich without it cannot go."

John read another "short discourse" before the class, on Practical Gardening, on the 2nd of April, 1852, at the opening of spring, when gardening operations were beginning.

After defining a garden as "a place separate from the ordinary fields, and protected by an enclosure either of a wall or hedge," he speaks, of course, of the occupation being "veary Anchent," of the garden of Eden, "a most beautiful and charming spot, enclosed and planted by God Himself, and hence called the garden of the Lord," and of Sire Adam, "the first man and the first gardener." After describing the hanging gardens of Babylon, he turns to the "most humble gardens they were met to consider, which opened up sources of healthful and innocent and pleasurable

* That is, "poor," according to local pronunciation.

employment." "There is hardly a spot of earth so rugged in which the art of the gardener will not be found to produce something like loveliness in the scene; scarcely a tribe of man so rude among whom it will not create some idea of beauty, to lift up his mind to the Supreme Fountain of light and beauty and the Giver of all goodness; and there is scarcely a cottage so small that may not have the rose and the woodbine winding round its porch, and *Clematis* or virgin bower. I have heard that even the poorest of the weavers of Paisley and elsewhere, much to their credit, take especial pride in rearing their geraniums, hyacinths and tulips. It would thus appear that there is a sort of spell or charm about flowers, independent of fashion or the pleasures of sight and smell, which tends to soothe the spirits and compose the mind."

In practising gardening, he rightly pleads, like the scientific student he was, that, to do it properly, "the first and great object to be attained is a thorough knowledge of the constitution of plants, without which no correct idea can be formed of their proper treatment." He then gives a series of advices about gardens and gardening, showing good knowledge of the subject and practical acquaintance with its details, with which we need not trouble even the most patient reader. He mentions that Pliny describes about a thousand plants of all kinds, and asks us to compare this with Loudon's estimate of our floral wealth in the present century, which amounts to above 25,000 species. He attributes the cankering, or "clubbing," that attacks cabbages and carrots to dry ground and to drought, "which is the nursing mother of insects of every description."

"I asked," he continues, "some country people what

they had growing in their gardens. They said, 'Oh, we have nothing but green kale, but you may come and see our yard.* We were thinking to sow a pickle onion ["oin"] seed; where would we sow them?' Weel, I looked around me in the yard, and all was close with weeds. They said, 'Oh, you will delve a bit and sow the onion seed.' I said to them, 'I have not a spade.' They said, 'We have a spade.' They brought an old spade not above six inches long to me!

"I have walked by the way and have looked in over yards in country places and seen nothing but a coquiny† of green kale and berry bushes, growing like rasp bushes close with weeds—such as *ranunculus*, and couch grass (*triticum repens*) and *galeopsis* (hemp nettle) and the *lamium purpureum* (red dead nettle) and the *stachys palustris* (marsh wound-wort) and the henbit nettle (*lamium amplexicaule*) and the *holcus mollis*, or Creeping Soft Grass. Now, they could have a good many useful ["youseff"] plants instead of all these weeds; such as horehound and hyssop and sage and caraway and rhubarb and scurvy grass and rue and sweet marjoram and thyme and parsley and parsnips‡ and plenty of green kale, and a great many flowers of hardy annuals and biennials and perennials, of various sorts, both for use and beauty ["boiuty"]. But it is

* The common name in Scotland for a garden, being the same as the first syllable of the English word.

† Evidently meaning "wheen," the Scotch form of an old Anglo-Saxon word, *hwaene*, a few. The Scotch is also written *quhene*, *quhoyne*, etc.

‡ These plants were greatly used by John in his herbal pharmacopœia and were cultivated by himself in his garden at Droughsburn. He practised what he preached.

a true saying of the wise king, when he made a remark upon the slothful. He says 'I went by the field of the vineyard of the man void of understanding, and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns and nettles.' Now, in the land of Canaan ["ceannind"] vines were as plentiful in their gardens as our green kale is in Scotland ["cotclnd"]. But I shall add little more.

“‘ Is there a heart that beats and lives
To which no joy the spring time gives ?
Alas, in that unfeeling heart
No love nor kindness hath part.
Who round about him finds, unsought,
Fresh matter for improving thought,
And more, the more he looks abroad :
He marks and loves the present God ! ’ ”

CHAPTER XXV.

FRIENDSHIP AND COURTSHIP.

DURING part of John's stay at Auchleven, Charles Black lived at Keithhall near Kinnethmont, where he had come to be gardener to Sir Andrew Leith Hay, in 1848, the year before John returned to Gadie side. Being only a few miles apart, the two friends renewed and extended former happy intimacies. They often botanised together, as of yore, generally bringing plants to each other, and comparing their finds at mutual visits. John frequently remained all night with his friend, and Charles once or twice stayed with John, after a long day's hunt. The two slept together in "the philosopher," where Charles made the silence reverberate with unwonted jokes and laughter on the situation; and he still recalls the sound of the animals below them, crunching their food and stamping with their restless feet.

Charles had begun at Raeden to make a collection of geological specimens; but these John looked at with little attention, for he was then too absorbed in the flowers, and Aberdeen is barren in fossils, which Charles afterwards obtained in the greatest abundance and beauty on the shores of the Solway. Geology was a subject John by-and-

by felt considerable interest in, and would have pursued its study, especially after Charles had begun it. But when he had more leisure to do so, he had no longer any opportunity of practical guidance in a science that, more than most, requires initiation into it on the field, under the practical tuition of another. So it remained with the weaver a barren subject. He did in time gather a collection of minerals, "Geology stones" as he called them, almost the only available specimens in the Vale of Alford.

The last ramble the two friends had together was long recalled by both as a happy memory. Charles remained only a year at Leithhall, leaving it in November, 1849, for Hamilton Palace gardens on the Clyde, where a brother of his was chief gardener. Before setting out for the south, the companions determined to have a long, quiet pilgrimage together as of old. As Charles's leisure was limited, they settled on a beautiful Sunday in the beginning of October, for what proved to be, though happily then unknown to them, their last joint excursion in the dear old style. They met that morning near Auchleven, and walked over the hill together, past Keig and across the bridge of Don, admiring the fine glimpse of the old Kirk of Keig from its high parapets, by Bankhead where an unsurpassed view of Benachie and the pass of the Don and Castle Forbes is got, on to the Free Church of Keig. There John sat once more in his old seat, hearing his former minister, Mr. Smith. After service, they went to see an old friend, one of the Netherton circle, Charles Lawson, at Barnley, where they dined. Then they walked by the old paths to Prospect Hill and Whitehouse, and enjoyed their splendid outlook over memorable scenes, but they did not enter

the mansion, round which clustered so many memories of merriment and study.

It was now getting so late that they were obliged to retrace their steps. After recrossing the bridge of Don, they ascended the hill above it, and looked back upon the wide-spreading Vale below them, under the mild sunset light. They then took a short cut homewards under John's guidance, who knew every foot of the way. They passed the ancient fort of the Barmiken of Keig,* catching a parting glimpse of the hollow of Tullynessle and Muckletown, where John had lived, and descended the hill to the north straight for Leithhall. By the time they reached the Gadie, it was quite dark, and they had to cross it on a plank, crawling after each other in the gloom on hands and knees. Then they parted, Charles to go to his home at Kinnethmont, and John to walk down the Gadie side to Auchleven. It was a delightful day, full of the beauty of the present, the poetry of the past, and the hopes of the future.

They little thought it was their last journey together, but so it turned out to be. During the next thirty years in which they both wandered down the vale of life, they saw each other only twice. Charles has never been in the Howe of Alford since. They continued to correspond to the last, though, from their imperfect use of the pen, that was seldomer than their hearts prompted; but they never ceased to cherish towards each other that beautiful love which had blessed and united them so closely in the years gone by.

* See this described in Miss Maclagan's "Hill Forts, Stone Circles, etc., of Ancient Scotland;" as also those on Benachie, Dunnideer, Tap o' Noth, and other places (with very good plans and sketches), mentioned in this history.

Since his wife's death, notwithstanding his unhappy domestic experiences, and perhaps all the more strongly because of them, Duncan's thoughts had more than once turned to matrimony; for he was of a quiet, domestic disposition, and longed for a home of his own and a dear companion, to cheer him after his enforced long solitary life. He frequently expressed his opinion of general married life, when he heard of any one entering that critical condition, in this way: "Gin they had been as muckle married as I hae been, they widna care sae muckle for't!" But human nature was too strong even for John's bitter experience and sedate philosophy, and he more than once essayed to take a wife.

He had the reputation of being "a great ladies' man," or, as they said in the vernacular, "he liket the lasses;" as the greatest and best of the race have done. The presence of the young and fair, who alone touched his fancy, always roused him to a pleasant state of excitement, and then "he was all glee." But as might be expected from such a shy mortal, he was painfully bashful in his approaches, and not seldom ludicrous in his attempts to make himself agreeable to the other sex. He was often constrained to solicit the kind mediation of a friend, whose love of mischief still further increased John's embarrassment.

If rumour and history are to be fully believed, our gay Lothario of stars and flowers proposed to more than one fair Dulcinea of his acquaintance. John's opinion of his own matrimonial qualifications was certainly far from small. There is no doubt that he would have made any woman whom he loved, and who loved him in return, very happy. But with all the sterling qualities he possessed, it is to be

feared that it would have required a very superior woman, who looked far beneath the surface, to appreciate these, allied with what the fair sex seem least able to tolerate in a lover, eccentricity and oddness in personnel and habit, as was decidedly true in John's case.

But others had succeeded in more unlikely circumstances, and why not he? It is certain that his hopes were high, and not easily daunted in love-making any more than in stargazing and plant-seeking. To a female friend of his who esteemed him highly, he confided the important secret that he had a lady-love. Thinking at the moment only of his appearance in a woman's eye, she remarked, with plain malapropos naïveté but in real kindliness, that she was glad to hear that anybody would take him! John naturally bridled up with wounded self-esteem and misplaced confidence, and at once retorted with archness and vigour that, as for that, he could get as many lasses that wu'd be glad to hae 'im as would stretch frae the Brig o' Dee to Benachie!

A love letter of John's, a gem in its way, lies before me, sent in his fifty-sixth year, to an amiable and attractive woman then in her thirtieth, who lived in the valley of the Gadie. The date is the 25th of February, 1850; that is, be it observed, St. Valentine's day, old style—and a quainter, more scriptural *billet-doux* has been rarely received, even at that love-making season. The tender epistle is written in his fairest hand, and evidently as slowly penned as in his best copy-book at Paradise, upon pencil lines ruled with due care, on a single sheet, now yellow with age. It bears a printed ticket stuck at its head, containing the words "A friend" above a mirror, intended, no doubt, as a suggestive emblem of the fairness of the face that should gaze

into it. The whole is correctly spelled except one or two words. It runs thus:—

“Rise up, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. For the winter is past, the spring is come, and the summer is at hand, and the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is heard in our land. . . . For thy love is better than gold, yea, much fine gold to be desired are.* . . . For thou hast loved me with kindness and tenderness. . . . Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away ; for I will cheer you with joy and with gladness.

“For who can find a virtuous wife? for her price is far above rubies. . . . She will do him good and not evil, all the days of her life.

“It was by Providence intended that our pains and pleasures should be blended.†

“‘We smile to-day, to-morrow mourn,
Nor find a rose without a thorn.’”

There at once spoke the lover, the theologian and the naturalist, the astronomer, the predestinarian Calvinist and the poet ; though the concluding couplet has in it more rhyming truth than tact. But even this glowing epistle was not successful.

One of his fancies became a housekeeper in the parish of Tough, at a farm he used to visit. Though John was warm and persistent, and, as the folks said, “really daft about ’er,” she was cold and practical and cared for none of these things, at least in John’s person. Some of his kindly friends tried, in a left-handed way, to favour his suit, and

* The latter part of the sentence is a quotation from the Scotch metrical psalms (19. v. 10), which accounts for the incorrect grammar.

† This sentence may be a rhyming couplet, though not so written by John.

would tell her that he was "coming up the close." "Oh, the muckle sorra set him ! He's naething but a hinder to ane's wark !" exclaimed the practical housewife ; for love-making and kitchen cares did not in her eyes go well together. John was not easily repelled however, and would talk to her by the hour, in spite of the attractions of nature around, while she impatiently bustled about her duties. His friends would often tease him, in feigned surprise, "Ow, John, are ye aye here yet ?" "Ay, but I'm just gain' awa." After he had left, they would inquire in confidential tones, "Hae ye made onything o' 'er the day?" "The feint a flee," returned he, in natural indignation at continued non-success ; "she's an obstinate limmer, that's a'." And there the affair ended. After years of tenderest attentions, nothing came of it, and Jean remained an old maid, and John a widower.

One day he was found, by the daughter of the house, seated on a stone at the end of a cottage, "where the Gadie rins." She asked him to come in and get a cup of tea, as he had often done before. "Na," says John, in unusually earnest tones, "it's nae for that I cam', but to ask ye, gin ye'll be willin' to marry me !" looking up into her face with a curious bashful eagerness. That was plain and to the point, though scarcely approached with the delicate strategy dear to the sex in such affairs ; but there was no mistaking his meaning. "Eh, Johnnie man," said she, with equal plain and practical directness, "I cu'dna mak' a man's sark for my life !"—she was so weak in the eyes and short-sighted that she never could use a needle, and afterwards became quite blind—"I cu'd be nae man's wife." And she told him to "Gang hame and think no mair o' her i' that gait."

This John did, more downcast than he came. Her mother, who had been absent during the brief colloquy, asked her daughter on her return, why she laughed so to herself. She told her the tale, and continued, "and there, he's awa' doon the back o' the hedge wi' his answer." Even after this, John still visited her mother's house when he passed it with his flowers. In spite of this repulse, the daughter's opinion of John continued to be very high. He was, she said, "as gude a bein' as ever was born, and I hope I'll meet him in a better warld."

In his confidential moments, John used to tell a good friend of a love passage he had with a lady, curious but characteristic in its way. Who the fair dame was cannot now be known; but that is immaterial. Matters matrimonial had gone so far between them that an appointment was made to meet on a hill top between the Gadie and the Don, to come if possible to a final settlement. They both arrived at the trysting place dressed in their best, on a bonny day in spring. Wandering through the heather at due distance apart, they talked in a business-like way about their mutual possessions and their disposal of them. At last, being somewhat tired with their journey, John proposed to rest awhile. She sat down on one stone, and he took his place on another some distance off; and on these cold stones, in what would seem to most an ultra matter-of-fact style, which John used to give in detail, they continued their discourse on subjects that might change their destinies for life. But something displeased the lady, and she would not be reconciled. No understanding was arrived at, and there on that bleak hill-top, they parted, after shaking hands, each taking a separate way homewards,

John not a little down-hearted, she never again coming to terms.

His friend naturally asked John why he did his courting in that formal, distant style? and why, by all that was sacred and loving, he did not sit down beside his lady-love, on the same stone at least, if he did nothing else? John's reply was perfect in its simplicity: "That wu'd hae been takin' an undue advantage o' the wumman!" And he meant it, so great was his spirit of fairness and proper form, even in love matters; for the maxim that "All is fair in love and war" would be viewed as selfishness, if not sin, by such a man. Was not this a bit of the ancient spirit of chivalrous respect for woman, in humble life? Yet in his own undemonstrative way, he was truly warm-hearted and devoted, though he evidently was not skilled in those arts that win a woman's affections. And so ended all John's new attempts at love-making, though he continued for years after to cherish hopes of finding a partner for life. It was no doubt a pity and a loss to him in many ways, poor good soul, that he did not succeed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SETTLEMENT AND WORK AT DROUGHSBURN.

JOHN DUNCAN remained at Auchleven for three years. While he sojourned there, an event took place in 1851 which roused his highest interest, the first Great Exhibition in London, that wonderful world show—a happy prognostic of the Brotherhood of Mankind, seemingly more distant now than it was thought when its crystal dome was reared. That year also, the country lost two of its great benefactors—Robert Peel, one of John's heroes in the political world ; and William Wordsworth, the greatest interpreter of the higher influences of nature on man the world has yet seen.

John had long been connected with the Vale of Alford. He had lived for years in its north-west angle, at Tullynessle, had wandered and worshipped on its north-east side, about Benachie and Brindy, and had settled above a dozen years in its south-east corner at Tough ; and now, in 1852, in his fifty-eighth year, he removed to its south-west chamber, in the valley of the Leochel, and there spent the remainder of his days.

After leaving the village of Alford at its west end, a country road runs past the parish church amidst its tall trees, crosses a small stream called the Leochel,* which

* Pronounced *Loch'-el*, with the guttural *ch*.

joins the Don a short distance below, and then runs along its banks, over the hills to Ballater on the Dee. The valley of the Leochel is a lesser side glen opening on the greater Vale below, covered to its crests with sloping fields, and adorned with patches of wood, meadow and moor. Farms and cottages are scattered over its slopes, generally amidst clumps of ash and plane. It breathes a pleasant pastoral quiet, soothing and sweet, especially as seen on a sunny morning in autumn, the only sounds heard being the voices of cattle and children, or the purling of a brook as it hurries to join the river below.

Four miles from Alford, where a bridge crosses a stream and a house stands by the highway, a clump of trees may be observed on the right, almost hiding from view the cottages they protect. These cottages, which are discovered chiefly by their blue curling smoke, are known as Droughs-burn,* from the little stream that drains the hollow in which they stand. They are approached by an unfrequented path skirting the rivulet, which is almost hidden by tall grass, wild mint, and luxuriant watercress. An upward walk of half a mile brings you to a garden enclosed by a dike, and overhung by numerous great willows and rowan trees. Behind the garden appears a long thatched cottage, with a smaller one beyond, standing amid the corn. The little glen soon closes in to the left, and a low hill rises behind crowned with broom and whin. The cottages thus nestle in a tranquil little nook, in solitary but happy seclusion, away from the great world without, overarched

* Pronounced *Drochs'-burn*, with the guttural *ch*. The name is also written and pronounced *Droichs'-burn*. It is also locally called *Dreesh'-burn*.

by the blue sky, clasped by the friendly hills, and turned to the sunny south—the very home and congenial retreat of a lover of nature and flowers.

The first door in the larger cottage was the entrance to the house of a crofter; a second opened on a weaver's workshop; a third led into a barn; and the last into a byre, with the crofter's cows. On entering the shop by the low door, beneath which you had to stoop, you found yourself in a little room crowded with two large looms, a wheel, a winding machine, and other appurtenances of the weaving craft. It was very dimly lighted by three little windows in the front and one behind, which were obscured by the dust of the loom and the webs of busy spiders.

This small workroom was Duncan's home for nigh thirty years, till he was borne to his last resting-place in the churchyard at Alford.

The whole space of the floor was occupied with the various apparatus required for his trade, except a small part near the door, which was filled with his chests and boxes. Yet that room constituted the whole of his dwelling-place, and there he spent his days and nights. Where was his sleeping-room? There also. Close by the door stood a short home-made ladder, leaning against the wall. On looking upwards, there could be seen some planks laid across the couples of the roof at that end of the room, and extending towards the other end two-thirds of the available space above, the rest being open to the rafters. These boards formed a kind of "bunk" or cabin supporting a bed, to which the ladder led up. It contained just sufficient space for the bed and a narrow passage by its side. That was John's bedroom. Its roof was the thatch,

and it was entirely without light except what came from the room below.

There, within these four low, narrow walls, lighted by these four dim windows, was included the whole of John's interior domain. It formed at once his workshop, tool-house, dwelling-place and sleeping-room, as well as his library, study and museum. There he lived and laboured, read and studied, poor but contented, yea, happy,—a workman, a student, a thinker, and a God-fearing, upright man. Is it not blessedly true, that our happiness is bounded, not by our possessions, but by our desires ; and that our life depends, not on what we have, but on what we wish to have ?

William Watt, the weaver who held the croft of Droughsburn, and who now invited John to assist him, was no ordinary man. He possessed literary tastes, and was devoted to general self-culture. He was one of the founders of the Alford Literary Society, in the name of which we may trace his hand ; its secretary for some years ; and an active promoter of the Mutual Instruction Union. About a year after John came to Droughsburn, early in 1853, Mr. Watt removed to Aberdeen, to become one of the staff of the *Aberdeen Gazette*, but soon after joined Mr. McCombie, of Cairnballoch, when he founded the *Aberdeen Free Press*, which is still one of the ablest of our provincial journals. Besides being reporter, he was one of the reviewers on the paper, and did this work with ability. He also wrote one of the Prize Essays on the Sabbath evoked by the liberality of Mr. Henderson, of Park. His health, which never had been robust, was overstrained by this new and trying work, and he died in March, 1854, in his thirty-first year. A high tribute was paid to his memory by Mr.

McCombie, in the *Free Press* of March 31st. He was praised for his steady and enthusiastic devotion to self-education and the acquisition of knowledge, and for his discriminative taste and profound love of truth; although, as was truly remarked, he had passed the greater part of his life "at one of the most harassing and worst remunerated of country handicrafts." He rests in the churchyard of Alford, at a spot not far from where his successor at Droughsburn also now lies.*

What a pity that these two uncommon weavers, thus brought together in 1852, did not longer influence each other for good! They might have mutually broadened and complemented their aspirations and studies, Watt introducing Duncan to the refinements of literary discrimination and taste, in which John's self-education was greatly wanting; and Duncan showing to Watt the strength and beauty of science, which literary men are so apt to neglect and despise. It was well that they enjoyed the short communion they had together, and John fitly succeeded one whose career was at once a warning and an incitement. William Watt, the *littérateur*, was another of those wielders of the shuttle—cut off before he had barely proved his power—who have done honour to their craft: along with Thom, the poet of Inverurie, who had then recently died in 1848; Wilson, the ornithologist; Tannahill, the lyrist; Simpson, the mathematician; and Dolland, the inventor of the achromatic telescope. Shall we not now add to the list the name of the man whom Watt invited to his house, John Duncan?

* A son of Mr. Watt's is the present sub-editor of the *Aberdeen Free Press*; the editor is the author of the inimitable "Johnny Gibb."

John continued to carry on Mr. Watt's work, and to board in the house, till Mrs. Watt left for Aberdeen, in June, 1853, when the business was wound up and the effects sold off. He had previously purchased the contents of the weaving shop, by private bargain, and with these he carried on work till the end. The house without the croft was now occupied by Mrs. Inverarity, a widow whose husband had been grieve on the neighbouring farm of Dorsell,* and with her John boarded for nine years. When the croft and cottage were taken, in 1862, by John Allanach, Mrs. Inverarity removed to a house by the roadside close by the burn, called Droughsbridge, where John lodged with her for six months. He then returned to Droughsburn, after a settlement had been come to with Mr. Allanach, and there he remained till his death.

For the first time in his life since leaving Aberdeen, John had at last settled down, in his fifty-ninth year, in a "hoose and haddin'," or holding, of his own. He rented the shop from Allanach for £1 a year, and paid so much for his meals. He soon established himself as home-weaver for the district, and became quickly known as a first-rate workman. He produced the usual varieties of fabrics made by "customer-weavers," as already described, and had the further and not very common advantage of being equally able to do linen and woollen goods, having learnt both branches of the trade. He supplied himself "the warp" for the cloth, "the weft," or what was woven into it with the shuttle, being provided by the customers employing him. He sometimes got his "pirns" filled by a neighbour, but latterly he filled them himself. He also

* Pronounced *Dor-zell*, with accent on the second syllable.

manufactured a rough kind of stuff called "clooty carpet," which consists of narrow pieces of cloth, or "clouts" woven together. It is a material common in Scotch cottages, and a thrifty means of using up, when washed, the remainders of cloth and old garments useless for anything else.

He was a good judge of cloth, took a pride in doing good work himself, and liked to see it produced by others. Poor workmanship in weaving, as in all other things, he could not tolerate, and he expressed his criticisms of such in a dry, forcible and sometimes humorous way. Once, when shown a web of homespun in which he detected several faults, he remarked, "The makker o' that claith had a sair wame,"* meaning that he had not been able to move the treddles to good purpose.

It was his regular practice to carry home the cloth when woven, however far its destination. The necessary walk was wisely used by him as an alternative to his too sedentary life, and a means of prosecuting his favourite study. With this aim, he generally varied the track he took to and from a place, in order to see more of the country. He might often be observed, in his uncommon attire, moving at his usual rapid pace, in the early hours of the morning, before most folks were astir even in these early-rising districts. His well-known form, with the web under his arm, stick in hand and tall hat or broad bonnet stuck on behind, was easily observed from afar and raised the usual remark, "There goes the Droughsburn weyver, early aft as uswal!" In addition to the small payment for the weaving—for, as Mr. McCombie said, it *was* "the worst remunerated of country handicrafts"—he expected to be kindly

* The belly, another form of the word *womb*.

but plainly entertained, by being offered a share of whatever meal was being prepared at the time. To this he was in every way fully entitled, if only for the saving of carriage in bringing home the cloth ; and this he generally received ungrudgingly, from the fairness of the expectation after a long walk with such a burden, and from the genuine hospitality that has always reigned among our rural unsophisticated population. Though he had not a few bad debts in his time, he bore testimony to their being punctual payers about Alford.

When a web was finished, he carefully brushed it all over with a broad, flat feather fan he kept for the purpose, corrected all flaws, rolled it up neatly, and then tied it with cord. Being paid so much a yard for the weaving, it was necessary to measure it, and for this he required the help of some young person, generally one of Mrs. Allanach's girls. The child was rewarded for the service with some large, white, old-fashioned peppermint lozenges, of which he kept a store. She received one of them for every yard thus measured ; with strict injunctions, however, not to be greedy and eat them all herself, but to be good and part them with her brothers and sisters.

To obtain warp for his webs, he was obliged to get the materials from Aberdeen, either ordering them to be sent, or more generally going to fetch them himself. In travelling to Aberdeen, he went very often the whole way there and back on foot, the distance between Droughsburn and the city being above thirty miles. Very frequently he accompanied, in his covered cart, David Miller, now dead, who was then carrier from Scuttery on the Leochel to Aberdeen ; and he also rode with Charles Birse, the merchant there—

both of whom were very kind to him at all times, and carried his parcels and himself without grudge and without charge. In going to town, they made a half-way stage at the inn of Liggerdale, above the Loch of Skene, where they stayed all night. They found the old man the best of good company. All this took place before the railway to Alford was opened in 1859, when there was no longer need of such slow but picturesque and pleasant locomotion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LIFE AND HABITS AT DROUGHSBURN.

DUNCAN'S tastes and habits during the rest of his days at Droughsburn remained the very simplest. His usual hour for rising was four o'clock in summer, and when he had a long journey to go with a web, he would set out at three. In winter, he rose about an hour later. His regular time for retiring was at seven, except when he was visiting or plant-gathering, and then he was often late enough. When he had friends calling on him, he sat up till nine. In the country, "early to bed, early to rise" was and is the rule. How far it issued amongst the people generally in the proverbial health, wealth, and wisdom is another question ; but it was certainly a salutary practice, with good results in the order of statement. John's health was always very good, deflections being rectified by Culpepper's aid ; his wealth, never great, was not only sufficient for his modest wants but yielded a surplus for his relatives and for his books ; and his wisdom was certainly much greater than his neighbours deemed or could appreciate.

He lived entirely in his workshop, except when he went for his meals to the kitchen, the room next his own. This was a comfortable apartment, with the usual capacious fireplace, within which the children could sit, and was practically

and pleasantly furnished, like all thrifty Scotch country houses.

The Allanachs were highly respectable, well-conducted, hard-working people. They brought up a large family with credit, and were exemplary in their religious duties, holding worship nightly at home and going regularly to church every Sunday.

Mr. Allanach was what would now be called a contractor, employing others in the jobs he undertook connected with all kinds of country work, such as harvesting, draining and the like. His self-esteem was considerable, and he wished laudably to achieve as good a social position as he could, which his want of financial success greatly prevented. His style was what his neighbours thought high, and it subjected him to consequent criticism. He was considerably inclined to look down upon his simple tenant, the weaver. For John's habits and studies, he had not the smallest predilection, and he did not take any pains to try to understand the man. The result was that, though they sat at the same table and lived in such close connection, their relations were never very cordial. In Allanach's presence, John's retiring nature, which was all his life keenly sensitive to chilliness and contempt and only opened out under friendly warmth, was effectually frozen up. At best, there reigned between them a slumbering armed neutrality.

The distance between them was also increased by Allanach's treatment of Duncan's plants. John had a small part of the garden railed off for his own use, in which he cultivated what plants he pleased. In addition to this, during the nine years he had been there before the Allanachs came, he was allowed the use of the flower

borders that ran on both sides of the walks. Allanach, a practical, business man who despised all sentiment, wished to have the whole of the space belonging to him devoted to such substantial growths as cabbages and turnips, and turned out all John's plants. He might as well have plucked out his eye or cut off his hand. The result was, of course, the irretrievable extinction of all sympathy between them. Altogether, Duncan could scarcely have lived with a man whose tastes were more unlike his own. Allanach was a strong, dry, plain man who contemned all John's dearest pursuits as oddities or weaknesses ; and he was far too absorbed in his own occupations to feel or trouble himself in any way with this want of sympathy between himself and his tenant. To Duncan, their relations were fraught with no little pain and unhappiness, though he would have been the last to confess the cause.

But the iciness of the husband was more than made up by the geniality and warmth of the wife. She was an excellent, hard-working woman and mother, whose disposition and manner were bright, intelligent, and kindly. She appreciated and understood the old weaver, and respected his knowledge and ability. By her hearty motherliness and attention, she made his residence there comfortable, if not homelike. As Allanach was necessarily much absent in connection with his contracts, he seldom met the weaver except for a little in the evenings and on Sundays. So that John could tolerate this crook in his lot, for the sake of the kindness of Mrs. Allanach ; and thus, for nearly twenty years, he continued to live there, till the death of Mr. Allanach in 1880, and his own in 1881.

The result of this want of *rapproch* with Allanach was

that John lived a greatly repressed life in the house, kept himself more and more apart, and seldom or never blossomed out at Droughsburn as he always did in more congenial society. With Mrs. Allanach alone did he feel in any way at ease, or have any confidences; and he would talk at meals for a little, chat for some time by the kitchen fire after early supper, and occasionally read some of his books and show his plants. In other houses in the valley of the Leochel, he was much more at home, as at Mrs. Inverarity's at Droughsbridge, and Charles Birse the merchant's, who lived up the glen at Skuttery.

But nowhere was his silent reserve more thawed and his heart more opened out than in the home of a crofter who also lived at Droughsbridge. Mrs. Webster, the good genius there, is a pleasant, couthy, warm-hearted little woman. She understood and appreciated Duncan more than most of his neighbours, and possessed the geniality and tact that won his confidence. Her husband is plain, practical, hard-working, and kindly. To their cosy fireside, John came more frequently than to any other in the neighbourhood. There he would read and talk for hours together about current events, his wanderings and his plants, and relate incidents in his past history confided to few. He would take the children on his knee, and tell them stories of his mother and his own childhood, which he seldom told to any. To Mrs. Webster, he came for many years to get his hair cut, and even when they removed nearer to Alford, he continued the old habit, in the notion that she alone could do it properly, and that her kindly fingers were pleasanter than those of others. For this bit of service, he brought his own comb and scissors, which

he kept carefully rolled and tied up in paper. He had a special and unvarying cut of hair, by which it hung down equally all round over his brows, with very little shed.

To the Websters', he also used to go to read the newspapers, and talk over matters treated there. When any place was mentioned they did not know, John would consult his atlas at home and tell them about it at next visit, and sometimes bring down the book to point it out. His conversation was chiefly about his varied experiences, but a frequent topic was the history of Scotland, and especially of the Covenanters and their sufferings. The effect of sympathy and kindly appreciation on the reticent old man, so shy and distant with all but the friendly, is proved by this one fact, that, from Mrs. Webster, the author has learnt more of John's early days than from any other person about Alford.

In his vigorous years at Droughsburn, John kept his room, full to crowding though it was, neat and well arranged; for he was scrupulously clean, and methodical in all he did, having "a place for everything and everything in its place," if ever a man had, and every corner was utilised. The extreme care he bestowed on all he did and had, is shown by the excellent state in which his books, and especially his frail and brittle plants, have been left. Some of the books he preserved for more than sixty years, and many of the plants for above forty, in spite of all their natural enemies in dust, moths, mice and rats, all which were unusually abundant in that old thatched building. Indeed, the preservation of his specimens was marvellous under the circumstances, and proves a watchful care that is quite extraordinary.

He would allow no interference with anything in his room, doing himself everything required there, with his usual independence, making his own bed, dusting and cleaning up, and performing other offices generally done by women. He greatly objected to any intrusion, especially from children, who were naturally attracted by the curiosities there, on account of the many valuable things that lay in every corner, and he locked his door every time he went from home.

The most of his books and plants were kept in three large chests. The best of the books were carefully wrapped and tied up in several folds of paper. All the chests and plants and parcels were abundantly scented with camphor and dried native plants, such as mint and woodruff, to preserve them from the insidious moth. The insides of the chest lids were ornamented with pictures of various kinds, coloured and plain, pasted on the wood. These contained, amongst others, portraits of Queen Adelaide, William IV., Nicholas of Russia, Queen Mary, Queen Victoria, Rob Roy, Young Normal, a Highland chieftain in full coloured costume, plates of animals, and an old rude representation of Adam and Eve under the apple tree, round which the wicked serpent twined, with a quotation from "Paradise Lost" beneath.

Though John's care of his books was so great, his desire to spread knowledge was greater, and he used to lend them a good deal to his friends and the more intelligent of his neighbours; for nothing gave him more pleasure than to discourse about the subjects he studied with others, and assist them in prosecuting these in every way in his power. To prevent the loss of the books he

lent, he got a small card printed at Netherton, which was pasted on each of them, and of which this is a copy ; but of its author I can find no clue, though others then used the same :—

He always took pains to see his books duly returned, and was not slack to remind any one when a book was kept too long ; doing so even with Charles Black.

Nothing illustrates the remarkable solicitude he bestowed on all he possessed so well as the one fact that he wore the same suits of clothes, already described, all which were of his own weaving, for at least fifty years, and that they were presentable even to the last, though much worn and out of date. He had two suits with which he went out of doors, "a better and a worse," in addition to his working dress ; and during this long period, he never had any other till after the subscription raised for him in his

eighty-seventh year. Besides two time-worn, tall dress hats—which were of the real old beaver, with long hairy pile—he had two round, blue, flat “Tam o’ Shanter” bonnets, with great tassels on the top, which he wore in going about the house and on less formal occasions. One of these bonnets was borrowed by the Alford Mutual Improvement Society, to help in one of their dramatic entertainments. When John received it back, he gave it a good brushing, according to his wont, in presence of the member who returned it, although the man had previously cleaned it, knowing the scrupulosity of its owner.

John went regularly to church every Sunday, travelling four miles over the hill to the Free Church of Cushnie, and nothing but storm kept him at home. He always left Droughsburn in good time, to have leisure to visit or talk to a friend and pluck some of his favourites by the wayside.

The Rev. George Williams and his cousin, Dr. Williams of Tarland on the Dee, then lived with their parents about a mile from church, and both recall the old man from their early boyhood, with pleasant memories and great respect. Their homes were frequently visited by John, and there he was much appreciated and hospitably entertained. The children, glad to escape the over-restraints of sabbath keeping as then observed in the strict country, made a point of setting out very early for church to have a chat with the old botanist. They liked to hear him talking about the plants, and to repeat their grand names after him.

Though tight-laced on several religious matters, John never thought it any desecration of the holy day to admire, gather, and discourse of God’s illuminated herbarium,

spread open by Him on that day as widely and beautifully as on other days—plainly and attractively inviting to study, and chiding all condemnation of it. Hence his ready and willing discourse to the boys about the flowers while going to and returning from church.

With old George Williams, an office-bearer, "who had a belief in the old botanist when others were inclined to think him daft," he used also to talk about them before and after service, though many of his narrower fellow-worshippers would most likely have condemned both of them as sabbath-breakers for so doing. John always took some of the wild flowers to church with him, which the boys used to note with surprise were merely weeds, neither rare nor showy, but often the very commonest. These he would spread out on the desk in front of him, the Eyebright (*Euphrasia officinalis*) being a special favourite. He did this evidently for the simple joy of seeing them, "looking at them," as Dr. Williams remarks, "just as other people look, and cannot help looking, at those they love." And in all his worship, the flowers were ever present to him, to brighten and inspire the sacred book and its glorious themes. One Sunday, shortly after being licensed, young Williams preached in the church of the village, from the text (Matt. v. 45) "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." John congratulated the young preacher after service, but added, "When ye ken mair aboot floo'rs, ye'll be able to preach better upo' sick-like texts."

The boys used to be amused at John's curious old-world attire on Sunday, which was "anything but gaudy." They took special note of his dress hat, "useful, though not

ornamental ;" his swallow-tail, navy-blue coat, "with its collar of most ample dimensions, almost burying his neck, black neck-cloth and all ;" his great shoes, with their abundant protecting irons on the sole ; and his immense umbrella, "a kind of combined staff and tent," they thought, "which even such winds as blow in upland Cushnie would with difficulty have turned inside out." In church, he sat in the pew just in front of them, where they could study his peculiarities with ease—and it is to be feared they attended more to him than to the minister—noting even the "cat's-teeth" stitches of his home-made coat, as they showed themselves when he stood in prayer. They were, however, impressed, even at that age, with his remarkable reverence and attention during worship.

In reading, John's short-sightedness caused him to hold the book almost close to his face, and "even then he had to re-adjust his position afresh at the beginning of every line. But what delighted us most," the doctor tells, "was that every Sunday, just as the sermon was firmly caught between the heads and the application, John handed us his snuff-box (the finely painted one he had got from Mr. Beveridge in Tough). How kind we thought him ! Taking snuff and its consequent sneezing not being considered absolutely heterodox proceedings, albeit held of doubtful propriety, John and we were allowed to repeat the proceeding once every Sunday."

After service, the old man was generally hospitably treated by some of his friends in the Howe of Cushnie, and was thus strengthened for the four-mile walk home again. In returning, he generally had some willing companions, for one or more of the boys accompanied him to

the top of the hill, to listen to his discourse about the plants, old times and distant scenes, seasoned with good advice.

Solemn and scientific, dour and distant, as he looked to many, John had, as we have seen, a secret fund of jollity and humour. He derived the greatest pleasure, for example, from keeping up the innocent old festivals of our forefathers, and took an active and independent part in their celebration. He used to hold Halloween in full form, both indoors and out, inviting his friends and especially the children of the neighbourhood to assist him. He raised a great bonfire on the top of the hill behind the house, keeping watch over it himself to prevent its being kindled too soon by mischief-makers, who sometimes tried to do so. He set it on fire in the gloaming, "making a bleeze," as it was called, which was seen far and near, from its elevated central position ; and round it, he made the children join hands and dance hilariously, as in the old days of Baal worship, while he blew a loud blast, from a horn he kept for the purpose, which resounded over hill and dale. In the home ceremonies, in which the whole assisted, he joined heartily in all that was done, allowing himself, according to custom, to be led blindfolded to the "kail-yard," or cabbage garden, to pull a "kail-stock," the root stalk of the cabbage. This was duly placed above the door of his shop, to determine his matrimonial fate—the name of the first woman that entered showing that of the expected future partner.

Again, at Yule, that is Christmas, Old Style, on the 5th of January, he entered into all the merry frolics of the time, and into the homely games in which both young and old engaged, such as hide-and-seek, throwing dice for pins, and the like. He also drank "sowens," and carried them to

neighbouring houses to sprinkle them on the doors, the infliction being counted a dishonour, which they tried to prevent by watching their gates with due care and endeavouring to catch the invaders—his own door coming in for its share of the baptism along with the rest.

On other occasions of general gatherings at Droughsburn and the neighbourhood, John entered into all the merriment and contributed his share, by both dancing and singing, and also by playing “the trump” or Jew’s-harp, a style of music which he still cultivated ; and this he carried on even in his old age. At these times, his tastes were very abstemious ; though he could “take a dram” with the rest, a very little soon raising his hilarity.

In his advanced years, he once went to a *soirée* in connection with the parish church of Alford, of which Dr. Gillan was then minister, a man whom he had held in great respect since he had known him in Tough. This shows that his opposition to the Establishment had mellowed with age, as it did with even the fiercest dissentients. He sang one of his old songs, new to folks there :

“To the girl I lo’e I’ll ever prove true ;
I’ll ne’er wear a stain on my bonnet sae blue.”

Though his voice was much cracked by this time, his singing proved effective from the intelligent heartiness with which the sentiments were rendered. His quaint appearance in his ancient garments, with his staff in his hand as he sang, is still recalled by those that heard him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DUNCAN'S GENERAL STUDIES IN LATER YEARS.

DURING the twenty-nine years John Duncan stayed at Droughsburn, he pursued much the same studies as formerly.

In Theology, he was as keen as ever, keeping up his reading on biblical subjects, intelligently following the religious and ecclesiastical questions of the time, and watching, in particular, the fortunes of the Free Church and the career of its leaders with unabated interest.

His Astronomical studies seem to have been greatly swamped by Botany. He still used his dials and pocket timepiece, watched the heavens, and talked about them to interested friends.

Meteorology he still continued to inquire into and practise. From 1865 to 1869, for example, he recorded observations on summer temperature, and in 1876, in his eighty-second year, he purchased a new kind of "storm glass."

He never went into Ornithology, as his friends Charles and James Black and William Beveridge did. But with his observing eyes, in his wanderings amidst the special haunts of our rarer birds, he gathered much more than a common

acquaintance with their names, habits and winning ways, for he loved and studied all God's creatures. As Mr. Deans, one of his disciples, observes, "it ought not to be overlooked that, although he may not have studied the subject technically, he was nevertheless exceedingly well acquainted with the habits of our wild animals, and especially the birds, and could tell amusing anecdotes about them."

He also prosecuted Entomology to some extent, and was often seen chasing butterflies and insects, of which he made a collection, as at Auchleven.

In Natural History, he felt great interest, and used to examine all the creatures that came in his way. He possessed a considerable knowledge of animals, and read much about them, purchasing for this purpose Charles Knight's "Natural History," a large work.

Geology he had a great desire to know, especially after he saw Charles Black's collection at Raeden, and heard of his progress in it on the Solway, "for," as John said, "there seemed to be a deal o' Geology there;" but living in the unfossiliferous region of Aberdeen, he had little opportunity of working at it. By the time he wished to do so, Charles had removed to a distance, and John had, as he said, "naebody to gae 'im a lift wi't;" and Geology is a science requiring above most, in its earlier stages, the practical assistance of a master in the field. He was therefore reluctantly obliged to abandon the subject, in spite of its intimate relation to the plants and their habits, and its continual challenge to his intelligence and love of intellectual acquisition.

Phrenology, to which he had been first introduced by

Charles Black—and to which he was then vigorously opposed, according to the common prejudice—he by-and-by began to study, under the tuition of an uncommon man called John Adam, at Alford. Adam was a good antiquarian and mineralogist, whose fine collection of archaeological, geological, and other specimens is now carefully laid out and preserved at Haughton House near Alford, being bequeathed by him to the proprietor.

Adam was also a keen phrenologist, and assisted John in the subject. One skull in particular was a great favourite, it seems, with them. It had been obtained at "Fecht Falls," the scene of Montrose's victory at Alford in 1645; but whether it was the cranium of one of the luckless warriors slain on that occasion, or a prehistoric specimen, which is more likely, cannot now be determined. It is described as being very flat on the top, of unusual thickness, and very large, being "as big as twa heeds." At Mr. Adam's death, his brother buried it, by order of Mr. Farquharson of Haughton, in the garden of the present veterinary surgeon at Alford—a curious proceeding with such a unique example.

John's appetite for general knowledge was still omnivorous and keen, and he had a host of books supplying for it healthy food; amongst others Chambers's "Information for the People," and "Cyclopædia," whole libraries in themselves, and the "Dictionary of Daily Wants."

He still continued to practise gardening. He visited all the gardens in the district, cultivated the acquaintance of gardeners as hitherto, and worked a great deal in gardens. In this way, he gradually acquired a considerable knowledge of the principles and practice of garden

cultivation. This had been greatly increased by his study of several practical works, and he had lectured on the subject at Auchleven, as we have seen.

One of his old friends still retains grateful recollections of his services in this respect. This is Mrs. McCombie, widow of Mr. McCombie of Cairnballoch, an old lady now above seventy, who felt a high regard for the man, and thinks that "the story of his enthusiasm for plants, to which he sacrificed his life, should do good." John first became acquainted with Mr. McCombie while living in Tough, where Cairnballoch is situated. He was then accustomed to go there to help at the harvest and to assist in the garden, and continued to do both for years after he came to Droughsburn. He also did a good deal of weaving for Mrs. McCombie. On one occasion, John came to Cairnballoch with a bundle of weeds, which Mr. McCombie asked him to name and describe. This John did, after spreading them out on a table, in the presence of the household. Amongst these was the old nurse, who stared at the homely lecturer in utterly bewildered surprise, with a look at John and his plants which the editor, when he used to tell the story, said he never would forget.

Mrs. McCombie was greatly impressed with the weaver's earnestness of character, his willingness to impart knowledge, his desire to make himself useful, his intimate acquaintance with plants, his mild behaviour to those who laughed at him on account of his devotion to them, and especially with his practical services in gardening and the information he imparted in connection with it. His instructions, which she says were not at all commonplace, she valued and has since acted on with very good results,

having recently resuscitated an exhausted garden she now has by adhering to these.

Among the hints he gave, he used to advise the making of a "trinkie," or small circular trench, round about a bush which it was desired to nourish, at such a distance as that the water or manure should easily reach the spongioles or "tender parts" of the roots—surely sound gardening as well as sound science. She recalls his method of striking off young shoots from any tree, by bending a branch down towards the ground, inserting one of its twigs in a mound of earth till it took root while fed by the parent tree, and then cutting it off and planting. John did something similar when he wished to preserve a living specimen of a rare tree which was almost dead. He selected a live branch, however small, inserted it into a box filled with earth and supported at the proper level, until it took root and could be planted alone.* John used also to lend his books on gardening to his friends at Cairnballoch.

But in spite of John's interest in gardening, he had little admiration for cultivated flowers—"florist flowers" he called them—as compared with wild ones; his ideas of floral beauty being greatly bounded by its presentation in a state of nature. This was well illustrated by his conduct on one

* This method used to be also practised and advocated by the Rev. Dr. Farquharson, F.R.S., parish minister of Alford, a remarkable man, with unusual scientific attainments, at a time when such tastes were rarer in the country, especially amongst clergymen. He wrote well on several subjects in the Transactions of the Royal and other societies, and received his degree for his services to science. He lies buried in Alford churchyard, where a monument has been erected to his memory by his admirers, not far from where the old botanist now reposes. He died about the time John came to Droughsburn.

occasion, as related by James Black. After James had settled near Aberdeen, he had a garden which he took great pride in tending, and in which he had some rare flowers. At John's first visit to him there, after some years of separation, he asked James if he still liked flowers. James replied that he did, especially cultivated ones. Had he any? Yes. Could he see them? Certainly; and James led the way to the cherished garden plot. But there, contrary to expectation, nothing seemed to interest his old friend much.

Mr. Black, nevertheless, determined to charm the botanist, if beauty could charm him. He had recently received some very fine, high-priced specimens from a brother, a capital judge of these, who was then employed in the famed garden of Chatsworth, the seat of the Duke of Devonshire. Having asked John to sit down, he cut a "Fluke" and a "Bizarre" carnation, "lovely beyond compare" in his estimation, and far too costly to be cut for every one. But John was no ordinary man, and James wished to impress him with the fact that his flowers were not ordinary also, or at least to show that he himself was not, as he humorously puts it. He handed the pair of beauties to John, and, satisfied that he had done a self-denying deed that deserved recognition, he prepared his pipe, to smoke in peace while drinking in John's expected encomiums, which he silently waited to hear. When he had lighted the weed and turned round to look at his companion, judge of his surprise and chagrin to see the ground covered with the petals, the last of which he was brushing to the winds. John then looked into his face and pronounced his gems monstrosities, "monsters, naething

mair nor less!" When he received the carnations, these being new to him, John had determined to discover their botanical class, and finding, as he said, stamens converted into petals and similar transformations of organs, he had just ended this examination when his friend looked at him, by brushing away the last flower-leaf as rubbish spoiled by man. To crown this dashing of his hopes, John tried to convince the florist that the majority of mankind had a perverted taste, to pamper which man had sought out many inventions, "sick's that floories!"

He always carried on his study and practice of drugs, treating himself and neighbours, and believing in their efficacy as proved by long experience. Amongst others, his friend John Taylor speaks with lively gratitude of John's medical services to him in 1874, when he was a farm-servant at Tillychety, near Droughsburn. The young man was then very ill with rheumatism, and was at once called upon by the old herbalist, who prescribed for him. John continued to visit the patient regularly at the farm and, after his removal to his home, watched the progress of his treatment. He took him out to walk when convalescent, and instructed him in the cure of this trying disease, to which outdoor workers in the country are very liable on account of their exposed life.

In Politics, he remained a staunch and advanced Liberal, and his interest in them continued unabated all his life. He regularly read the newspapers, latterly the *Scotsman*, with remarkable zest, and followed the many new questions evolved by the progress of events with unusual eagerness and intelligence for an old man. War, free trade, chartism, and the land laws were keenly studied by him.

On these and other subjects, he was decidedly ahead of the time, and many thought him radical then, though fewer would do so now; for he sympathised with most of the recent ideas now held in connection with them, which will, no doubt, be the basis of future legislation.

As Dr. Williams observes, his views of the various political events of the time, strongly biased though they were, in his opinion, were evidently "the result of much thought and deeply rooted conviction." "It was astonishing," another friend remarks, "how he kept pace, about election times, with everyday occurrences, considering his slow way of reading and other drawbacks; but when he once got an inkling of his own side, he could cudgel many of his opponents that were far better book-learned than he."

On subjects in which he was well versed, though he never was an orator, he could still discourse with surprising fluency and power. "No one that had not heard him," says Dr. Williams, "would believe that John was such a grand orator. Yet just let him get a fair start on some of his favourite themes, and he would lecture long enough." Although he enjoyed the controversies of others, controversy was not very much in his line, on account of his ardent temperament, which made him lose patience when keenly opposed.

John's houses of call were comparatively few, and were chiefly confined to those in which there existed some congeniality of taste, reading or study. His intercourse with any one required to yield some intellectual or other higher gain, or it could not be continued. But there were some of his neighbours between whom and himself this community of sentiment existed, and whom he frequently

visited. One of these intelligent friends was the shoemaker, Willie Williams, who lived over the hill near the Free Church, at the Milton of Cushnie. "Willie's shop," as the Rev. George Williams describes, "was the retreat of the neighbourhood on a rainy or frosty day, for the shoemaker was a good politician, and remarkably gifted with the gab.* When a heel-ring or toe-bit was lost, or when time hung heavy on their hands, the neighbours would dander down to get a crack with the clever souter. A few yards along was the carpenter's shop, reigned over by John Ferries, a very intelligent, humorous and kind-hearted man, whose mother, 'Auld Nanny,' was everybody's mother. The old mill not far off, built a hundred years ago, was worked by John Taylor, a queer, comical fellow, but somewhat of a student. The village of Milton was the centre of the wit and wisdom of the parish, and few villages could boast of so well-read a shoemaker as Willie Williams, of so kind a body as Auld Nanny Smith, or so queer a fish as Jock Taylor."

The shoemaker's son, Dr. Williams of Tarland, gives a realistic glimpse of the intercourse between John and his father, interesting as exhibiting the weaver in an unusual aspect at this period, which recalls his younger days at Netherton. "John's visits to us on Sundays, as he passed to church, were almost weekly. On other days, they were not *very* frequent, but, when they did happen, they lasted an hour or two at a time. On these occasions, ordinary local gossip and such small matters were quite beneath notice. The sayings and doings of the highest personages in church and state were duly and deftly

* That is, good at using his tongue. *Gab* is from the same root as *gabble* and *gobble*.

criticised. That my father and John did not know more about all those topics of discussion than did all remaining humanity, is a sceptical after-thought on my part, not justified by my opinion then or any doubt or hesitation on theirs. Could I give you a picture of the two worthies when thus engaged, you might place it side by side with Tam o' Shanter and Souter Johnny.

"Of controversy, there was little or none. When it happened to be my father's turn to speak and when the theme was exceptionally important, he would for a minute or two give over work, and let off such an oration as would have done honour to any Yankee stump platform. John, sitting up close to him and occasionally wiping the gathering perspiration from his forehead, the result of excitement roused by the topics in hand, would then make a similar performance. For myself, I was practically a nonentity. They would no more have thought of listening to me, even if I wished to interfere, which I did not and could not, than of listening to a two-year-old child. Yet it would have been difficult to say which of the three enjoyed the affair most. That *they* did so most heartily was very evident. Their faces, now beaming with intelligence as they clearly unravelled some knotty point, then bursting with derisive laughter as they exposed some silly, stupid Tory, and anon stern as any black-capped judge when they foreboded some dire calamity about to burst on the country, clearly showed that they enjoyed a mental treat of the most varied description. My father was an extensive reader, and so was John. The weekly *Aberdeen Free Press* was their newspaper oracle, and the editor, Mr. McCombie, only a lesser deity to them.

“Altogether, they were a noble pair, mightily pleased with their own gifts and acquirements. It was only on such occasions that John would come out. At other times, he seemed very quiet and unobtrusive. At best, his eloquence was not of the thunder and lightning order: it was always tempered with more reserve than were the statements of his companion. Still, both were about equally forgetful of the fact that there are two sides to a question. Nor was it needful, in the circumstances, that they should temper their remarks to suit a fastidious taste. Being alone, they could argue to please themselves.

“The excited state of public opinion caused by the Disruption of '43 also furnished them with ample materials for discussion. By way of variation, when John had to describe some person, place, or event bearing on the point at issue, he would graphically narrate the circumstances under which he acquired the information. That he did well. I only wish I could reproduce a specimen, but memory fails me.”

The Milton had, of course, its grocery or general store, to supply the home necessities of the district. This was kept by a highly respectable, kindly man called George Williams, already spoken of as entertaining the weaver when going to church, now farmer at Holmhead in the neighbourhood. As his son, the minister, says, “He got more of John’s company when in the village than any of the rest, for he believed out and out in the man. He was often laughed at because he thought John a hero, when almost all his neighbours were inclined to call him ‘daft.’ As he had a notion of flowers without knowing much about them, many, many were the plants he brought home in

his walks round about Cushnie and in his journeys on business, to be laid aside for John to see and tell about."

Alford was not behind the rest of the county in intellectual activity when Mutual Instruction Classes were first founded in 1850, for in September of that year it instituted a branch, called the Alford Literary Society. This lasted for a good many years, and showed great vitality during its existence. It no doubt inspired and benefited its members, and helped to do what an enthusiastic secretary stated to be one of its objects—to prove that "the far north might merit the credit of sending to the south something else than snow." When first founded, it was thought to be a daring if not dangerous innovation on old ways, and the members were supposed "to be rather go-ahead." For a time, they were not a little ashamed to let it be known that they belonged to the Society. But they persevered, and their early efforts are still represented by the existing Alford Mutual Improvement Society. They not only read papers, but initiated and carried on for a time a course of lectures, one of which was given by the Rev. Dr. Gillan, and another, in 1852, on animal magnetism, by Professor Robertson Smith, then a young man fresh from college. One of the central meetings of the Union also took place in Alford, in 1855, under their auspices, and was very successful.

John used to attend their meetings, which were held in Peter Clerihew the smith's barn, at the Muir of Alford, a little above the parish church. At his first appearance, he said he "didna come there to ask questions nor to teach," which rather misrepresented himself, seeing that he had done so much teaching in his time. Contrary to his practice at Auchleven, he took little part in their dis-

cussions, no doubt greatly on account of his advancing years ; besides, their subjects, being chiefly literary, were not so much in John's line. They do not seem to have asked him to write on any of his scientific specialities, nor to have known that he had any gift in that way or had done work in it already ; and he was not the man to tell them. John thought, and perhaps correctly, that in their discussions there was often more sound than substance ; but in this criticism, he forgot that it is one of the aims of such societies to train to the effective regulation of sound,—in other words, to learn how to speak, in which John himself was much behind, having had no such opportunities in his neglected youth.

For general gossiping, John had neither relish nor time, and he was not slow to express his strong contempt for it ; vastly preferring his books, plants, and pilgrim staff to such empty pastime, even when innocent. As Mrs. Webster bears witness, in all his abundant conversation at her fire-side, he "never spoke ill o' his nee'bours ; never abused ony body wi' his tongue."

At my first visit to him, I asked him if his neighbours did not visit him. He said that they did at times, but he did not care very much for their calls, for most of them wasted his time and were rough with his plants. "Then," said he, "the maist o' them can speak o' naething but nowt ! *—o' nou't but nowt !"

The whole style of the man, and his strong objection to mere gossip talk, forcibly suggest his likeness in this respect to Wordsworth, as given in his admirable poem on "Personal Talk," much of which expresses very happily the feelings and habits of the botanist as well as of the poet.

* Cattle, the same as the English *neat*, as in neat-herd, or cow-herd.

To John, truly—

“Better than such discourse, did silence long,
Long barren silence, square with his desire.”

To him also in his lonely life, as to the poet, with special emphasis, books were—

“A substantial world, both pure and good :
Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
His pastime and his happiness did grow.
There found he themes, a plenteous store,
Matter wherein right voluble he was.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

DUNCAN'S BOTANICAL STUDIES IN OLD AGE.

THE study of Botany was still the dominant pursuit of Duncan's life. From his new centre, he searched the whole country far and near, to discover new plants and new stations. For ten or twelve years after he came to Droughsburn, he still went to the harvest in the south as in former days, selecting new districts for exploration, completing his herbarium, increasing his knowledge of the Scottish flora, and adding to the plants he grew in his garden.

In gathering plants, he used no vasculum, a modern luxury he never possessed. In want of it, he had various homely but effective substitutes. A common one was the overhanging interior of his "Tam o' Shanter" bonnet; but a better was the top of his tall black hat, the plants being kept in position with his big coloured handkerchief. In fact, he never came home without his hat being more or less filled with plants. Not unfrequently, in saluting a friend or entering a house, his bashfulness caused him to forget their being there, and they would stick on the crown of his head, or fall to the ground, or be pulled out with his handkerchief when he used it, or otherwise cause him

intense confusion. The grasses were less easily managed than the smaller plants, and he used a special appliance for them, a thick round rod about a yard long, cut from the wood with part of the branches still adhering, along which he laid the stalks, wrapping them round with cloth and tying the whole with string. When carried under his arm, this had the appearance of a gun in its cloth case, and caused him on more than one occasion to be seized as a poacher. Near Fyvie, he was thus caught redhanded, as it were, by a too eager gamekeeper, who, when he saw what the offending weapon was, looked, John said, "as if his nose were bleedin'."

When he wished to be still more careful, he used a pair of large double boards, bound at the back and tied together with a string in front, like a portfolio, which enclosed the requisite drying and pressing paper. This was the veritable "Ratray's Botanical Chart" which Charles Black had presented to him. He prized it accordingly, and showed it to me, with affectionate pride, as Charles's last gift to him when they parted many years before.

His travelling fare in the way of provisions remained throughout as primitive as in his younger days—oatmeal for "crowdie," bread and cheese, or plain oatcake, washed down with water from the mountain brook, seasoned with nature's relish in the shape of water-cresses, a keen appetite and simple tastes. He still occasionally spent the night in the open air as circumstances required, even when above seventy. One day, after doing this, he entered the train at Banchory for Aberdeen, and met in the carriage Mr. Deans, who had also been botanising in the district. They, of

course, exhibited to each other the specimens they had gathered. In taking out his from the back pocket in his long blue coat, John had the misfortune to pull out with them his simple lunch, cake and cress, wrapped in paper, which dropped on the floor of the carriage, greatly to the amusement of the passengers and his own painful embarrassment. John, nevertheless, "gathered all the crumbs and wrapped them up again as if they had been grains of gold."

To the last, he had a peculiar pleasure in using the technical as well as the common names of plants, which he did with the ease of long habit. During his later years, some of them were beginning to escape him; and he had frequently to pause in order to recall them, and not seldom failed in the more specific names.

When I visited him in 1877, I asked him how he was able to learn and remember the great Greek and Latin words botany was so full of. "Ow, ye see," he explained, "I had aye a gweed memory. But when I got a noo plant and fund oot its name, I used to write it doon on a bit o' paiper, and lay it on the wab afore me as I wis wirkin', to glance at it noo and nan and say it ower to mysel', withoot disturbin' my wark. I hae seen a gae lot o' thae words lyin' afore me at the same time on my loom. And then when I took a waalk, I wu'd tak' them oot o' my pooch, and lairn them as I gaed alang.* But it wasna very muckle trouble, for I had a gweed memory, and I was aye usin' them, ye see, wi' the plants."

There we have several of the secrets of true education

* Amongst his papers, there remain a large gathering of such memoriter pieces of paper, containing the names, etc., of plants.

—in writing down the words to be remembered, using the eye, frequent looking, abundant and varied repetition, the learning only the names of real things as they were required and these things possessing a lively interest, concentrated attention on one object at a time, and continually employing the words in practical work.

His use of classical terms, as might be expected, was defective in pronunciation and quantity, and even in spelling in his herbarium, which showed that he must often have written them down from memory and not transcribed them. In saying these words, he would often crush out a syllable or two, and otherwise transform them; but they were nevertheless recognisable by one acquainted with the science. He seldom travestied them as unlearned gardeners and others often do, who call *Rhododendrons*, for instance, "Roderick Randoms," or "Rosy Dandrums;" the *Lysimachia*, "Lizzie Mackie;" the *Gloire de Dijon* rose, the "Glory to John;" and the like! Some of his transformations were sufficiently funny and smile-provoking even after familiar use, which only confirmed the original defects; but most of them were obvious transformations—as, "*Atropia beldonia*" for *Atropa belladonna*, "*Peteris aquilinia*" for *Pteris aquilina*.

The mirth the big names caused to his ignorant neighbours did not arise in their case, of course, from the errors he made, but simply from their uncouth foreign sound to their unaccustomed ears, and from their humour being tickled by dignifying the common weeds with such "crabbit," "lang-nibbit" names. Those whose learning enabled them to detect his false quantities and other mistakes in classical words, were rarely likely to laugh or sneer at the unlettered

old man, but would be all the more impressed with the strong will that had not been deterred by the terrible technicalities that crowded his chosen science. There were exceptions, however, when bran-new classicists from college made fun of the old man's blunders—certainly not at *his* expense.

Trusting to his remarkable memory, he had never written down the localities or dates when he discovered his plants—a great loss in regard to the rarer ones, only partially made up through John Taylor's labours. When asked why he had not done so, he said, "I didna need ; I ken brawly whar they a' cam' frae." Certainly he could recall the times and places with remarkable ease, and, no doubt, correctly. He could also tell the circumstances under which most of the plants were discovered, and any special experiences he had in obtaining them. Indeed, this was one very good means of getting at John's past life, which he could latterly give chiefly by way of reminiscences suggested by his plants. Each one had become to him the centre of many happy, humorous or hard memories ; and thus, dry and dead and broken, as they were in their worm-eaten receptacles, they were all living to him, and were surrounded by him with the sunshine and the shower of his past life. In taking a walk with him, you had merely to direct his attention to the plants you passed, and at once you opened springs of living memory which flowed without stint from the old man's heart. In this way, his past life latterly was greatly linked with the wild flowers, and a stranger could get at his history mainly through their companionship.

John's interest in flowers continued intense to the very

end, being truly a ruling passion, strong even to death. Many proofs of this could be given, but one will suffice.

In July, 1878, shortly after my account of him appeared in "Good Words" of that year, a lady from England drove to Droughsbridge at the foot of the burn, and walked up to the cottage to see the old man, whom she found at home. He gladly showed her all she wished, his books and plants, and the garden, and was unusually bright and cheerful. The lady was much charmed with her visit, and expressed a desire to possess a specimen of the *Linnæa Borealis*, or the Two-flowered Linnæa. This is a pretty, little, perennial plant, with long, branched, thready stems and sweet pink twin bells, creeping in the northern woods. It was selected by the great Swedish botanist as an emblem of his own once lowly life, and was named after him, and used by him as his crest. It is rare in England, being found, it is said, only in one spot there; but it occurs in several places in the north of Scotland. It is much sought after for its rarity and beauty, and on account of its poetical and scientific association with Linnæus. It was a special favourite with John for these reasons, especially the last.

Charles Black first discovered it, identifying it from description, one day when casually passing through a fir wood between the Manse and Bridge of Alford, and he announced the discovery to John with great exultation. John afterwards found it at other spots in the Vale. The nearest station to Droughsburn was on Manabattock Hill in Tullynessle, north-west of the Bridge of Alford;* and that being the very time of its flowering, which occurs in

* He first found it there in 1842, "to the west of Tullynessle, on the hills above Dalpersie Castle," as already mentioned, p. 206.

June and July, he promised to obtain a specimen for his visitor, if at all possible. Accordingly next day, the old man, then in his eighty-fourth year, set out on this arduous journey of twelve or more miles, not counting the climbing of a thousand feet of hill—keen in heart as ever, but now sadly slow on foot as he felt at every step—to obtain the desired flower. The day did not promise well; but, undaunted by even worse prospects than that, he walked across the bridge of Alford and up the old familiar road to Tullynessle. He called on a friend, Andrew Mitchell, who lived at Gallowford, at the foot of Manabattock, where he rested for a time and received some refreshment, remarking that he had found himself “some slow for a while, but he would need to brush up,” for “hope sprang eternal” in the old man’s breast.

When he got well up the hill, a dreadful storm of thunder, lightning and heavy rain descended upon him and speedily drenched him to the skin. Still he held on, searching over all the spots where he had found it before. But all in vain: the shy favourite was nowhere to be seen, and he had reluctantly and with a heavy heart to retrace his steps homewards, defeated—a rare sensation with John in such explorations—and he felt the disappointment to the very core.

Yet, with all the strenuous eagerness of youth in an aged body, he could not thus lose the day, and recalling that another rare plant used to grow on the south side of the hill, he determined to go in search of it. The midnight shades were now descending amidst the pouring rain, but it was midsummer and darkness would be short. So he climbed the eastern shoulder of the hill to the source of the

Culhay Burn, for the plant grew somewhere along its bed. This stream flows there between steep banks covered with brushwood in places, and the old man had to grope his way down its channel in search of the prize he sought. But as this dirty work would have soiled his old blue coat, he took it off in the drenching pelt, and in his shirt-sleeves, clambered down the burn and along a neighbouring dike till he found it! The self-denial and ardour shown in the whole circumstances were extraordinary at his age; but it was only a last proof of the inextinguishable resolution and enthusiasm that had made him what he had been. Like the keen old soldier he was, the man died as it were in battle, with his armour buckled on and sword in hand.

He reached home early next morning, wet to the skin, his stockings in holes, and his feet swollen and blistered. Though worn and exhausted in body, he was sadder in heart, because obliged to confess that he had failed and was not now what he had been. His friend, John Taylor, found him that morning in this depressed condition, and consoled him by telling him that the *Linnæa* did grow on the hillock of Dalpersie, lower down than where he had been.* John brightened up at once on recalling the place, and with a flash of the humour of earlier days said: "I'm like the fishers that 'toiled a' nicht and caught naething.' There hae I been howkin' and glowerin' a' nicht for't and hinna fund it. But noo I'm tell't it's on the very hill I was at!"

The young botanist went for the plant and brought it to him, cheering the old heart beyond expression. But,

* John Taylor informs me that he knows six other stations for this rarity in the Vale of Alford.

sad to tell, the lady never returned to inquire for or claim the plant that had cost him so dear. It was almost like a blood-stained blade, for he never got over the exposure of that stormy night on Manabattock Hill.

In front of the cottage at Droughsburn, on the sloping bank between it and the burn that gave it its name, was the large and fertile garden already mentioned. It faced the south and was enclosed by a stone wall, having a row of four rowan trees before the door, with bushes along the fences on both sides of it, and willows and geans at the foot next the burn, planted a little before the time John came. That part of the garden immediately in front of the workshop was railed off for John's special use, and there he cultivated a large number of plants, chiefly wild, as well as those required for his drugs. It was entirely under his own care. For years, it was kept with the greatest neatness, and without a weed. He spent a good deal of time there, getting up at three o'clock on summer mornings to tend it. Nothing could exceed his delight in working amongst his flowers, especially the wild importations from nature. The natural result of such attention was that his little plot was a treat to be seen, and gained the admiration of all that visited the place.

It contained plants from all parts of the country, brought north during his wanderings. The garden thus became to him more than a place of beauty and utility—it grew countless memoriters of by-gone days and distant scenes. The space he had was too small for his needs though every corner was occupied, and he had to utilise the banks of the stream that ran at the foot of the garden for the flowers suited to such a situation. In this

way, the course of the burn for the half-mile down to the road was adorned with plants of various kinds, many of them brought from far, which brightened the scene and scented the air; for the odoriferous mints were specially luxuriant. Many of these foreign visitants were carried down into the Leochel by the stream that fed them, when it was in spate, and thence into the Don; and thus their banks in many places will long retain these mementoes of the wandering botanist. When talking with a friend of this practice of his, John said that they would grow in memory of him long after he had passed away—and no doubt they will, sweet and appropriate memorials of the loving hand that planted them.

Amongst others, foreign to the place, that now flourish along these streams brought down from his garden foot, are the Great Hairy Willow Herb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), large and shrub-like, with its downy leaves and handsome purplish flowers, brought by him from the banks of the Clyde; and the *Mimulus ringans*,* or “Monkey Flower,” a garden out-cast, not native, though a variety of it, the *Mimulus luteus*, the yellow mimulus, has been reckoned as naturalised.

For some years before his death, John became quite unable to look after his favourite plot, which, from its super-abundant vegetation, soon got into wild disorder, an eyesore and grief to its aged attendant. By the time he passed away, it was a tangled mass of weeds, the saddest wreck of what it had been; and its protecting fence was broken down. It still contained, even in August, 1881, a

* This plant is also very abundant on the banks of the stream above Keig, that runs by the road side from Auchleven. Did Duncan plant it there also, in his many walks along that well-beaten path?

large number of his old favourites, now rampant and disordered.

In forming and tending this wild-flower garden, as in other respects, John Duncan resembled that remarkable man, Robert Dick, baker in Thurso, geologist and naturalist, the tutor of Hugh Miller, and the instructor of Sir Roderick Murchison in the geology of Caithness, by means of the flour he was using. Dick used also to have, in a little glen between Thurso and Reay, a kind of natural garden of native plants, gathered during his many excursions over the country, and watched over by him with great assiduity—also now all gone to ruin.

John Duncan in his zeal may, by this habit of his, disturb future botanists, who may find it difficult or impossible to account for the existence of certain plants by the Don and the Leochel, so far from their usual or only stations. This announcement of one of his innocent habits may prevent future discomposure of the botanical mind on this matter, and render unnecessary any ingenious theories of the flora of Scotland and Aberdeenshire.

In 1866, Charles Black sent John a portrait of Linnæus, presented to John by Mr. James Linn, now of the Geological Survey of Scotland, who had heard of his character and studies through his friend, and respected him greatly though he never saw him. This portrait John prized much as a gift, but more for its subject, speaking of it frequently and showing it to friends and visitors.

In 1871, at the annual show of the Alford Horticultural Association, on the 24th of August, two prizes were offered by the Rev. Andrew Christie, an able botanist, then parish schoolmaster of Alford, now minister of Kildrummie up

the Don. One was for "the best collection of dried and mounted specimens of indigenous flowering plants, gathered by the exhibitor during the last year, in their native sites, within the district embraced by the Association, correctly named and arranged according to the Natural System : " and the other for "the best collection of grasses, indigenous, and correctly named and arranged as above." John sent in a collection of plants arranged according to the Linnæan system, and of grasses arranged as asked, and gained both prizes. The collection contained, amongst others, the Bitter Sweet (*Solanum dulcamara*), which Mr. Christie says is not indigenous to the district, and which was from John's garden, having been brought by him from a distance. Of these honours, John was naturally and reasonably not a little proud, pleased also that the wild flowers were being patronised even in this small way.

He gathered and named a selection of the cryptogamic plants of the district the following year, but did not present them for competition, on account, he said, of the smallness of the prizes offered, which he held to be an evidence of the little value put on such things in the Vale. Prizes of the same kind were subsequently offered, but he did not again compete. The two prizes gained were a praiseworthy and energetic thing for an old man of seventy-seven to win, and he seems to have rested satisfied with this proof of his capacity and knowledge.*

* Some of the plants Duncan cultivated may be mentioned as interesting relics of a wild-flower and herb garden, taken down on the spot by me along with John Taylor : Evergreen Alkanet (*Anchusa sempervirens*), brought from Cushnie House, naturalised and rare ; Spurge Laurel (*Daphne mezereum*), with beautiful clusters of red berries ; White Dead-nettle (*Lamium album*), both common and varie-

gated ; "Aligopane" (*Inula helenium*), already mentioned ; Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), in flower, from near Aberdeen ; Tansy ; Bald-money (*Meum athamanticum*) ; Mercury Goosefoot (*Chenopodium Bonus-Henricus*) ; Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*) ; Wound-wort (*Stachys palustris*) ; Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis*) ; white, red, and yellow Water Avens (*Geum rivale*) ; Ground Ivy (*Nepeta glecoma hederacea*) ; Master-wort (*Peucedanum Ostruthium*), rare, brought from a distance, but found at Cairnballoch near Alford, and Alton in Leochel Cushnie ; Larkspur ; Bitter-sweet (*Solanum dulcamara*) ; Columbine (*Delphinium Ajacis*) ; Gout-weed ; Scotch Lovage (*Ligusticum Scoticum*), rarish ; Greater Plantain (*Plantago major*) ; Yellow Pansy (*Viola lutea*), pretty rare, from about Towey ; Blue Jacob's-ladder (*Polemonium caeruleum*), rare ; Wall-pepper (*Sedum acre*) ; House-leek (*Semprevivum tectorum*) ; Bloody-veined Dock (*Rumex nemorosus sanguineus*), rare ; Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*), rare ; Periwinkle ; Chervil ; Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*), called locally "Dog's myrrh ;" Caraway, which John used greatly ; Flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) ; Bind-weed and Forget-me-not. Along the burn side :—Peppermint and Spearmint, in great strength and abundance ; White and Goat Willow (*Salix alba et caprea*) ; Orpine (*Sedum telephium*) ; Pale smooth-leaved, and Great hairy Willow-herb (*Epilobium roseum et hirsutum*) ; a great patch of Tufted Vetch (*Vicia cracca*) ; the gean ; and abundant watercress in flower.

He cultivated garlic, in which he had great belief ; the blackberry ; the American tree-onion, with seeds on the top of the stalk ; a large luscious variety of the rasp ; and the elderberry, from which he brewed a kind of drink. His wild dog-roses and his wild daisies had become double by cultivation ; but since he had ceased to look after them, they were relapsing into singlehood.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS UNDER WHICH JOHN LIVED.

NOTHING is to be had for nothing in this world. One of the highest-priced commodities here has always been liberty, and not less costly the liberty of differing from one's neighbours, of dissenting, however slightly, from the established form of the personal, social, religious or scientific creed. For severer degrees of deflection, the penalty has been suffering and death. In lighter matters of manner, habit and pursuit, the price must be paid as certainly and as fully as in heavier, in misunderstanding, misrepresentation, contempt and other forms of petty social persecution.

This our eccentric enthusiast found to his cost all his days, of which proofs have already been given. Having had the temerity to leave the ancient paths trodden by his ancestors and neighbours in certain directions, he had, of course, to walk alone or with the few that were as brave or as foolish as himself, and to bear the gibes of the crowd who frequented the beaten track. And John Duncan had to pay his full share of these social penalties, which he did with meekness and dignity.

Nothing more impresses an observer of mankind, in this connection, than the urgent need that exists of having

the things of everyday life interpreted to the mass of men. Familiarity not only breeds contempt of even the greatest elements that surround and support them, but shuts their eyes to their nature and importance. It thus becomes one of the functions of science, to interpret to the blind the true beauty and dignity of the commonest objects they hourly use, as working under universal law ; of education, to teach the real character and relations of common things ; of religion, to show that there is nothing "common or unclean," as under the Great Father's love ; and of poetry,

"To clothe the palpable and familiar
With golden exhalations of the dawn."

Not less is there the same need of interpreting to the great majority of mankind, the men and women they daily meet in the house, on the highway, or at the market ; and this is all the more necessary if their neighbours have pursuits differing from their own. The best of men have often been misunderstood all their days, or viewed in a false light, or ignorantly persecuted, from this sheer inability of their fellows to look beneath the mere outer surface of things, as well as from the co-existing want of that blessed charity which "hopeth all things and thinketh no evil."

Such facts in the experience of mankind receive abundant illustration in the history of John Duncan, and few have passed through life whose real character and pursuits were more hidden from their contemporaries than this scientific weaver. Many things led to this result. His eccentricities challenged criticism ; his unusual studies were pursued at a time when science was little followed by any, and still less by the poor ; and his seeming simplicity

provoked the stings of the witlings of the country side: while his self-contained nature, and his satisfaction with his own quiet joys, made him independent of the opinion of his neighbours; his silence and innate reticence prevented explanation when such might have been serviceable; and his constitutional pride and small love of approbation would not allow him in any way to court popular favour. But be the reasons, internal and external, what they may, the fact remains that the man walked through life, understood and appreciated by few, and misinterpreted, if not despised, by most. And, poor good soul, he was contented so to live, blessed by the charms of the higher life he led, and of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. He never looked, there can be no doubt, for any reward beyond what he daily received, the delights of his own thoughts and pursuits; nor did he ever dream of any compensation before he went, or after he was gone, by having his life interpreted to the world in a book, as Cromwell looked forward to having justice done to him.

What were some of the causes of this misunderstanding?

First, his odd appearance, solitary studiousness, and unusual, old-fashioned habits inclined his neighbours to think and speak of him as an "odd," "queer," and "curious creetur." Then, his gazing at the distant stars and "pottering" about the ditches and hedges, mosses and mountains, for what they contemned as weeds, caused them to wonder at and despise the man that spent his time on such things, and to count him "silly" or "no very wise"—a phrase which in Scotland means not fully *compos mentis*,—or at least as "having a crack" about him; just as Robert Dick's wise contemporaries at Thurso looked

upon him as "the mad baker." As one of his friends who used to accompany him in his rambles says: "When John began botany, he was looked upon as a half-wit about Tough, and persistently attacked by hundreds who were in every way his inferiors, except perhaps in personal appearance; and the poor man had to endure no end of 'chaff.'" But John's philosophy was such that he "never once saw him lose his temper" under the stings of these small flies, whose attacks were most numerous when he first began to botanise. By-and-by they became less so, as they got accustomed to the novelty and found the object of their petty attentions imperturbable to their attacks, or too clever for themselves. Ere long his unretaliating meekness and remarkable enthusiasm in what seemed to them thankless studies, gained their increasing respect. On John's removal to new districts, he had to undergo the same misunderstandings and to conquer a place in their esteem, and in the end he always achieved a high one. But even then and to the last, in regard to his studies, which were a puzzle to them, he was reckoned by most of his neighbours as at best an innocent phenomenon.

His uncommon style of dress, and near-sightedness, combined with his constant habit of poking by the high-ways and hedges as he passed along, caused even the children to notice him and count him queer. One day some boys were returning from school at Tullynessle, when one of them shouted out in alarm; "A madman! a madman!" At once they all scampered over the dike for protection, to wait the advancing terror. It was only John who was taking home a web under his arm, and beguiling the time by looking for plants in the bottom of the roadside

ditch. One of the youngsters, John Taylor, who afterwards became a disciple of his, knew John, having previously seen him at the same work, and relieved his companions by telling them that it was only "the Droughsburn weaver."

His quiet unpretending look made many think that his knowledge was much less than it was. Four young gardeners from the Barn Yards of Fyvie, who knew something of plants, determined to test the weaver on one occasion. Coming to John with a large collection of native flowers, they tried him first with the more common, advanced to the rarer, and ended with several new to themselves. John not only named them with ease, but showed the way to discover those they did not know, and gave their properties and habits. They told him of their conspiracy, confessed themselves beaten, and complimented him on his knowledge and practical skill.

A friend of the Rev. Mr. Williams long refused to believe in John's "jaw-breakers," and stoutly affirmed that he gave plants "thae lang-nibbit names oot o' his ain heed;" and he was only a specimen of many more. John one day met him when he was complaining of a pain in his interior regions, and told him of the efficacy of the root of the Tormentil (*Potentilla tormentilla*), which obtains its name from its potent curative powers in certain "torments," or pains. The man was induced to try John's prescription, and experienced satisfactory results. When speaking on the subject shortly afterwards to Mr. Williams, he remarked that the grand name of the plant he could not vouch for, his scepticism even then asserting itself; but as to its effects, he could and would stand up for them, concluding with the confession, "Man, John kens mair ner ye wu'd

think!" When Mr. Williams told John of this man's conversion, he replied, "It's hard-won knowledge."

Even at the Milton of Cushnie, where, in the houses of Mr. Williams' father and uncle, the old weaver was more appreciated than in many places, he and the other children who liked and respected him, looked upon him as "a great curiosity." Influenced by the common talk about the man, they thought he invented new words for the plants as he liked. On Sundays and other times when they walked with him, they used to ask him the names of the same plants "over and over," in order to test his consistency, like the great little critics they were, as Dr. Williams tells. These, nevertheless, John never tired of repeating to them, "as solemnly and willingly the twentieth time as the first." He seemed to think them earnest students, but anything they did learn, they confessed, was "by mistake;" and they rather made fun of the big words and "threw them about at each other," remembering such sonorous vocables as *Veronica beccabunga* and *Veronica chamædrys* long after they had forgot the plants they designated.

In his encounters with ignorance and prejudice, John had most trouble with his farmer and ploughman neighbours, for he lived amongst them and met them yearly in the harvest field. The notorious tendency of their class to play practical jokes and make fun of what they do not understand, got abundant scope, as they thought, with the odd weaver and his queer ways. From long intercourse and not from mere prejudice, his opinion of his tormentors was not very high, calling them generally "Johnnie Raws," a description he first heard from Charles Black, who said it was originally used by a curious beggar that wandered

over the country in his young days. This man, who dressed like an officer in the army, was most mannerly and unusually smart and intelligent, rewarding his entertainers with exhibitions of his dramatic powers, when he cleverly delineated several characters, amongst others "Mr. Polite," and "Mr. Rompish," not sparing his bucolic friends, the "Johnnie Raws." They often tried their dull wit on John in various ways, but seldom got the best of it,—asking him the names of the plants when they met him on the road, or called at his workshop as they sometimes did, and then laughing and ogling to each other when the sequipedalian syllables fell from his lips, but leaving him, not seldom, "wi' a flee i' their lug."*

When John called one day on James Black long after he had left Tough, he was asked if he continued to be annoyed by the small witlings of the country as he used to be. John replied that he was still a little troubled, but not nearly so much as before, and told some stories of how he had played them out. One of these is worth relating, both for itself and as a proof that there was much more acuteness and humour in the quiet, meek-looking man than, to the very last, many would credit him with; and this he also told to myself with dramatic power and circumstance.

While collecting plants one evening on the braes above Tough, John was met by a number of farm servants, who thought they would get some fun out of the weaver about the "weyds" he was carrying in his hat and in his hand. He showed them amongst other things a sprig of juniper.

* That is, with a sharp retort that stuck to them,—a good example of the striking metaphors in common use amongst the people.

They said they knew this plant quite well, and that it grew "etnach * berries." But one lad "kent a buss, a great big buss, an' nae leevin ever saw a single berry on't;" and all the others knew the same bush well. John at once saw a chance of both amusement and rebuke, if it should turn out to be a female plant. He asked if there was only one bush, and was told that there were none for miles around but itself; at least they had never seen any. After learning that this bush, which had thus become famous in the neighbourhood, was not far off, he asked them to lead him to the place, as he wished to see it. So off the whole party marched to the spot.

They soon found the juniper, a solitary female plant, as he expected, in full bloom; and there and then he resolved to read them a lesson and "prove his ability as a man and a botanist, who knew something of nature and nature's laws," as James Black remarks. John said, "Nae doobt, ye think yoursel's clever chiels, but cu'd ony o' ye mak' that buss bear fruit?" "Na, faith, na, John," they all exclaimed, "we canna dee that; nor cu'd ye, 'less ye hae mair airt than yer ain, man." John asserted that he could and would; and then, stretching out his hands over the bush, he muttered several words in the manner of a magician, which his astrological lore had made him familiar with, and ended by declaiming—"Thou shalt bear berries for once!" The young men were more than amused, they were astonished at the little man's whole style in a vein so serious and unexpected, but they drowned their surprise in laughter. John arranged with them, however, that at a

* This is the name of the juniper in various parts of the country, and is a bit of Gaelic—*etinn* being the Gaelic name of the plant.

certain time at the beginning of winter, of which he would apprise them, they should all reassemble there, to witness the fulfilment of what he had said. There they parted as the sun set, and though trying to think it a good joke, the young bucolic critics felt their merriment somewhat restrained, as if "coming events cast their shadows before."

Next day, having to visit Inch beyond Auchleven in connection with his work, John went to a locality he knew, crowded with juniper, where he selected a large branch from a male plant on which the pollen was ripe and unusually abundant. This he carried all the way by the winding footpath over "the back o' the hill," across the bridge of Don, and home to Netherton, with the pollen safely preserved—no easy task on those breezy heights, over so long a distance. Next day was bright and sunny, and he bore his tender burden to the solitary bush on the hill. When the sun was in all his glory, shedding, refulgent, the necessary light, heat and electrical influences—for as John remarked, "the plants are creatures o' licht, and all their little transactions are done in open day, having no evil to hide"—he shook the pollen-laden branch above the open flowers below, sprinkling them skilfully with the all-potent dust. When he visited the spot alone some time after, he saw the complete success of his bold experiment, in the formation of a host of baby berries.

In due course, when the fruit had reached maturity, he summoned his tormentors, who had forgotten all about their encounter with the botanist, to witness the result. Their surprise may be better imagined than described. As they stood speechless and astounded at the sight—for, as John

said, "they were na up till't, and, fat was waur, they wi'dna be instruckit."—John concluded the drama by solemnly declaring, that the bush never would bear another berry ; and sure enough it never did. The story got wind in the district, raising John in general estimation as a botanist, if not as a magician, with powers that were "no canny," and doing much to silence future aggressors.

Speaking of the subject afterwards, in the Society at Auchleven, he said that, when he saw the successful action of the pollen, "it gave him more happiness than if he had fallen heir to a kingdom."

But John was depreciated by not a few who should have known better ; and about Alford, from first to last, he was less understood than at Auchleven and elsewhere. In the Howe of Cushnie, for instance, there flourished, for some years, another branch of the Mutual Instruction movement. In accordance with his desire to act as propagandist for his own studies and help in all intellectual pursuits, he offered to read a paper, of which we have seen not unworthy specimens. But, as one of the members informs me, "the secretary had the greatest possible difficulty in putting him off. The services of a lecturer from a distance were sometimes secured, and John was very, very anxious to give us a lecture. Our trusty secretary, however, would not hear of such an outrage, and had to coin divers excuses that would not hurt the old botanist's feelings. It was a pity," he continues, "that he was so conservative and so zealous for the honour of our society. We ought to have accepted John's offer, and heard him lecture on the subject regarding which he could have enlightened the best of us : but 'a prophet is not without

honour save in his own country,' especially if he be a *carpenter* there, or a weaver!"

A prevalent charge that John's study of plants brought against him was, that he was idling his time by doing such useless things. Now, if there was one thing more than another true of the man, it was that he was not only industrious but hard-working at his trade. When he indulged in botanising at any time, the hours thus spent were fully made up by extra work at another time, either taken from his sleep or his leisure. When his neighbours saw him outside gathering plants during the day, that looked to them like spending time at play, when he should have been at work "like other folks;" but they did not see him hard at his loom early in the morning or late at night, when they were under the blankets. Though he thus laid himself open to be misjudged as he was, he was too proud, too self-contained, too careless of their opinion, or too conscious of right, to stoop to explain.

The one great test to which every pursuit such as John indulged is subjected by the worldly wise, with their narrow foot-rule, is, "What is the use of it?"—or, as they express it in Aberdeenshire, "Fat's the ees o't?" By this is meant, not true utilitarianism, the broad range of use, but the narrow, hardening test of its value in hard cash, worldly advancement, or personal advantage. John's enthusiasm for stars and plants being judged by this criterion, he was found wanting.

If there is a part of the country where this narrow utilitarian rule of thumb is more constantly applied to everything than in most places, it is the county in which John passed the greater part of his life and pursued his thankless researches.

The real feeling in this meagre estimate of Duncan and all such students was that which is so inimitably expressed by Dr. Douglas Maclagan in his clever satire of "the Battle o' Glen Tilt;"* which humorously describes an unsuccessful attempt by a great lord, in 1847, some time before John left Tough, to stop a party of botanists for trespass, in an excursion through the Grampians, over ground John knew well. Of John, his contemporaries were ever ready to exclaim, as of his fellow botanists:—

"Some folk'll tak' a heap o' fash
For unco little en', man;
An' meikle time and meikle cash
For nocht ava' they'll spen', man.
That chap wu'd gang a hunder' mile
For what was hardly worth his while;
And a' to poo
Some girse that grew
On Ben Mac Dhu
That ne'er a coo
Would care to pit her mou' till!"

What's the use of it! That question could be answered abundantly even in its narrower aspects, putting aside the higher pleasure and profit of these pursuits. But John once gave a reply which should have melted the heart of the hardest, had they known his history, and of which we who know a little of his hidden tragedy, the secret grief of his life, can feel to some extent the real pathos. When asked why he went after the flowers so much as he did, and what benefit they were to him, he replied that they might

* Written on the extraordinary attempt of the Duke of Athol to prevent Professor Balfour and some of his students from passing through Glen Tilt, on a botanical excursion, in August, 1847, before John left Tough, in 1849.

be no benefit in that sense ; but they *took up his mind*, and he thought that, if it had not been for them, *he would have gone wrong altogether*. We now know something of what is implied in that answer ; and it surely, in itself, is a reply more than sufficient to silence the everlasting query that assailed his ears—"Fat's the eese o't?"

But is it not sad that this question, good and right and wise as it is when truly viewed, should be asked and answered on the poor level on which it generally is? Is it not time that our educators of all kinds, in the school, the pulpit and the book, should try more earnestly and actively to raise the standard of judgment, of the application of this true *experimentum crucis* of all work and study? Is it not a grave censure upon our boasted educational and ecclesiastical agencies, that this question should so long and so late have remained on the low platform on which it still stands?

CHAPTER XXXI.

DISCIPLES AND SYMPATHISERS AT DROUGHSBURN.

THOUGH thus self-contained and self-absorbed, over-modest and retiring, and much misunderstood by his neighbours in general, Duncan's influence over others was by no means small. Of this we have already seen proofs in the progress of our story, and it will be interesting to adduce others in his later years.

He was never more truly delighted than when communicating knowledge, and, with the spirit of the true lover of science, he was constantly trying to gain proselytes. But, in the prevalent state of education and opinion in regard to such pursuits, his success in making converts to Botany was not very great; and even with a more public-spirited, less retiring man, could scarcely have been greater as things then were. To John at times, notwithstanding his large hopefulness and knowledge of his own endeavours, his life in this respect sometimes seemed to have been spent in vain, though it was very far from being so. At my first visit to him, when, in talking on this subject, he deprecated such influence over others, Mrs. Allanach kindly broke out in his behalf: "Noo, John, I maun tell on ye; ye hae had scholars, and a wheen o' them. There was my ain son-in-law, and that clever loon doon the road there, noo a grand

teacher awa' in Ingland, wha baith used, mony a day, to come to you wi' their bits o' floors and girses ; and many a lauch I hae had at ye a', as ye stud at the door there i' the gloamin', lookin' at the unco' things and gabbin' over them to nae end !”

The first of John's disciples here referred to was John M. B. Taylor, already mentioned. He was a farm-servant in the Vale of Alford, and for a time at Tillychetly on the Leochel, opposite Droughsburn. He first made the botanist's acquaintance in 1871, when he saw his herbarium. At once he felt, as he says, “a peculiar charm in the man and his studies that struck a high-sounding chord in his nature.” In May, 1872, he took some schoolboys to the rare weaving shop, when the old man delightedly showed them his plants and described their peculiarities and discovery, till it was time to leave. John then accompanied them homewards, according to his kindly practice, and the young folks indulged on the way in the unwonted pleasure of gathering the wild flowers by the roadside, and bringing them to be named by John, who spoke also of their medicinal properties. At parting, he talked earnestly to the ploughman of the joys of Botany, the charm it had been to himself in his loneliness, the contentment it had imparted in his lowly life, and his delight in solitary wanderings in search of his favourites, all uttered in what seemed to the young man a vein of “true poetry.”

Taylor was now thoroughly “bitten” with the subject, and set himself to its systematic study under John's guidance. He commissioned his tutor that autumn to bring him a text-book from Aberdeen, which he did with pleasure, “Brook's Introduction to the Linnæan System.”

He visited the weaver at all spare hours, and went systematically into the study by reading books which John lent him. When John gave him the loan of any book, he was accustomed to say, "Noo, Johnnie, lad, dinna be over weel-fashioned wi't; be *ill-fashioned*. Look in atween the brods and see fat's in't. There's some fowks sae weel-fashioned wi' books that they never open them."

In the mid-winter of 1873, John went to his garden and brought his scholar a Christmas rose, saying, "Tak' that i' yer han', and gin ony o' the ploughmen chiels speir fat it is, say it's *Helleborus niger*, and ye'll sta' them wi' sic a name."

The following summer, Taylor made his first collection of plants, of considerable number, which he named and arranged according to Linnæus. He now paid weekly visits to Droughsburn. His delight in plants so increased that, to have as much time as possible with the botanist, he used to leave the farm at once without supper when work was over—a bowl of milk and bread being, however, placed by the kindly kitchen-maid to wait his late return, in the hay-loft where he slept.

At these visits, they used to hunt for plants in the long summer nights, John telling their common and technical names, peculiarities of structure, and medicinal and other properties, and seasoning his talk with much fun and humour, stories of his adventures, and good advice. This pleasant intercourse continued for several years, and Taylor says he never brought a plant to John which he was unable to name and describe. John's remarkable memory struck him, as it did all that knew him, with his familiar knowledge of the localities where he had found plants.

One evening, John and he set out to search for a certain species at some distance, but by the time they reached the spot, darkness had come down, and nothing could be seen. The eager old botanist, nevertheless, knew the place so well, though he had not been there for a year or two, and though the plant had just appeared above ground, that he found it—after groping in the dark on hands and knees—and presented it to the lad.

The botanical garden at the cottage was a frequent means of instruction and study, and every plant there was examined and described.

Taylor's progress was rapid and secure, and all holidays, of which he had only two in the year, were devoted to science. In time, he formed a more complete herbarium. To extend his knowledge of the flora of the country, in 1875 he spent some time in Forfarshire, where John's intimate knowledge of the country and the stations of plants there proved of the highest service to him. Since then, Taylor has advanced in Botany, and now possesses a very good knowledge of it, both practical and theoretical. He has accumulated a collection which includes, it appears, most of the flowering plants, ferns, and grasses of Aberdeen, Banff and Kincardine, as also species from the north of England, where he has also botanised.

His studies have not been confined to Botany. He has gathered specimens in Archæology, Geology, and Mineralogy. In 1869, he began Phrenology, which he studied both practically and theoretically for years, in books and on the heads of his friends. From 1871 to 1876, he made a series of Meteorological observations, in which John was much interested. He also studied Astronomy with great

earnestness, securing assistance and encouragement from the old star-gazer ; and in 1872, he made observations in the Vale, for the "Astro-Meteorological Society" of London. Since that, he has gone more or less into several branches of Natural History, as shells, insects, and animals, of which he has a good selection. He has passed the Science and Art examinations in Botany, Geology, Animal Physiology, and Practical and Theoretical Chemistry. Altogether, he has developed, under the extraordinary difficulties that beset poverty and lowly condition in the country, remarkable aptitude and enthusiasm for the natural sciences. As he gratefully acknowledges, he received his first and deepest impulses towards these from John Duncan.

Some years ago, he abandoned farm labour, and gave a realistic account of his experiences in a book called "Eleven Years at Farm Work : a True Tale of Farm-Servant Life from 1863 onwards." In 1876, after marrying a daughter of Mr. Allanach's, whom he had met in his visits to Droughsburn, he removed to Aberdeen. There he was engaged for some years in several employments, and occupied his leisure in writing for the newspaper press and in prosecuting science.

He is now assistant in the Public Library of Paisley, having been recommended to that post by an Irish professor, who examined his private collections. It is to be hoped that his scientific knowledge and enthusiasm will ere long be utilized in connection with some museum or other similar institution, in which he would be an undoubted gain. His affection and respect for Duncan are deep and permanent. From the first, he perceived the genuine worth and ability hid beneath the unpromising exterior of the

old weaver. From Mr. Taylor, I have gained more regarding John than from any other friend.

In the Vale of Alford, there lived another farm-servant, a friend of Taylor's, but somewhat older, called William D. H. Deans. With exemplary diligence and perseverance, under trying difficulties and ill health, he went to Aberdeen University—the nursing mother of thousands of her able but humble sons—and in due time took his degree. Though adorned with academic honours, he did not forget his old friends in the Vale, but, amongst other kindly services, used to assist his struggling companion, Taylor, in his neglected education; guiding his English studies, correcting exercises for him by post, and introducing him to Latin, to help him in botanical nomenclature. Deans determined to devote himself to teaching as a profession, in which he had engaged during his college course.

In 1868, while conducting a school at Lethenty, in Fyvie, in Aberdeenshire, he was introduced by the parish minister, the Rev. Gavin Lang,* to an earnest botanist, the Rev. William Lytteil,† then officiating at a church near the Cross of Jackson, who possessed a good herbarium, specially rich in grasses and ferns. Under him, Deans began Botany both in the book and in the field. In order to help him to do it in proper form, he bought Balfour's "Outlines" of the science, and a vasculum. That summer, he returned to his mother's house at Alford, and began its independent study. In coming home one evening after seeking for plants, he met a neighbouring farmer, who, when he saw his unwonted vasculum and its contents, said: "Weel, Willie, man, ye su'd

* Now of Inverness.

† Author of "Landmarks of Scottish Life and Language," 1877.

gang up tae the aul' weyver abeen the burn, for he's near wud * aboot plants and floo'rs; and some o' the fowk up yonder say he's whiles up gin four o' the mornin', wan'erin' aboot the stanks † and dike-sides aifter them." This was the first time he had heard of John, though the weaver had then lived sixteen years by the Leochel! Willie at once conceived a strong desire to become acquainted with him, especially when he now learned his enthusiasm and success.

Shortly after this, while at Alford cattle market, Deans observed, as he writes, "an aged man standing in the centre of the fair, neat, clean, dressed in a blue home-spun coat with a large collar and brass buttons, and leaning upon a large blue umbrella." Assured, from descriptions he had got, that this was the botanist he sought, he introduced himself to John, who received him with a kindly smile, saying, "Ay, laddie, fat dae ye dee and far dae ye bide?" The young man, having satisfied him on these points, told him how he had been working at Botany for five or six weeks, and said he would be greatly obliged for his kindly assistance in the science. They at once entered into earnest confabulation, personal and botanical, and John finished with some counsels about the plants and a warm invitation to meet him next day at Droughsburn.

With a collection of wild flowers in his hand, William entered the weaver's curious domain at the appointed hour, and found him at his loom, the clatter of which had guided him to the door. John at once ceased work, and with wonted care, spreading a sheet of brown paper on the web at which he was working and a newspaper over that, asked him to lay out his plants there. Then, after arming himself

* Mad.

† Pools.

with "Hooker and Arnott" and "Dickie," he reseated himself at the loom, while the young student sat by, and they began the examination of the specimens. This was a long but interesting process, names, structure, properties, and adventures being variously intermingled. John's odd pronunciation of the technical terms at once tickled the ears of the collegian, just fresh from university benches. The writing of the names from his dictation was "downright Thracian," as he says, John trying the spelling letter by letter, but giving it up, and asking him to "look at the buik." In due time, Deans secured the names of the plants he brought, and got instructions in regard to gathering, drying, laying down, and other mysteries of practical Botany. When he left, John accompanied him up the hill above the cottage, naming and describing all the plants they saw, till they reached the summit. There he sat down beside a marsh, and asked his companion to "look about'm." The place was covered with the purple flowers of the Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*), John's pronunciation of the Latin being exceedingly amusing. When this had been examined and commented on, John asked the hour, bade him good-bye, and hastened homewards down the hill, shouting back to his young friend not to be long before coming back again.

A day or two after this, John himself called at Mrs. Deans' house, about six in the morning, saying he would return about seven that evening. He travelled a long distance to his former haunts at Keig and Tough, delivering to customers some "cloutie coverings" he had finished, but duly appeared on the road near the house at the hour named. The young student, who had been looking out for

him with pleasant anticipations, at once went to meet him, and found him brisk and blithe, with a fine flower of the White Ox-eye (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*) stuck gaily in his button-hole—and a beautiful flower it is, commonplace as it is counted, surpassing many of our lauded garden asters. Holding up a parcel he carried, he exclaimed, “Sal, lad, I hae something here for ye!” As they walked towards the cottage, John directed his attention to the flower in his coat, and described the structure of the composite order, of which it is a very good, clear example. While tea was being prepared by the good mother, John, ever careful of the fragments of time, asked the lad to show his recent gatherings and get them named till the kettle boiled. After tea, which revived him greatly, being somewhat worn out by his long journey, the naming was resumed. This was accompanied by a varied commentary, scientific, social, and personal, all interesting and picturesque, as suggested by the plants. When this was finished, he opened the parcel he had himself brought, and described specimens of the rarer kinds, which he promised to “divide wi’” Willie after he had pressed them, when he came up to see him at the Droichs burn.

At subsequent visits, botanical investigations were continued, the mysterious boxes—shown only to the worthy—were opened, the books looked over, the herbarium untied, weaving described, and early memories of his life related. As their intimacy grew, they met twice or thrice every week. They botanised together all over the country round Alford and along the banks of the Don. Under John’s direction, Deans also visited many of John’s early haunts; amongst others, Castle Forbes, Monymusk, and

Benachie. John often visited Mrs. Deans' cottage on Sunday evenings, to have a cup of tea and talk with her son. At such times, his conversation never touched on Botany, but was confined to religious, political, and social themes, in which he wished to interest the young student. He used to deplore "the decay of modern preaching," and to bemoan the general run of sermons as "a rigmarole of ecclesiastical phrases"—a criticism, it is to be feared, too often merited.

In time, Mr. Deans left for a school in Stoke-on-Trent, and he is now head master of a successful upper-class school at Clifton, near Bristol; being the "grand teacher awa in England," referred to by Mrs. Allanach. He recalls his ancient botanical tutor with gratitude and appreciation.

Droughsburn is situated on the large farm of Dorsell, which lies on the slope of the valley above the road skirting the Leochel, and was then leased by Mr. McCombie, the celebrated cattle-breeder of Tillyfour up the Leochel, brother of the editor. To Dorsell, in 1866, there came to learn Scotch farming, a young Swede, about thirty, called Hans J. Samson, belonging to Gothenberg. He was pleasant, intelligent and bright, had been well educated, being able to read Latin, and was a general favourite. He took lessons in English from the Rev. Andrew Christie, then schoolmaster of Alford, now parish minister of Kildrummie on the Don, and he could use the language very creditably.

The rough ploughmen with whom Hans worked used sometimes to visit Duncan, having encountered him on the road and met him at harvesting; and they laughed at his eccentricities, and especially at the droll names he gave the weeds. They told Samson about the botanical weaver,

and accompanied him one evening to the weaving shop, to get some fun, as they said, out of "the queer cretur." But their merriment received an unexpected check from their companion. To their surprise, he entered earnestly into all that was said and shown by the old man. They never returned with him there, as it was evidently useless for their purposes ; for the Swede was "tarred wi' the same stick " as the man of weeds. He took to John immensely, studied Botany with him, and visited him frequently. John spoke highly of him to me, and had great pleasure in his company, delighted as he was at all times to gain a convert to his beloved science. They made some botanical journeys together, and became great friends during the year the young Swede remained on the farm. As John said, "Hans was unco' fond to hear about the floo'rs and their names, and to talk about his great countryman." At the mention of Carl Linné's name, he "would hae jumpit shortly," John said ; that is, he would start from his seat with enthusiasm. He made considerable progress in Botany, and could by-and-by decipher a plant with a little help from his aged tutor.

The purpose of Mr. Samson's bucolic companions was thus pleasantly frustrated, in a way that issued in pleasure and profit to himself, and helped to cheer the old man's latter days with the too rare joys of sympathy in his solitary and misunderstood pursuits. Samson left Dorsell for England, to prosecute his agricultural studies under eminent farmers there. He then returned to Sweden, but his subsequent history I have been unable to trace.

Dr. Williams' memories of John and his plants are pleasant and appreciative, recalling him from earliest

boyhood, when he used to come to church, as already told. "How he loved Botany," he exclaims, "and how he enjoyed it, few could believe. Truly, in that respect, John Duncan was a most remarkable exemplification of what the humblest student of nature may become. To a botanist, a visit to John's out-of-the-way abode was quite a treat; and I have a lively recollection of John at home. Of course, one would find him weaving—a process that was to me new and interesting. The first visit, therefore, began with a demonstration in weaving. Thereafter, with evidently no reluctance, John went over with me pile after pile of his *hortus siccus*. Every specimen had its history, noted in his memory. The local floral resources he had exhausted, and could tell where any rare specimen was to be found. If he had it to spare, he seemed to have great pleasure in parting with a specimen, nor was he slow to give away a sample of a rare plant. Thinking medicinal plants suitable for me, as a medical student, he gave me a specimen, which I still possess, of *Atropa belladonna*, Deadly Nightshade. He called it 'Atropia Beldonia,' but what did it matter, though he occasionally mispronounced these neck-breaking names? Time to spare for interested visitors John seemed to have in abundance.

"That first visit was to me a rare treat, and is still vividly recalled. The man himself, compared with his circumstances and surroundings, was perhaps a greater rarity than his rarest specimens. Many a brown study have I had of him and the curious place he worked in. Then, John always saw his friend a good way along the road, when the visit was ended, bidding him 'haste ye back.'"

Dr. Williams' cousin, the Rev. George Williams, from

whose reminiscences of the botanist we have already gleaned, also recalls him from childhood, when he came to church and used to speak to the children and to his father about "the lilies of the field how they grow." Afterwards, while he was attending college, John tried to induce him to begin the serious study of plants. "He brought me," Williams says, "a book to help me in the subject. He pulled a buttercup to pieces, and explained its parts very carefully and minutely. I resolved to begin discovering for myself the names of the commonest wild plants. I began with Ragweed; but, alas! the florets of the disc, which I mistook for the petals, and the florets of the ray for the stamens, would not correspond with the book. I tried another of the *Compositæ*, with like results. I got disheartened, and returned the book to John, at the same time telling him that I had no time for Botany. I think he was vexed. If I had told him my difficulty, he would have been so glad to remove it and to instruct me further; but I did not, and so my technical botanical studies ended.

"I called one day on John at Droughsburn," he continues. "We discussed the weather, crops, and church news. In a few minutes, John had dragged me to his wonderful patch of cultivation—his garden. He told me a great deal about the plainest-looking weeds. Amongst other things, he plucked a bit of common Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and told me that the plant was once called 'Eerie,' as lasses used to take it and put it in their breasts as a charm, repeating this rhyme—

'Eerie, eerie, I do pluck
And in my bosom I do put;
The first young lad that speaks to me,
The same shall my true lover be.'

"I suggested that 'eerie' might be a corruption of 'yarrow;' or that it might be the Scotch word 'eerie,' meaning timorous, because the girl would go tremblingly and timorously to pluck and place the charm in her breast. John at once exclaimed, 'Oh, man, that's it!'

"He had a plant called 'Humility,' or 'Aaron's Beard,'* which he said was so called because it threw out long tendrils which hung down over the margin of the pot where it was suspended. 'But,' added John, 'Aaron's beard was nae langer than Moses' beard, as far as we ken;' and then he quietly repeated the first verse of the psalm—

'Like precious ointment on the head,
Which down the beard did flow,
Even Aaron's beard, and to the skirts
Did of his garments go.'

"'So you see,' he continued, 'Aaron's beard went down to the skirts o' his garments.' I think the old high priest sank considerably in his estimation when I pointed out that it was the oil, and not the beard, which flowed down to the skirts.

"I was speaking to him one day about the colours of flowers, and mentioned that the sweet scents and pretty petals attracted insects, whereby the flowers were fertilised. 'Ay,' said he, 'they're attractive to wee flees as well as to us. But some o' the flees are killed by them.' This led him to describe the irritability of the stamens in some plants, and he ended by saying, 'There's nae mony o' them sae cruel, though.' I replied, 'they all hang out their colours

* *Saxifraga sarmentosa*, a Chinese species of Saxifrage, having flowers like the other known as "London Pride" (*Saxifraga umbrosa*), a Lusitanian species, now wild in some places in Britain.

and give out their sweets for a selfish end.' 'Na, na,' he replied, 'they're jist like the lads and lasses, dressin' themsel's bonnilie to get a sweetheart;' and he went away, laughing heartily at the conceit.

"We were talking one day, on the way from church, about the death of an acquaintance, when he very solemnly remarked, 'Floo'rs come up oot o' the caul' grun' gradually in spring; man will be raised up suddenly full blown.' The remark was in accordance with the generally hopeful view the old man took of things."

On another occasion, Mr. Williams was passing Droughsburn and met the old botanist near the cottage. "It's a fine day this," said John. "Yes, John, a very fine day." "But we're sair needin' rain," John went on. "The flees are busy nibblin' awa' the neeps." "Does rain kill them?" asked his young friend. "Na," replied John, "I dinna think that; and even gin it did droon them, they're sae breedy that ae generation o' them, greedier than the last, wu'd spring up wi' the first blink o' sunsheen. The rain maybe doesna kill them, but it gars the neep grow till it gets ower hard for the beesties' teeth." "What havoc farmers suffer from these small creatures!" remarked Mr. Williams. "Ay, ay," consented John; "gin they were as big as hares, we cu'd gae oot an' shoot them wi' guns and trap them like rabbits; nae game laws cu'd prevent that. But they're sae sma' cattle; catchin' them winna pay ony mair nar clippin' the soo."

"Is work brisk just now, John?" "Oh, weel," replied he, "I've aye plenty to dee. 'Swift as a weaver's shuttle' is an auld sayin'; but ye canna keep the guidwives frae grumblin' awa' and ca'in' me lazy; just as gin they hadna ae

steek o' cla'es to cover their backs wi' till I tak' their wabs tae them." "Are you not often wearied, doing the same thing over and over again?" "Ow, na," briskly returned he. "The wark wud be gey an' wearisome gin the min' were tied till't. But the min's free like the shuttle, and sae it can rin aboot here and there, back and fore, ding dang."

Here Mr. Williams mentioned the names of the greatest African traveller and a distinguished Aberdeen philosopher, who had either been weavers or connected with weaving in their early days, and thereby shed honour on the loom. "Just sae," consented the old weaver, proud of his trade, "oor wark mak's us greater by ord'nar' ; or a gey sicht less." "And you have turned to plants and flowers," pursued Mr. William, "to keep your mind green?" John brightened up at the mention of his favourites, but with his usual deprecation of personal praise, quietly assented ; "the smell and sicht o' them drives the dust o' the shoppie oot o' the lungs, nae doo't." "I wish I knew as much about Botany as you do, John," vainly sighed the young man. "Ye micht soon ken a hantle * mair ner me, gin ye wu'd set yersel' till't. Thae lang names pit me oot files, but ye wu'd ken the meanin's o' them and min' them better." "The scientific terms and meanings are almost of no use," rightly remarked his friend, "until the things meant are known." "Weel, weel," wisely and encouragingly urged the real educationist John was ; "pu' and look, read and speir, and never fear !"

He then began to show Mr. Williams some of his favourite plants, "bits o' floories" as he called them. "This ane," he went on to explain, "I got at A," mentioning the

* Literally a *handful*, hence a considerable quantity.

name of the place where he had obtained it. "That ane I pu'd and brocht hame frae B. Here's ane ye winna see ilka day ; I had a gey ca'in' afore I got my neeves on him. I wis he may grow doon here ; but the snell air and mountain dew suit his constitution best. I got him awa' up on the hill o' C. *This* wee bit thingie's nae thrivin'. I got it in a hedge at D. Weel, weel, they're a' wild, as ye say, but I'm tamin' them ; killin' some o' them]nae doo't i' the process, but kind to them a'. Here's a girse I carried frae E ; there's lots o't near your hoose." And so the good old enthusiast went on, showing and speaking of what was dear to him and must be interesting, he thought, to every one that heard him.

Then the conversation drifted to other matters, and amongst these, the affairs of the Cushnie Free Church. Of a preacher they had lately heard, John observed, "He mak's awfu' moo's ; I liket him better when I didna leuk at'm." The old man accompanied the young minister along the road, as he was wont, and after a hearty "good-bye, and haste ye back !" he returned to his quiet hollow.

The medical students from Aberdeen, in their botanical excursions, used sometimes to call on John, and he has led them on occasions to the spots where the rarer species grew. But "puir fallows," said he, "they cu'dna stand my walkin' at a' ; they had ower thin boots. But fat cu'd you expect frae thae young loons ?"

The Rev. David A. Beattie, the first Free Church incumbent at Cushnie and John's minister for eight years, used to visit him frequently, and was much interested in his uncommon parishioner. "In his lowly home," he says, "he was all sunshine when conversation led to his favourite

study. I remember once, after speaking to him of Christ as the 'True Vine' and His culture of the branches (John xv. 1), how he warmed to the theme, and, ere I left, took me to see his little plot of rare plants, a wonderful and miscellaneous gathering from all parts. There he showed his full acquaintance with the blossoms that smile on us in the garden and on the wayside, and he gave abundant evidence of his conquest over botanical terms, which showed him to be an earnest student, ardently scientific while intelligently devout. As a botanist, he showed unwearying diligence in collecting facts and noting phenomena ; but he did not search merely for cold, abstract, inexorable laws, but owned the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley. He grasped his Bible tightly while repeating along with me the words 'All flesh is grass—but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.' His love of Botany as a specialist was great, and every discovery bearing on it filled him with delight."

CHAPTER XXXII.

VISITS TO ABERDEEN—FRIENDSHIP AND ECCENTRICITY.

SINCE leaving Aberdeen, in 1824, John Duncan was accustomed to visit it several times a year, to obtain yarn for weaving, and attend Militia drill for some weeks at a time. Before the Alford railway was opened in 1859, he walked the whole distance to and from the city, except when conveyed by kindly acquaintances. In Aberdeen, there were several good people who appreciated the man and relished his visits. He frequently stayed overnight there, and, business done, devoted the whole of his time to inspecting second-hand bookstalls, purchasing books, and calling on friends, but chiefly in extending his knowledge of the flora of the surrounding country.

At these visits, he was greatly astonished at the rapid growth of the town and the numerous changes effected on it since first he knew it in 1816, and he used to entertain and surprise his friends with remarks on these changes, and with descriptions of the city as it stood at the beginning of the century ; for his reminiscences of such things were interesting, vivid, and permanent. When he stayed in town over Sunday, he devoted the day to hearing good preachers, "the dons,"* "the guid han's," as he called them,

* Another bit of old scholastic Latin, being a contraction of *dominus*,

especially after 1843, going often three times to church ; and he could give off long after “great screeds” of the sermons he had heard, and describe the orators with humour and point.

From 1842 to 1848, his visits to the city were more frequent and extended than at any other time, for Charles Black then lived at Raeden, and there John used to stay several times a year ; for the two friends could not remain long apart while they lived in the same county.

By none was the weaver more welcomed than by Charles’s brother, James, who retained the most genuine friendship for him since their wandering together on the braes of Tough, in the thirties. James had been long settled near or in Aberdeen, where he was successful in business, being able ultimately to retire and live in its neighbourhood. To him, John’s visits, with his old-world style and stories and his intense enthusiasm, were always peculiarly interesting, as studies of human nature in the man himself, and bright glimpses of the happy past. As he often repeated in reference to them—

“ They brought him back the holms and howes
Where sillar burnies shine,
The lea-rig where the gowans glint
We pu’d in auld lang syne.
Oh, born o’ feeling’s warmest depths,
O’ fancy’s wildest dreams,
They twined wi’ monie lovely thochts,
Wi’ mony lo’esome themes ! ”

“ Many and varied were the floweries,” he says, “ that did glint in John’s path and mine, and fresh and lovely a lord, and a common term in Scotland, as well as at Oxford and Cambridge.

the banks of the sillar burnies, pregnant even yet wi' monie lovely thochts, and furnishing me *still* wi' monie lo'esome themes."

As a letter writer, James is picturesque, pithy, and entertaining, and he became a pleasant medium of communication between John and Charles, to both of whom the use of the pen was always more or less a piece of task-work, making their personal communication by post comparatively rare, though pretty regular.

When John came to town, he of course donned his best suit. If his attire was odd in the country, in the town it was simply *outré*, especially during his latter days, drawing all eyes even in the city crowd, and frequently causing embarrassment to his friends when in his company. Certainly, as James says, his like was seldom or never seen in Aberdeen in recent years, with the quaint dress already described—his home-made, home-cut ancient coat, with high neck and brass buttons, latterly well-nigh fifty years old; his trousers, short at best, rolled up half-way to the knee; his great heavy tacketed boots; his very tall dress hat, older than the rest and worn with use, set sloping on the back of his head; his "Sarah Gamp" blue umbrella under one arm, and a large bundle under the other, and generally with a collection of plants otherwise disposed. The whole formed a *tout ensemble* of an uncommon kind. It was certainly no small trial for any one to accompany its wearer, especially if he were at all sensitive to the ogling glances, constant stares, and mirthful faces encountered all along the street. As for the man himself, he seemed quite unconscious of his own appearance, and moved along the peopled pavement with as glorious obliviousness as

if he had been walking "ower the moor among the heather."

Of the effect thus produced by John's—

"Outlandish ways and dress
On which his neighbours laid such stress,"

like the *Pied Piper's*, Mr. Black gives some amusing examples. James lived in various parts of the city, and always duly instructed his old friend in regard to any change of residence, and directed his attention to the precise situation of his house. John, however, could not remember the exact number, and on coming to the locality had always to make diligent and numerous inquiries at all the neighbours till he succeeded in his search. To John, his friend was still the same as he had been at Netherton, neither more nor less than plain "*Jamie Black*." No matter that he had risen in the world, and was the manager of an establishment in which many hundreds were employed, and where he was invested with autocratic power; to the old weaver, braid Scotch was more than all modern stuck-up courtesies, and so Mr. Black remained and was spoken of by him to all and sundry, strangers, employées and friends, as "*Jamie*."

One day, John had come from Alford and walked to the Loch of Belhelvie, some miles north of Aberdeen, for some plants he wished to get there. Tired, footsore, dusty with long travel, and bespattered with the mud of his scramblings, he returned to Aberdeen to seek out his friend. He was clad in his usual picturesque garb, with hat at proper slope and rolled-up trousers, carrying a bundle of plants, and trailing behind him a thick sheaf, seven feet long,

of the tall Reed Grass (*Arundo phragmites*), which he had found at the loch. Arrived at the street, he duly inquired at every door for "Jamie Black." No one knew such a person, or protested they did not, amidst gathering mirth, as increasing numbers stood in their doorways to watch the curious inquirer. To and fro the old man went, vainly seeking for his unknown friend, saying he did live there the last time he called, and gradually becoming bewildered in the search. Happily, he was noticed from Mr. Black's house, and one of the daughters was sent out by the mother to bring home the old man, amidst the ill-concealed smiles of the whole neighbourhood; and in John was hurried, grass, bundles and all. Mr. Black was then from home, but on his return, heard the whole scene fully rehearsed by the ladies, amidst their mingled indignation and merriment. As Mr. Black, in relating the story, pertinently asks, Who does not try, at least in public, to forget the name his mother called him by?

On another occasion, some years after, John had been walking a great distance as usual, and came to James's house carrying two immense bundles. He was utterly exhausted, and looked the very picture of age, except that he was not hoary, being brown, shrunk, and dry as a mummy. He was clad "in the same garments as he had worn forty years before at Netherton," as James told Charles when writing to him on the subject. After dinner, though much refreshed, he still looked fatigued, and his friend determined to do the kindly and heroic and to brave all public criticism, by carrying one of his bundles. These were large, done up in faded coloured handkerchiefs, wound about with innumerable strings. Being as round and as unindented as

eggs, they were clearly outsiders, and had to be carried under the arm, and even then with difficulty.

Boldly enduring the suppressed giggling of the young ladies at home, James sallied forth into public gaze with his unconcerned companion. As they had to walk some two miles from one of the suburbs to the head of Union Street, through a crowded locality, James thought it better to take a back road, once the entry into the city, but now greatly deserted. This John did not like, it appeared, but he overcame his annoyance so far as to notice the changes that had taken place in the road, and talked of them to himself, James catching the words "changes" and "highway." Surmising that he referred to his taking this by-road, as his own conscience suggested, he said, "Oh, I did not take the high-road, John, thinking you would like the retired path better." John made no reply. At length, at a special spot, he stopped and said, "We now stan' on what was ance the king's highway to a' the sooth o' Scotland, and on and on to London city." "Bless me, John!" replied his friend, "how do you know? I thought you were never here before." "Oh, John kens that, and meikle mair than some fowk think," tartly answered the old man. And back he would go to the high-road, because nearer to his destination, till James was forced to yield.

Up the main street thereafter they marched in this picturesque style, under the gaze of all the folks, to whom Mr. Black was well known. Being none of Pharaoh's lean kine, the perspiration stood in beaded drops on James's face, flushed with more than mere travel and the burden he bore. John, getting tired, wished to rest for a while, and, regardless of his friend's protestations, sat down on the

window-ledge of a large grocery. James stood beside him like a standard-bearer, but with less dignity, his virtue fast oozing out in spite of his inward calls to stand to duty and prove to his fellows that he at least was not like other men ! It was sufficiently trying to be ogled at as they trudged along, but it became insupportable when a smiling crowd, first of ruthless city arabs and then of older people, gathered round them at the shop window. John himself was utterly oblivious of the sensation he was causing, and it was with very great difficulty, and only after frequent urgings, that he was prevailed upon to rise. His martyred friend accompanied him to Union Street, till, utterly beaten out with his load and discomfited by his gathering feelings, he was obliged to leave him, after seeing him fairly on his way. James returned home a sadder and wiser man, determined never to sacrifice himself in the same way again for even the dearest friend ; and realising with new vividness, as he says, how much human beings are but the creatures of circumstances, and greatly how he, in particular, had been cast very much in the common mould. In telling this experience, he exclaims, with humorous truth—

“Breathes there the man with soul so dead,”

as not to take a red face under such circumstances ? Is the reader one of these ?

In 1864, John once more, and for the last time, met his dearest friend. Charles had never seen him since 1849, when they parted on the banks of the Gadie. He had since then spent some time in Ayrshire, near Dalry, whence he had removed, in 1858, to Arbigland on the Solway. After years of longing, he succeeded, in 1864, in paying a hurried

visit to the north, to see the friends and scenes of youth. He stayed with his brother at Stoneywood, on the Don, a few miles from Aberdeen, and there James invited the weaver to meet him. John came with alacrity, and the two *par nobile fratrum*, spent several dear hours together, after fifteen years' long-drawn separation.

John arrived before his friend. When told that Charles was just coming, the effect on him was electrical and remarkable. He stood all eager attention, with that peculiar alert and expectant expression seen, as James Black remarks, in dogs on the hunt when prey is instantly looked for; while his countenance seemed to glow like a saint's with inexpressible joy. Mr. Black had observed such a light on the human countenance only once or twice in his life, indicating a state best conveyed by the word beatitude. "I have seen," he says, "the eyes glow like a dull, lambent flame, while all the face seemed to emit light. I have seen this at farewell partings, and, to some extent, in the countenances of lovers and mothers when much moved. But I never saw it more marked in healthy life than I did in the face of John Duncan when momentarily expecting my brother to appear." *

When they met, Charles was much affected, and even quiet, undemonstrative John could not hide the moisture in his eye, while his voice discovered deeper unexpressed emotion. They sat and talked long and earnestly of the dear old days, with their joys and sorrows, their studies and wanderings; of their subsequent experiences, the new

* This beatific glow is a known fact, under strong human emotion, and has attracted the attention of psychologists, poets, and other observers of the finer and rarer forms of human expression.

plants they had gathered, and the new subjects they had entered on. They parted in affectionate sadness and with small hope of meeting again, with their gathering years ; for John was now seventy, and Charles lived far off on the borders of England. They never did meet, though the elder survived for seventeen years ; but they continued to correspond to the last, united by deathless friendship.

Charles Black had long wished to have a portrait of his old friend, and this desire increased greatly after their last parting, in the fear that he might pass away before such a memorial could be secured. He accordingly wrote to his brother to try to get John to sit for his photograph, hoping that his brother's friendly adroitness would effectually overcome John's natural timidity under such unaccustomed conditions, and his inevitable objections to the necessary preparations and actual process. James by-and-by got him to consent to gratify Charles, for whom, as he used to say, he "wu'd hae dune onything—for Charlie was nae common freend." Accordingly, in September, 1866, in his seventy-second year, an appointment was made for John to come to Aberdeen for the purpose ; but, as James told Charles, had he not had a liking for John's portrait himself, he feared that, fond as he was of pleasing his brother, he could not have gone through the ordeal of bringing the matter to a successful issue. "John was an awkward fellow," he observes, "in the street ; but in a photographic studio, he was absolutely unmanageable and absurd."

John came to town one Saturday, bringing Mr. Black a collection of grasses, tied with hundreds of thrums to a strong willow wand, according to his good custom with

such long specimens, still in the hope of inducing his friend to begin systematic Botany. On parting that day, they agreed to meet on Monday morning at nine o'clock, at Prince Albert's statue, at the end of Union Bridge, John spending the Sunday with other friends.

Punctual to the moment, James found him at the appointed spot; but as the photographer's place was not yet open, and James had some business engagements in the forenoon, they agreed to meet opposite the saloon at two. When he arrived at the hour, he found John already there. He stood with his bundle stuck on a railing above him, his staff between his knees, some silver coins between his teeth, some half-crowns in one hand, while he held a florin in the other close to his eyes, evidently to see if it was a half-crown or not. When accosted, he at once turned round, with his usual irresistible reticence, and pocketed the whole in all haste. Then facing his friend and quietly saying, "Ay, Jamie, ye hae come," he took down his bundle; and they moved in silence to the place of execution, as it evidently seemed in John's eyes.

Charles had enjoined his brother to have John taken in his usual attire and style, with umbrella and bundle, as he used to see him in the old days at Whitehouse, so as to get as far as possible a realistic and speaking momento of the dear old man. John had of course put on his best, which, in default of better, was the old familiar suit. But he did not bring the big blue "tent;" and, in the wish to appear as genteel as possible on such an important occasion, the bundle he had provided was not a quarter of its usual dimensions, and without its generally super-abundant cordage. The parcel could not now be well increased in size.

It was with great difficulty, also, that he was prevailed upon to accept James's fine umbrella, having a lurking fear,—regardless of appearances though he outwardly seemed—of being made “a sicht o’,” and only did so on being assured that it was absolutely necessary “to please Charlie.”

They entered the studio. There John had to be reassured as to his looking decent and in order, and insisted on his friend tying his neckerchief in a better fashion than he could himself, a thing James was very loth to do, as he wished to have him taken as naturally as possible. All was at length duly prepared ; but now came the ordeal. The poor man had no idea whatever of the nature and meaning of photography, but would, of course, never confess his absolute ignorance. With great difficulty, James got him properly posed by the wall, his head fixed in an iron support. He stood erect, with umbrella in one hand, bundle in the other, resting on the edge of a writing-table, on which was placed his long hat ; his hair hanging over his brows somewhat in its usual fashion, though less rough than desirable. John stood, as he wrote to Charles afterwards, “in heavy marching order ;” his regret being, he said, that he was tired, having travelled a great deal that day, and that his shoes were brown with the dust of the street ! The dear, good creature ! he desired to appear to the very best advantage before his distant friend.

When the artist began to settle his apparatus in front of his subject, John became deadly pale from what seemed real apprehension. He evidently took the instrument for a kind of cannon or other deadly weapon ; for the position no doubt suggested to the old man that of a soldier before the cannon's mouth. He winked inordinately as he

looked towards the camera, at the artist's request ; licked his lips, as if in nervous anticipation of some explosion ; and finally, when the cap was removed after the command to be steady had been given, he turned away, and refused to stand !

In great concern, he went up to his friend, exclaiming, "Dear me, Jamie, what dis it a' mean?" and pointing to the instrument, "what *is that?*" It was at once explained. But what was to be done ? The first plate was spoiled, and the photographer was non-plussed, if not annoyed. By dint of further explanation, assurance, and coaxing, John was induced to stand once more. Another plate was prepared, John took his position, less culprit-like than before, and the photograph was obtained before he was aware. When told that it was all over, he went up to James and asked in real earnest, "But, Jamie, when am I to be drawn ?" "Dear me, John, you are already taken !" But John would not believe it, and continued to speak his doubts by repeating, "Na, na ! na, na !"

When the artist reappeared to say that it was quite successful, John went up to him very gravely, to give orders about the number he wished. "I'll tak' three ; ay, I'll tak' three—*nae mair*, and I'll tak' them wi' me !" evidently intending one for each of the brothers and the other for himself. "Beg your pardon, sir ?" said the photographer. "Ay, three, and wi' me," replied John. The gentleman could not understand, and still repeated, "Beg your pardon ?" while John continued, "Ay, ay ! only three, and wi' me ;" till Mr. Black explained the matter to both.

The likeness thus with difficulty secured was very satisfactory, much more so than could have been anti-

cipated from the unpromising beginning. Of course, the fine umbrella, well-crossed tie, and small square parcel were not from the life; but the face was clearly taken, the light falling well on the countenance, which, however, showed traces of weariness and of John's distrust of the whole process. Otherwise, it gave a fair representation, it seems, of the man as he then appeared in his seventy-second year.

John was photographed again in full homely guise in 1878, twelve years after, when he was eighty-four, while seated in front of his own garden at Droughsburn, clad in his weaving dress, after he had become famous.

Charles Black was delighted to receive the likeness of his friend, and wrote to him in acknowledgment.*

That same year, 1866, a great meeting took place in London, on the 22nd of May—an International Botanical Congress, which it would have immensely gratified the old botanist to have seen; as showing that the subject he loved was rising in dignity and worthily taking its place beside the advancing sciences of the time, since it began to take steps in the true direction under his early master, Tournefort.

A friend he never failed to visit in Aberdeen was William Beveridge, in whose father's house at the Craigh, he used to spend the bright evenings on the braes of Tough. When Mr. Beveridge succeeded his father in the farm and developed his genius, and had become the broad-hearted, kindly man he is, he used to relish John's visits exceedingly, after John had settled down at Droughsburn, and

* The admirable etching that forms the frontispiece, is taken partly from both portraits—the head and face from that secured in 1866, and the body from that of 1878.

used to cross the hill to see his old friends round Netherton. As he says, "I knew far better then the value of the man, and always laid aside work when he came, to get the good of him ; though, alas, I never profited equally to the many opportunities I had after all." After William removed to Aberdeen, in 1873, and became curator of the Free Church College there, his heart was still in the dear Vale of Alford. He never took to city life, he sadly says, for the green fields and wild nature were always more to him than all the art of man. The sense of injury received at his harsh severance from the home of his fathers still frequently disturbs him, and he feels and ever will feel, as he expresses it, "like a tree transplanted after it is old, which still holds on a kind of life, but never regains the freshness and vigour of its original situation."

Hence John's visits were all the more prized by him in Aberdeen, and "his honest face was like a blink of sunshine in the dust and din of the city," as he gratefully expresses it. John as fully enjoyed his pleasant society, and used to speak of his friend with high esteem. To both, the dear and delightful memories of the past, which they used to "con with meikle care," were singularly refreshing, and welled up into the poetry of life, an invigorating and strengthening charm. Then William could show his old friend many things new and interesting to him, which he could not have done in Tough. He had still a very fine garden, that recalled the old one at the Craigh where John used to sit with strange immunity among the clustering bees ; and there John could always walk, admiring its floral beauties. The college museum, which contains the splendid collection of Natural Science specimens, one of

the best and most valuable in the country, munificently gifted by the late Mr. Thomson of Banchory, was to both the centre of wonders stranger than fiction. There John was most fascinated and astonished at the exquisite examples of the flora of the Coal Measures in the geological department; being "perfectly overpowered," as his companion tells, "when he looked upon these examples of the mighty past, in the flora that bloomed millions of years ago."

Behind the museum, was the workshop of its curator, a melancholy reminiscence of the beautiful one he had left behind him at the Craigh, where John had often seen him at work, sadly recalled by both. Then the evenings were spent in the cosy parlour, amidst the bright and happy faces of the home circle, when the music of the past was reproduced by his friend with bow and violin of his own making, to chase dull care away and recall the days of other years.

Latterly, John's old-world attire and unconventional ways rather disturbed the ladies in the households of the friends he used to visit, as violating the proprieties of city life, to which the sex are so ardently devoted, and the want of which they find it difficult to condone, when they are not strong and pronounced enough to shake off the bondage in special circumstances, as in John's case. Of "the proper," one of the first articles in the female creed—standing even before "the right," shall we say?—the ancient weaver had not the dimmest glimpse even in the city, and it certainly was not a little trying to feminine nerves to receive so *outré* a visitor, whose appearance could not fail to draw the public eye in a way far from soothing to feminine notions regulated by the social demands of "the

genteel." On occasions—but these were few—the petty annoyances thus created found expression in remonstrance, which was in the old man's eyes certainly unexpected, if not a good deal painful, and which he was not slow to mention to his male friends with indignant surprise and rebellion when it occurred. But these were mere passing clouds, easily dispelled under the warm sunshine of the heart with which he was nevertheless received, and under which he blossomed out in sweeter perfumes and opened the drooping bower of his sensitive affections.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VISITS TO ABERDEEN—FRIENDSHIP AND BOTANY.

WHEN Charles Black was for a short time foreman in Reid's nursery in Aberdeen, in 1842, ever true to the higher influences he wielded over all he met, he set himself to the intellectual improvement of the apprentices, and helped them in grammar and arithmetic, as well as in botany. Amongst these was a lad with higher tendencies than his companions, called James Taylor, seventeen years of age, who then gained his first permanent impulses towards the studies he afterwards prosecuted ; for, as he confesses, "It was Charles Black who created in myself and others a desire to know plants and a love for Botany." * Along with some others, he also began Latin, assisted by a young man who knew something of that language. He went the following year to the Grammar school, where one of the masters, Dr. Beverley, took a fancy to the lad, which afterwards ripened into lasting friendship, and helped him greatly in his studies. In time, James went to the University, and amidst difficulties specially known to Aberdeen students and bravely conquered by them, went through his Arts course and entered on Medicine. Here he became

* As Mr. Taylor says, "Charles Black was a centre round which not a few aspirants gathered."

“prosector” to Dr. Redfern, then lecturer on Anatomy in King’s College, Aberdeen. From various causes, largely connected with want of means, though befriended by the professors, he was unable to complete his curriculum and take his medical degree. In 1856, after he had married, he went to the Arctic seas as medical officer in a whaler. He did so for five years, and endured the necessary privations less for the money thus gained than for the fascination he felt in examining the Natural History of these little-known regions, especially the Botany of both land and sea, flowering and cryptogamic. The results of these indefatigable explorations were afterwards published in the Linnæan Society* and the New Philosophical Journals, and formed then the most valuable contribution to Arctic science yet made, as testified by the highest authorities, who edited his collections. Many specimens were new to the Arctic flora, and one lichen was named *Tayloria*, in acknowledgment of his services.

Mr. Taylor was employed for some years at Kew Gardens, then under Sir William Hooker, arranging and naming the multitudinous specimens there; and to the museum, he presented his large collection of Arctic lichens, mosses and flowering plants. His investigations into the flora of Aberdeen and the neighbouring counties have been very thorough. Dr. Beverley and he, among other works, were the first to make public exhibitions of Fungi in Scotland, efforts that have ripened into the formation of the Cryptogamic Society of Scotland and its popular exhibitions. But Taylor’s study of science has not by any means been con-

* Vols. x. and xi. Mr. Taylor wrote on the flowering plants himself, and Dr. Dickie, of Aberdeen, on the *algæ*.

finer to Botany. It has embraced a wide range of Natural History, especially Ornithology, in which his knowledge is very great, and, concerning the northern counties, more or less exhaustive. For many years, he published, in the local papers, an extended and interesting series of notes on scientific matters in the north, which not only contributed to popular instruction when these things were greatly despised and generally unknown, but which should be of permanent value.

For some time, Mr. Taylor cultivated the farm of Allanvale, near the bridge of Dee, on which his ancestors had dwelt for nigh three hundred years, and which is now included in the Duthie Park, recently munificently gifted to the city of Aberdeen.

In 1874, he removed to Clashfarquhar, not far from Portlethen, about ten miles south of Aberdeen, on the estate there belonging to the University, for which he undertook its management. Amidst his hard and varied agricultural labours, he still cultivates science with enthusiasm. He keeps fully abreast of its rapid progress, and has been an active member of the Natural History, Microscopic, and other societies in Aberdeen, to which he has from time to time contributed a host of papers.

Mr. Taylor used often to meet John Duncan at Raeden, where he also visited Charles Black, and since then he has ever remained one of his most attached and appreciative friends. John became a regular visitor at his house at Allanvale, called before his time Scrapehard.* The house was then a small cottage, comfortable but confined, now only represented by two willow trees that grew near

* Mr. Taylor named it Allanvale after the proprietor, Col. Allan.

and a mineral well close by, once much frequented by the Aberdonians. Mr. Taylor was of great assistance to Duncan in the earlier years of his botanical studies. John never came to see him at Allanvale without a large gathering of new or difficult plants, which he wished to show or get his friend's assistance in deciphering. All these had to be carefully examined, identified and named, and Mr. Taylor was often exhausted by the protracted work involved, while John seemed eager and receptive as at first. When the more lengthy technicalities were told him, he would say, "I winna mind a' thae names; let's hear that ane again." He would solve the difficulty by taking out a slip of paper and asking it to be written down, and pronounced again and again while he carefully looked and repeated it; often concluding with some bit of practical psychology, as "ye see, the *mind* winna keep a' thing." But, as Mr. Taylor says, John's "memory and identification of plants and names were always strong;" though strange technical and foreign words were difficult to him, as to most.

Mr. Taylor watched John's gradual and sure progress in the science, and has a high opinion of his knowledge of plants and of the general flora of Scotland. They used to assist each other in discovering new species and new stations, informing each other of these when found, gathering for each and making exchanges, as all true lovers of plants delight to do. Thus John, for instance, brought Mr. Taylor the Rest Harrow (*Ononis arvensis*) when he first found it at Oldtown of Leochel, about a hundred yards from the farmhouse, the first specimen his friend had seen from a station so inland and elevated or from that district.*

* See p. 225. Duncan also got it at Mamsel of Monymusk.

Mr. Taylor recalls the time when John, having greatly conquered the common plants, began the more difficult *Carices* or rushes, willows, and grasses, and, about 1860, the still more occult cryptogamic plants; and he admired the remarkable ardour with which John prosecuted the study of all these thorny departments of the subject. Mr. Taylor was deeply impressed, if not astonished, at his growing mastery of Botany, for John groped his slow but steady and irresistible way amidst difficulties very few have had to encounter. As he says, "John's love of plants, his struggles, and his own characteristic ways of doing his botanical work were of no common type." Mr. Taylor's yearly return from the Polar seas, during the five years he went thither, was an event always earnestly looked forward to by his old friend, in order that he might inspect the new and strange treasures he brought back; duplicates of the plants being always gladly presented to him, and delightedly received and added to the herbarium at Droughsburn.

Mr. Taylor went occasionally to the Vale of Alford to see John and his plants. He accompanied Dr. Sutherland*—a young Aberdeen physician, and an earnest botanist, who wrote several articles on the subject—when he traversed the region, gathering materials for the new edition of Dr. Dickie's "Flora" of 1860. Sutherland had heard of Duncan through Mr. Taylor, and the two friends called at Droughsburn, got many new localities from Duncan, afterwards embodied in the book, and visited several of the habitats of the rarer species under John's guidance. A letter from

* Dr. Sutherland, who was a promising scientist, afterwards entered the service of the Oriental Steam Navigation Co., and died young, in South Africa.

Mr. Taylor in 1855 still exists, preserved by John, giving a long list of plants he wished John to bring him, including grasses and ferns, and telling him, to cheer the enthusiast, that Botany was thriving at that time among young men. Mr. Taylor has many reminiscences of the old man and his studies and difficulties, which have been utilised in the present history.

One day he gave John specimens of a species since famous for investigations into their carnivorous powers, the rarer Spathulate and Great English Sundew (*Drosera intermedia* and *Anglica*), which he did not then possess. When he did so, he told him of a still rarer find then recently made by Mr. John Sim (a capital general and cryptogamic botanist, now of Gateside, in Strachan), the Limestone Polypody (*Polypodium calcareum*), or Rigid three-branched Polypody, a rare fern almost confined to limestone regions, and requiring a calcareous soil, as its name shows. Mr. Sim had discovered it in an old limestone quarry opposite the gate of Scotston, in Aberdeenshire, where he was then farmer and gardener. As Mr. Taylor had but a single specimen, he could not give one to John, but he described its locality. John left the house, and returned the same evening with the plant in his possession, having at once set out for the spot, some ten miles off. He had found the quarry and its rare inhabitant, and returned with it in joyous triumph, as he had often done before. John had a remarkable facility, his friend observes, even in his advanced years, of discovering plants under unlikely circumstances, when he once went in search of them.

After Mr. Taylor's removal to Clashfarquhar, in 1874, John visited him twice, old as he was. As letter-writing

became more and more irksome in his later years, he generally came unannounced. His last visit was paid in June, 1877, in his eighty-fourth year. At Aberdeen, he asked the guard to put him out at Portlethen Station, which was kindly done. The station-master directed him to the farm, about two miles distant, near the coast. He walked so far on the way, when, coming to a cottage which resembled the old residence at Allanvale, he entered it and sat down, saying, "Ay, ay, I hae come mair than forty years to this hoose, but I winna come lang noo!" Poor old body! he had then become occasionally absent-minded, especially when in any way exhausted. When the woman of the house spoke to him, he recalled himself and rose up, exclaiming, "I doobt I'm wrang." He showed her a letter of Mr. Taylor's, and asked her to point out his farm. She did this very kindly, and the old man went resolutely but feebly on his way. When he came near Clashfarquhar, which it requires some little geography to reach by the by-roads that approach it, he was espied by one of the children, who knew him and ran home to tell her mother. He soon entered the house, holding his hat in one hand, the letter in the other, and some plants under his arm. Seeing the kindly beaming face of his hostess, who went to welcome him, he sat down, completely overpowered; gratefully exclaiming, "I'm at hame noo!" This was in the low-roofed, thatched cottage, now deserted for the finer house since erected.

After getting some refreshment, Mr. Taylor not being then at home, the keen old man could not rest, but wished to see the new country in which he was. Mrs. Taylor took him round the farm. He was proud to see them

in such a large holding, and described the nature of the soil and what crops it was likely to produce. He then walked some distance to the shore alone, and returned with a bunch of flowers he had picked up, saying he was "clean deen." Mrs. Taylor induced him to retire to rest for two hours, after which he rose much refreshed.

During his visit, he accompanied Mr. Taylor along the bold rocky coast, which here rises above the boiling surf far below in splendid cliffs and caves, jutting capes and isolated stacks, that exhibit the grandest scenery. It recalled to John his own boyhood, and similar scenes round dear, unforgotten Dunnottar. Old as he was, he could still stand above the beetling precipices without fear, and walk along the narrow footpaths that skirted their crests which, to unaccustomed eyes, it requires a steady nerve to do; though he could not now venture down to their base, as he would once have done. Mr. Taylor took him to the Burn of Daff, to see a rare Scottish species new to John, the Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*), which he had discovered in 1875.* He also showed him, amongst others, the Frog Orchis (*Habenaria viridis*), along the shore near Downies. This is a picturesque fishing village lying between Clashfarquhar and the sea, which also recalled John's early memories of Stonehaven and Cowie and their interesting people.

For the aged traveller, who however walked astonishingly well for his years, the distance was too far to go north to the other fishing villages of Portlethen, and Findon locally called "Finnan," whose name is known, all the

* He had previously found it, in 1862, at the only other spot where it grows in that neighbourhood—on the burn sides near the village of Cove to the north.

country over, from its excellent smoked haddocks. These are prepared in all the villages along this wild coast, off which the fish are caught by the brave and hardy fishermen. The old botanist returned to his friend's house, delighted and strengthened by all he had seen ; and he left the next day, "much improved," as he said, by his pleasant visit.

After John Taylor, his young Alford disciple, had removed to Aberdeen, John used regularly to visit him, to encourage him in his studies and get details of his progress and discoveries. The plants gathered by the young botanist were always carefully examined, and their localities noted, Duncan directing him to spots where he had found certain species. When John heard of others new to himself, he was sure to visit the place and return to his young friend's room in the evening with a specimen. There he was refreshed by needed rest and a cup of tea. Mr. Taylor's employment then led him at intervals into the north of England, where he gathered plants, returning to Aberdeen, like John, with an interesting bundle of new species. These were eagerly examined by the old man, who got duplicates, while he was entertained by accounts of the country and the people, which recalled his own wanderings in the same regions.

Amongst those whom John visited in Aberdeen was the late Dr. Dickie, Professor of Botany, whose work on the Aberdeen flora had been of such eminent service to him and Charles Black. He first called upon him regarding some plants, shortly after he began Botany, and was very kindly received, and asked to return when he came to town. John always did this if he had anything rare or

difficult to show or consult about. He frequently took tea with the kindly professor, mentioning this with special gratification. He received gifts of botanical works from him ; amongst others, "Lindley's School Botany," which he used to show to friends with some pride ; for appreciation of his solitary studies was most grateful to the quiet man, by whomever bestowed, and it was all the sweeter from an acknowledged master of the science. John also brought the Doctor specimens of all his rarer discoveries.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE AUTHOR'S FIRST VISIT TO DROUGHSBURN.

FROM what I had heard of Duncan from Charles Black, whom I had known intimately for years, I conceived a strong desire to visit the old man and make his personal acquaintance.

Though too long prevented from gratifying my wish, in September, 1877, I saw the Vale of Alford for the first time. In company with a friend, the Rev. Thomas Bell, the minister of Keig, a botanist and entomologist, and a guest of his, the Rev. Mr. Johnstone, of Stranraer, I paid John the long-desired visit. Mr. Bell had called on him before, and was greatly interested in the man. I was quite unknown to him even by name, and my coming was altogether unexpected. On account of his sensitive reserve, only the minister of Keig and myself entered the workshop at first. We found him seated alone at his loom, in the streaming sunlight, behind the gauzy screen of threads and sticks, and busy with his shuttle as it made its merry music. The aged weaver, thus all-unconscious of our entry, formed a picturesque sight that would have made a pretty composition in lights and shadows. That one glance fulfilled the hope of years and raised the liveliest anticipations. After finding his way

with some difficulty up the narrow passage between the looms and the winding-wheels, the clergyman advanced towards John, gave him friendly greeting, and introduced me as one who had come a long distance to see him. He looked very old, and well he might, for he had entered his eighty-third year, and his vigour, remarkable though it had been, had now largely abated. His head was uncovered, and we could see that it was not yet bald, the hair, only a little mixed with grey, falling from the crown all round and hanging over the brow. At once he ceased his weaving, and replied to the minister with evident pleasure, excusing himself for not returning his last visit, on account of the recent bad weather. The presence of a stranger seemed to create some shyness, as he turned to say that he was glad to see me; but the mention of his friend, Charles Black, at once stirred a pleasure that raised a bright smile and lighted up his eye and countenance. That name had evidently struck a deep chord and wakened distant memories, for he was silent and absorbed for a little; but it charmed away at once and for ever his constitutional reserve. We soon got into active conversation, as I told him of Charles and his many tales of their past lives, and my own long wish to see a man so great a student of plants and so dear to one I so much esteemed.

After talking for some time, he returned to his loom, according to his custom, to reflect in silence on what he had heard, and to save time, for he generally talked to his friends amidst the clatter of the shuttle. He worked slowly, but with great regularity, earnestly watching the progress of the web and scanning the threads to notice any defects as it grew under his hands. Old as he was, he was "gleg

o' the e'e,"* as he said, and seemed to miss nothing; for all at once he caught an error in the warp, leant forward over the beam, put his head and arms through the cords, and tied the break with smartness and success. His hands were withered and wrinkled, the fingers bent, and the joints thick and knotted with long tying of threads and digging of plants. It was astonishing, for a man above eighty, how well he did that trying work.

By-and-by the third visitor was introduced. His entrance seemed for a little to cause a return of his natural shyness, for John shortly turned again to his web. He felt no doubt as if he were being interviewed, but the sunny countenance and pleasant humour of the new-comer speedily put him at his ease.

Pointing to the "pirn" wheel, which stood opposite the loom where he was working, I asked, "Who fills your 'pirns' for you, John?"

"Ow, I dee't mysel'!" said he, with some surprise at the question.

"Dear me!" said I, for it is not usual for the weaver to do this work; "is there no woman to do it for you?"

"Na, na!" replied he, "no, for this mony a year. Besides, I dinna need their help, and I manage awa' brawly mysel'; so that I am independent o' them. I *like* to be independent," said the little man, and his voice and look told this better than words.

"And do you wind your own warp too?" continued I, turning to the tall warping machine† that stood opposite his loom.

* Quick-sighted and keen, applied to any of the senses, but chiefly to sight.

† A circular cylinder, about three feet in diameter and six feet in

"Ay, ay!" said he briskly; "I do the hale thing mysel' frae beginnin' to end. I get the spun threed frae the women that employ me, that's a'; and frae that I manage a' the lave wi' my ain hands, till it's made into claith and ta'en hame ready for use. Ye see, sir," he went on, "when I becam' a weyver, I made up my mind to *be* ane, and to maister the hale affair—and I *did* it; and tho' I say't mysel', fyow cu'd beat me." There the old man revealed the stuff that had carried him through his hard life and harder studies.

As we were pushed for time, we expressed a wish to see his collection of plants. John rose with alacrity, and went to the other end of the room, near the open door, which shed there a much needed gleam; for the small dim panes, overshadowed with trees, admitted only a diminished light, except where the sun shone directly on the loom. When he stood up, he appeared exceedingly round-shouldered and bent, the effects of years and the stooping required by his work and studies. He was clad in moleskin trousers and vest with sleeves, without a coat, and with a coloured napkin loosely tied round his neck. He wore the usual small white apron of the weaver.

At the end of the room near the door, stood his boxes and chests and parts of old looms, and on the top of these lay a mass of papers and some books. These papers contained dried plants. They were sadly covered with dust and "stoor," and had evidently not been moved for some time. The plants were contained in rough, home-made

height, moving vertically on a central pole, round which the long yarn is wound to form the warp or long threads of the web before it is put into the loom.

foolscap volumes of white and brown paper and newspapers. I opened several of the books, while we all looked on. The specimens were laid down in the usual manner on the front of each page, but they had been much disturbed, and sadly showed the extensive ravages of moths. When I crushed some of these destroyers with an expression of annoyance, he remarked, "Weel, weel, it's a peety, but I canna keep them clean noo, as I ance did, I can tell you. But," added he, with a quiet smile, "they were ance leevin', the puir things"—referring to the plants—"and they're leevin' again, ye see!" thus hiding his pain at the loss of his treasures behind a touch of humour. But they could scarcely have been other than wasted, even in better circumstances for preservation, for many of these plants had been gathered by him forty years before.

I was so saddened and disappointed at the sight of what I had looked forward to see with keen anticipation as a rare and valuable collection, that I could not continue the inspection, and asked if these were all; hoping that they were but duplicates and waste specimens, and that the best were still to come.*

Key in hand, he opened one of the chests close by the door and revealed a more cheering sight—a large number of books in very good condition. The under side of the lid exhibited the coloured pictures and printed matter he had pasted there to brighten the box and increase his pleasure when he consulted his library, herein partly contained. After turning over several books, at which we

* I found afterwards that we only saw a small part of his better herbarium containing the specimens now in Marischall College, which he never opened out unless there was ample time to examine it.

casually glanced, he produced two parcels carefully wrapped up in paper and tied with many strings. One of them enclosed a good and pretty large collection of the Grasses, in a book well bound in canvas and interleaved with blotting paper. The plants were fastened by cross strips of paper to each page with all the care of a practised hand, and duly inscribed with their technical names. The whole volume was neat, clean and carefully preserved, and the plants were classed according to order and species. The other parcel comprised the general wild plants of the neighbourhood, scientifically arranged and pressed with like care and neatness. These were the collections prepared for the Alford Horticultural Show in 1871. He showed them with quiet pride, and had kept the tickets announcing the honour then achieved. Our praise of these collections raised the old man's spirits, somewhat depressed, as ours also had been, at the state of the other plants, and greatly gratified him. New animation seemed to inspire him, and his face wore a brighter and more youthful expression that was pleasant to see. After the general misunderstanding under which he had lived all his life, the presence of sympathetic spirits, students of his favourite subject, and the praise of admiring eyes, were like water in the waste to the thirsty wanderer. The carefulness with which he handled these finer plants was very great. Though I turned them over with all tenderness, he could not restrain himself from nervously saying more than once, "Tak' 'tent' noo; tak' 'tent.'*" See ye dinna hort them!" as he bent keenly over me, while I turned the leaves.

* "Tent" means *attention* and care, and is derived from the same root as *attention*, *tendo*, to stretch.

"But that's no a'," he said, after we had finished looking at these two volumes. He then lifted some other books from the chest, till he came to a larger parcel, which he delivered into my hands, with animated countenance, saying, "Look there noo, and see fat's there!" We had no notion of what was within, but John's proud bearing and beaming countenance raised our expectations.

I unloosed the string that bound it, unwrapped the paper, and found a similar string and wrapper inside. This I untied and uncovered, and again a third string and wrapper appeared. Once more untying and unfolding, I only exposed a similar protection within. "Dear me, John!" exclaimed I, "what have you here? Is it your silver plate, or a grand presentation, or what is it?" "Oo, just gang on," replied John, "and ye'll ken in due time!" He evidently enjoyed the lengthened process of revealing the mystery, and chuckled to himself with a growing humorous glee. After the fifth cord and wrapper had been removed, there was revealed—a book! It was manifestly a favourite with John, and must enclose something better and rarer than we had yet seen. And it did. It was a collection of the *Cryptogamia* of the district, the obscure mosses and their allies, one of the hardest sections of the botanical field for any one to decipher, however expert and skilful.

As our Galloway friend remarked, the book was certainly well named *Cryptogamia*, for it was hidden as in a crypt, fold within fold, and buried under many a tome deep down in the bottom of a chest! John enjoyed the joke with evident relish, and still more our spontaneous and unrestrained expressions of surprise when we opened the volume and saw what it contained. It was a victory to

the dear old man to gain such rare praise from appreciative students of the flowers, as sweet in its way as when he first discovered the *Linnaea*. Was it vanity or childishness to be so elated over so small a matter? God send us all such vanity and simplicity!

The plants had been carefully pressed and neatly fastened on and named, and were scented with camphor to preserve them from the moths. We were truly surprised how an old man, his study of the cryptogams being recent, had been able to make out such obscure species; for they require the most minute and even microscopic examination. They certainly formed no mean monument of his enthusiasm and of his love and knowledge of the science.* The precious collection was sympathetically examined and then closed, as carefully covered with its multitudinous wrappings, and then restored to its old hiding-place in the bottom of the box, below its protecting companions.

Our time had now expired, and leaving John to put away the books, we turned to say good-bye in the doorway. But the old man would not permit us to depart so coldly, but, with the true feeling of the worthy host and gentleman, conducted us, bare-headed as he was, to the gate at the bottom of the garden; and, cordially shaking hands with us all and thanking us for the visit, which he said he had enjoyed, he bade us good night.

On the following day, I made my way alone once more to Droughsburn. The weather was fine, the Leochel flowed down its quiet valley in the bright sunlight amidst the

* John used to say truly that the *Hieracia*, the Hawkweeds, and the *Salicaceæ*, the Willows, were "eneuch to fleg a young botanist." The *Cryptogamia* might have "flegged" one so aged.

ripening corn, and the retired nook where John lived, with its willows and rowans, seemed more removed from the outer world than before. I found him outside in his own little plot, bare-headed and bent but hale and bright, having come out for a rest from toil, for nothing cheered and restored him like the flowers. The enclosing dike was crested with honeysuckle in bright blossom and sweetest scent; and the Woody Nightshade, with its lurid flower, rose prominent above the rest. John gave me cordial welcome and a warm shake of the hand, and seemed in excellent but quiet spirits. After some remarks on the plants, we entered his house, and seated ourselves opposite each other between the two looms. He placed himself with his back to the front windows, through which the sunbeams streamed and prettily touched his head and eager, intelligent face. He was brighter and more communicative than on the previous day. My relations with his bosom friend, Charles, had evidently opened to me his solitary and silent heart, and I enjoyed the glow created by memory and friendship.

As he sat, he told me in considerable detail, amongst other things, the story of Linnæus, suggested by some subject we had mentioned, characterising him as “a gran’ chiel,* an awfu’ clever man, wha had to fecht his way up frae naething, for they were to mak’ ’im a shoemaker.” Thus, in delightful Doric, which somehow sounded strange regarding one so associated with bristling technicalities, he told of the early struggles of the great Swede—his going to college, assisted by “a kind and bonnie lass,” to whom “the only

* Or *chield*, a young man, often used with endearment. Pronounced *cheel* or *cheeld*; the same word, likely, as the English *childe*, as in “Childe Harold.” It occurs frequently in the old ballads.

return he cu'd mak' was by-and-by to mar'y 'er;" his journey to Lapland; and his afterwards rising to dignity and renown.

"Do you not feel lonely," I asked, "thus living by yourself, your family gone, and Charles so far away?"

"Na," said he, "only noos and nans.* Ye see, I hae my newspaper, for I aye get that, and my books; and there's aye the bonnie floo'rs to look at. Oo na! I'm no lanely!"

"Do you ever get tired, working so hard, now that you are getting so old?"

"Some," said he. "But then I just rise and gang about a bit, and oot to the gairden to see the floo'rs for a wee. And a body, ye ken, maun just begin again!" continued he, with cheerful practical philosophy; "but I aye likit to wirk."

We continued our talk on many topics mentioned by me and suggested by incidents and associations as they occurred. He discoursed pleasantly and fluently—of God's use of poisonous plants for the cure of diseases; of the most useful of plants, the potato, belonging to the dangerous order of the Deadly Nightshade; of his own medical practice by use of herbs, and of the successes he had had with them in his own and others' experience; of the Loch of Drum, and his dangerous adventure there; of his searching for the Bladderwort in Tillyfourie Moss; of his methods of learning and remembering the difficult technical words in Botany; and similar bits of science and reminiscence, described in capital Scotch, and seasoned and illustrated with apt saw or sentiment from his rich "pro-

* "Nows and thens," the English "now and then."

verbial philosophy." When I told him anything that greatly surprised him, he burst out in simple tones of wonderment, exclaiming, "Od be here, man! Ye dinna say sae?"

As we thus sat talking, the bright sun was shining outside and streaming pleasantly through the cords and beams of the loom. I wished much to get John out into the field, that I might see more of his habits and let the flowers do their office of suggestion, and I proposed that we should take a walk. He was ready at once to go, and was evidently willing to devote the day to me, as, certainly, I was to him. He rose, put on his broad bonnet, and, shutting the door of his dwelling, staff in hand, he led the way up the hill behind the house. He walked at a smart pace, with short steps, leaning forwards on his staff, which was put down on the ground with each foot, being apparently required to support him. The way was rough, there being no proper path except the field or dike side, but he would not accept any assistance even in difficult places, as when getting over the dike, climbing fences, or pushing through the tall broom on the steep hill slope. "Na, na, I dinna need ony help, sir, thank you. I can manage awa fine." Yet, tottering as they seemed, his steps, though short, were firm and smart, and he moved onwards at a good rate. He could still take long journeys, going, for instance, some four miles over hill to church, which he still attended very regularly; and undertaking to visit my friend, the minister of Keig, next summer, a promise which involved some sixteen miles of a walk! "I only need a little time noo, ye see," he explained. "I ance didna, for I was a smart walker i' my day, and can do something till't yet. Mony a fit I hae gane, I can tell ye."

He led me first to a quarry of twisted Silurian slate; there largely developed; for in the valley of the Leochel, we were west of the granite upheaval of Alford and Benachie. We then ascended to one of the prehistoric cairns so common in the north. It was circular and some twelve yards in diameter, once surrounded with tall standing stones, some of which still remained, and covered with sloe bushes and vegetation—known as “the Captain’s Cairn.” John told me that the cairn was once high and large, but, with much indignation, that the stones had been removed to build the factor’s dikes—a not unusual fate for such antiquities during the blind Vandal period of our history, scarcely yet gone by. He gave the usual local explanation of such remains, that some great captain or chief had died in a great battle that took place there. Rising through wet bog and tall broom and whin, which completely hid us from view, John led manfully upwards, though it was hard upon him. He would nevertheless move on alone, evidently believing, to the last, in “a stoot heart to a stey brae,”* as he had always done in more things than in hill-climbing. The Grass of Parnassus catching his eye as it grew in the wet places of the hill, he called on me to look at “that bonnie snaw-white floorie!” in tones of truest appreciation as well as in words of correct description. When shown by me the backward movement of the sensitive stamens of the Rock Rose (*Helianthemum vulgare*) after the base of the style has been titillated, which is certainly very striking, he exclaimed, in childlike wonder, “Ay, man, ay! so it does!

* A steep brae or hill slope. From the Gaelic, and occurring in many names of places in the Highlands, as the Braes of Lochaber, of Portree, etc.

The cretur has sense!" He was exceedingly taken with the phenomenon,* and frequently repeated to himself, "Ay, man, ay! ay, ay!" as if pondering over the sight and its suggestive relations.

We climbed at length to "the croon o' the hill," where he wished me "to see the view." It certainly commanded a splendid prospect, looking down, on the one side, across the fine Vale of Alford, with Benachie at its far extremity; and on the other, away to the south, over a sea of rounded, rolling hills, like heaving waves on a calm day in mid-ocean, the taller peaks of the Grampians rising beyond, still adorned with gleaming patches of snow and surmounted by the fine top of Loch-na-gar. We rested there for some time, enjoying the far-stretching scene and the warm sunshine. He talked fluently of the various plants and places and features of the hill and landscape, which afforded him abundant matter for remark; and I exceedingly enjoyed his interesting communications and picturesque speech.

Near the top of the hill, there is a shallow loch or marsh, where he had found some good water plants. He pointed out the site of a wood, now cut down, on the other side of the valley, just opposite, where he had discovered the rare *Pyrola secunda*, or Serrated Winter-green.

That short saunter with the old man revealed him more than ever, and I enjoyed it immensely. I was delighted to see him out in the field, under the blue sky, and amidst the

* This property, which he knew, as John Taylor informs me, he had forgot for the time. We have several British sensitives, with active and striking powers, such as this one; the barberry stamens; the open stigma of the *mimulus*, which smartly and firmly closes when touched, especially under sunlight; and the spurred spores of the horse-tail, which move like long-legged insects, as seen under low microscopic power.

plants he had loved so long and so well. I felt how pleasant and instructive a companion he must have been in his younger days, when mind and body were full of his enthusiastic vigour.

We wandered slowly down the hill again towards the burn, he leading the way, and entered the cottage. We were welcomed by Mrs. Allanach, a striking-looking old dame, with abundant traces in face and figure of the tall, handsome and good-looking woman of earlier life, though now bent with rheumatism and needing a staff. The house was kept sweetly clean, both "but and ben,"* by the youngest daughter, a growing pretty girl, active and bright-smiling, who bade fair to reproduce her mother's youth.

We sat in the cheerful kitchen chatting for some time with the vigorous old lady, who is a splendid talker in first-rate Scotch, while the young housekeeper prepared a meal for us in "the best room." Mrs. Allanach told me that the last year had made a "terrible odds" on John, and that he was now not like the same man, as if natural decay were rapidly beginning to tell upon him. She was sorry I had not seen and known him in his more active years. At length, John and I retired to "the other end," where a homely but substantial meal was neatly laid down on a snowy cloth, consisting chiefly of the home produce of the field and the byre. We did full justice to the viands after our appetising walk, seasoning our rustic meal with "smooth discourse and joyous thought."

After finishing, we once more entered his own room

* In the kitchen and the better room, for there are but two in such cottages. The words are derived from *be-out* and *be-in*, the better room being reckoned the inmost one or sanctuary.

and went over his books, which I wished much to see, and which he was justly proud to show.

The day had passed with a strange speed to me, and, as evening was now drawing nigh and I had a long way to return, I was reluctantly obliged to go. Staff in hand, he accompanied me down the burn, that sang its evensong beneath the cress and scented mint, and along the highway some distance towards Alford. The sunshine was bright and warm, and the valley of the Leochel was filled with a calm sunset light, as we walked on together, pursuing the pleasant talk that had winged the hours with such delight to me and happiness to him. I told him how I had enjoyed the time I had spent with him; how it had realised a happiness I had looked forward to for years; and how, seeing he looked so well, I hoped ere long to come again to Droughsburn, before he passed to his long home. I told him that I should write his friend, Charles, of my visit and all I had seen and heard. This visibly affected him, and touched a chord that trembled on his lip and gave a pearly brightness to his eye. He assured me that he had enjoyed the day, and would remember it, for he now had few to visit him, and fewer to understand and sympathise with his pursuits; and he sent his best remembrances and many messages to Charles. We shook hands warmly and parted. I went back to the outer world of work, and he returned to his solitary labour and study and contentment, in that retired hollow among the hills.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FAME, PAUPERISM AND WEAKNESS.

EARLY in 1878, I wrote an account of my visit and a short sketch of John's life, which appeared in "Good Words" * of that year. It roused interest in the man, both local and general. It also brought him not a little substantial assistance from some who appreciated his story and rare enthusiasm, as well as several visitors desirous of seeing himself in his striking surroundings. With all this, the old botanist was greatly gratified, as he had the best right to be; for the public appreciation which he had never sought and which had been so much denied him in his long and secluded life, had to some degree come at last, though late.

The Rev. Mr. Williams, meeting him a little after this, spoke of "Good Words," and remarked, "So they have found you out at last!" He looked very thoughtful for a little, and then said, "I kent it wu'd come to that, come time." What precisely he meant it would be difficult to say. It could scarcely be that he ever anticipated becoming in any way famous in his lifetime, for of that there was not the least likelihood, so far as he could expect or wish, and it is most improbable he ever did. With such a quiet, simple

* In April, May, and June, with a portrait of the man and a picture of the cottage at Droughsburn, neither of which were very correct.

soul, hidden away from the world, fame was not and could not be

“The spur that the clear spirit doth raise
To scorn delights, and live laborious days.”

That “fair guerdon” he never followed nor hoped to find, though it found him in the end. His pursuit of knowledge truly was, if it ever was, “all for love and nothing for reward.” He may have only meant that he expected something to come of my visit, though I was very careful to prevent any such impression being conveyed at the time. Or, “did he mean,” as Mr. Williams suggests, “that his devotion to the beautiful flowers of God’s creation, although unseen and unknown here, would be seen and known and used in the beautiful land whither his failing frame told him he was soon to set out? Probably,” Mr. Williams thinks; “for his words had often a deeper meaning lurking about them.”

He called on James Black some time after, and the conversation turned on the same subject. “Oh, John,” said James after dinner, with his usual bantering earnestness, “you’re now a great man!” “Oo, ay,” said he; “am I?” Then, after a pause, “But, faith, man, it pays, an’ that’s better!” smiled the blithe old man, entering into James’s key; “Sal, lad, it pays. Umpha! Twa notes an’ a half whiles in a day. Oh, weel, I ance got a’ that frae a man awa sooth there, and I get a note or some shillin’s ony day. Sal, Jamie, dinna tell me,” continued the old boy, getting chirrupy and humorous, as was his wont in genial society, “dinna tell me that leernin’ gets nae reward!”

James walked with him into town, and the conversation turned on one who had some time before showed the

sensitive man some slight on account of his calling in his worn clothes—"meanly dressed," as was said; and John's old-world dress and queer style were certainly trying to those friends who prized city style more than country worth. John expressed his indignant annoyance, and concluded thus, "Man, Jamie, I hae leddies callin' at my door i' their carriages! *Real* leddies; nane o' yer wu'd be dirt! Their *maids* wu'dna look ower their shouther at sich like as they, peer things!" Who could censure the old man, then far above eighty, for this little elation at these late-found attentions from his fellow-men, and also from rank that had till then looked down on him or passed him unregarded by, even while living in his own neighbourhood?

John parted with James, asking him to convey his love to Charles, "dear Charlie," and tell him to write him "ae letter sune, and to write it plain, as he wu'd read it aften." Dear, simple, true-hearted creature, how he did love that man! And Charles did write him, warmly congratulating him on his new-found, well-deserved renown—the sweetest praise John received—Charles only deprecating that he himself had been so much and so highly extolled, in connection with his dear friend!

During his long, hard-working life, though labouring at one of the most ill-remunerated trades, which was gradually being extinguished by modern improvements, he had always been able to earn enough to make a living, and even now, in his old age, was in debt to no man—a highly honourable achievement that few could have made in the same or even in better circumstances. He had not only

supplied his own wants, but had always spared not a little for his needy family and their poor connections, which he had for many long years regularly and ungrudgingly bestowed — giving to his errant wife, paying for his daughters' board, and helping them after marriage up to recent years. Even in 1867, when he was seventy-three and his earnings were becoming painfully small, he had to bear some expenses connected with the death of his wife's son, Durward.

His one luxury had been the buying of books. His food had cost very little ; he had never spent money on liquor ; he had been no snuffer, though that habit was very common ; and his extensive wanderings had increased his means instead of lessening them. But books he must have. The money spent on them might perhaps have made him richer in pocket, but it certainly would have rendered him poorer in thought and happiness, if not, with his hidden sorrows, a wreck. Which of us could have the heart to grudge him this one intellectual extravagance, saved, as it undoubtedly was, from stomach and back ?

After 1870, when trade became daily duller and strength feebler, and when he had passed his seventy-sixth year, for the first time in his life he began to feel the pressure of actual want—the breath of “poortith cauld.” He worked all the harder and later, and did without a fire in his workshop even in winter, to save a little ; still trying to make ends meet, with the sturdy, admirable independence that had always characterised him since he began to earn his own bread at ten years of age, more than sixty-six years before. He was too proud, too sensitive, too reticent, and too kindly and tender to others, to tell his

wants and fears even to his friends, who would have hastened to help him. The daily lessening income and all that it meant, known but to himself, only made him drive his shuttle the faster, to maintain himself free of assistance, debt, or the dreaded pauper's dole—a dear liberty which it was one of the strongest desires of his heart to preserve inviolate to the end, till he should drop into the grave beneath his beloved flowers.

His books were numerous and valuable, and, if sold, would have brought a considerable sum, which could have loosened the stern grip of poverty and postponed, if not prevented, the disgrace he feared. But with these, the dear companions of his long life, pleasant studies and scientific struggles, he could not—*could not*—bring himself to think of parting, even under such cruel straits; especially after testing his own endurance of separating from them, by selling a few of the less important. His plants—these were still dearer than his books, each a drop of veriest heart's blood; and he could not, would not, barter them for heaps of gold even in dire extremity. No, no, a thousand times no!

But it became daily more painfully plain to the decaying workman that the shuttle could no longer provide even the little portion that formed his daily bread. He was getting into debt to his landlord, and every day made it deeper. To his friends, true though few, he would not apply, to save himself the pain of asking, and them the obligation of giving, what he could now never repay. When need grew greater, he did stoop to tell his only relative—and was refused! When work became still scarcer, he even sought employment at a neighbouring sawmill, willing, anxious, to

do *anything*—except to beg—to win an honest penny! But the evident unfitness and weakness of the tottering old man, in his eightieth year, of course made his application unsuccessful.

As a friend, speaking of this incident, remarks, his willingness to do the hard work connected with a sawmill “illustrates, in a telling manner, his grand old spirit of Scottish independence. Would even Burns,” he asks, “had he lived to John’s age with all its infirmities, have had the resolution to tramp to the sawmill and ask for work?”

In 1873, so low were his circumstances, with present needs and increasing frailties, and so sad and down-hearted did he become in the darker prospects before him, that the old man took to bed, sick with melancholy heart-ache, for the first time in his life losing hope amidst the gathering blackness. What a new meaning did that childlike and trustful petition in the model prayer of our childhood possess now to John in his age and want—“Give us this day our daily bread!” And what a new but inexorable commentary on God’s only method of answering all such prayers, did his darkening prospects afford!

How unutterably bitter and heart-sore must have been the hours then spent by that keen, sensitive, silent, pious and proud old man, in that dark, cold bed on the rafters under the thatch of the solitary workshop, with the fire extinguished on his hearth in the cheerless November, and the flame of hope only flickering on its dying embers in his heart—alone in the world in that desolate hut, widowed and childless, bread even denied him, strength departing when most needed, and God seemingly deserting him in his old

age ! May none of us ever catch the most distant glimpse of such agony !

But lying there in the dark would not mend matters. Bread must be found, somewhere and somehow. Dire necessity thus nerved his sick heart, and he rose to finish the web he had in his loom, looking for more to follow. Hope increased with busy hands, work came when this was done, strength grew with exercise, and the future brightened. For a whole year after this taste of despair, he struggled on, bravely facing the fiend that had grappled with him in the darkness and even now stood grimly and cruelly in the near distance, with relentless look towards him.

It was in vain. He *could not* win enough to support dear life. But he was never again plunged into the hopelessness from which he had then escaped. With the resolution that had upheld him throughout life, even in the bitter waters of his home and heart, he now nerved himself for what seemed to him the knell of life—at least, of all happiness. In soul-crying silence, without a word spoken to any one, he went down the Leochel side one winter morning, on the 2nd of November, 1874—to beg a pauper's portion ! Ah, the pangs unutterable that act involved to such a man ! How sad his heart, how dark his prospects, how distant God, as he trudged with reluctant feet along the familiar paths, which now looked so different, on that forbidding errand ! Even the very flowers that might have comforted him, as they did Wordsworth,* in his woe, were dead and hidden from view beneath the bitter frost and snow. Often, often as the same misery has been

* See his poem, composed after the death of his only brother, the original of his portrait of "The Happy Warrior."

felt and most powerfully sung, never was it more truly tragic and magnanimous than that day by the Leochel, as transacted in the inner depths of that bent little body that leaned on a tottering staff, while the soul stood bravely erect, silent and alone, in dread darkness. But the energy of resolution prevented any return of the despairing grief that had descended on him the winter before. He had now steeled his heart to bear and to do—and he bore and acted, outwardly without emotion or seeming difficulty, but inwardly with pathetic repulsion and unutterable shame.

It is scarcely possible for any one who has not seen and sympathised with the proudly sensitive and nobly honourable feelings that in Scotland make such an appeal to the parish so full of horror and dismay, adequately to understand John Duncan's feelings in this transaction. His own nature revolted against such dependence, and the traditional opinion and popular hatred of that condition had burnt it deep into his heart as the last and lowest depth of disgrace. May this feeling long, long exist in the country, a protection and an impulse to higher endeavour after independence amongst our poor.

He arrived at the Poor Inspector's after midday, and stated his circumstances. That officer took note of these in his books, which bear that "his average earnings were only about two shillings a week ; he was failing in strength, and his trade was almost gone." He then received five shillings, and at the first meeting of the Board, on the 17th of November, 1874, he was formally admitted on the roll of paupers, at an allowance of three shillings weekly ; and one of the usual pauper's cards for entering the sums received, inscribed with his name and number, lies before me.

That badge was the consummation of his shame, as it felt to him, and seemed to stamp him with the brand of Cain, which all men might read. Yet every month for years, the old man carried it to the parochial office, to receive his pittance, until the present inspector, Mr. James Reid, now one of his trustees, a man full of the milk of human kindness, used to bring it up to Droughsburn, in order to save John's feelings. In May, 1879, through Mr. Reid's good offices, on account of his increasing weakness and inability to work, he was *boarded* with Mrs. Allanach at four and sixpence a week; and his old shop, in deference to his feelings, was retained at the old rent, after the question asked by the chairman—alas for local fame!—"Is Duncan a deserving pauper?" had been at once "answered by a dozen in the affirmative." Thus did this keenly sensitive, aged man eat a beggar's bread for six years in silence, till relieved in his last year by the kindly gifts of admirers; never telling the painful fact to a single one of his friends, whom he still used to visit as in his old days of high-hearted independence. To me, he did not breathe a whisper of it.

In the year of my visit to him, 1877, John's vitality, remarkable and vigorous as it had been, began obviously to fail—and no wonder, for he had entered his eighty-fourth year in December.

When he called on James Black that summer, he had begun to look, as James expressed it in a letter to Charles, "old in earnest." His skin "felt clammy with exhaustion," and his power of walking was so much lessened that he had to stay a night on the way to town. When James

entered the house, finding John sitting by the fire with his back to the door, he caught him by the shoulders and held him till he laughed and guessed who it was. With his friend's good cheer and hearty company, the old man greatly revived, and talked brightly of old days at Whitehouse. Despite his inherent reticence, though with difficulty, he also gave his friend details on certain points of his early life and domestic experiences, confided to few, which Charles had asked him to get for him, and which have been utilised in this history.

In the following year, 1878, on the first Sunday of May—a favourite month of the old botanist's, as it was to Chaucer, and as it has been to all lovers of nature, for then

“The flourës gynnēn for to spring”

—he set out for church, climbing the hill above the cottage that lay between him and the Howe of Cushnie where it stood. The way was long—four miles to go—and the road steep and trying to the aged. But the day was smiling, the tender spring flowers thrilled him with their opening beauties and countless memories, and he gathered as usual some of his favourites to lay before him in church. When he reached the top of the hill, he sat down on a stone to rest, and gazed on the familiar prospect over hill and dale that stretched all round him, as he had often done before. It was a sweet Sabbath morning that sent its soothing peace into the good man's silent and receptive heart, and breathed a benison on him and on all nature, linked to the man by subtle ties of knowledge and sympathy, which few of the other church-goers could understand. Like Wordsworth's Wanderer—

“Early had he learned
To reverence the volume that displays
The mystery, the life which cannot die;
But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.
All things, responsive to the writing, there
Breathed immortality, revolving life
And quietness still revolving; infinite:
There littleness was not; the least of things
Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped
Her prospects; nor did he believe—he *saw*.”

After resting for a space in such “still communion,” generated by “the blessed time” and his dear life companions, that smiled to greet him all around, he rose to continue his journey. But in doing so, a strange and new sensation swam round his heart for an instant; then all became blank, and he fell to the ground insensible. There he lay for some time, unnoticed by any one, for the way he had come was little trodden. By-and-by, with a bewildered feeling, he slowly revived. Gazing round, he recalled his position, and with difficulty rose to his feet. He was obliged to seat himself again, but, after some rest, regained sufficient strength to totter towards the church, for it was the Sacrament day—a holy time he would not lose, unless compelled by sheer weakness. The sick man crawled along the road, till his pale appearance and weak steps were observed by the schoolmaster, Mr. Reid. He ran to his assistance, compelled him, in real alarm, to sit down, and brought him some needed brandy. This friendly draught revived him much, and, in spite of remonstrance, with his usual determination he insisted on going on to church. Mr. Reid, seeing his weakness, kindly got his phaeton ready; and, seated beside him, the old man was carried pale

but smiling to church, where he arrived almost restored to wonted vigour.

He sat out the long service of the day, comforted and strengthened by the good words he heard from the cheering text, strangely appropriate to his circumstances—"As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him" (Psa. xviii. 30). His friends had crowded round him both before and after service, inquiring anxiously and kindly how he felt after his "drow."* But he would not complain, and, according to his wont, he tried to make light of the matter; for to a nature like his, public sympathy at such times is pure pain. But as old Mr. Williams said, on returning home that day, "I knew quite weel that he was waur than he wu'd allow. Peer breet,† I doo't he'll never come to the kirk ony mair."

After service, he was refreshed by kindness and food, and by a sympathetic and helpful gift from the good minister, and, declining all offered conveyance and accompanied by friendly feet, he walked homewards down the hill to the familiar cottage.

That *was* John's last visit to church, and his first decided warning of the coming end. His stout heart, which had for more than fourscore years done its work so well, was at length beginning to fail, and, for the first time in their long journey together, had ceased its vital offices—still willing and able, however, to continue them for a period; only now, like a prophetic friend, giving due

* A fainting fit; a word from the Anglo-Saxon.

† "Poor brute," a curious term of endearment, used there and elsewhere in Scotland.

warning that ere very long they must finally part company.

One day, the Rev. Mr. Williams met the old man on the road, now tottering somewhat more than before. After friendly greeting, "John," said he, "you're getting the worse of the wear, I fear." "Ow, ay," brightly returned he, "jist at the fa'in, like an aul' tumble-doon, feal * dike!" Though, after this, his strength wonderfully revived, he was never the hale old traveller along the paths of time he had formerly been. Yet, when the lady called on him in July of that year, and asked him to get the *Linnaea borealis* for her, as a memento of himself and his cottage, the old spirit returned, and he fearlessly and unflinchingly undertook for it the long and trying journey to Manabattock Hill, in Tullynessle, on the other side of the Vale.† But that terrible night to the aged botanist, alone on the mountain, in the rain and the storm, was an experience at his advanced years from which he never fully rallied; and no doubt, in some degree, it hastened the end. As he remarked, in speaking of it to a friend who inquired how he had fared, "I never cowered ‡ that day."

Before the close of autumn, nevertheless, he was able to pay his friends in Aberdeen a visit, for his vitality at his age was extraordinary. But he took four hours to find out James Black's house, poor old man, and when he arrived there, was so exhausted that, overcoming his unconquerable shyness even with intimates, he asked for

* That is, a dike made of turf, which, when it does begin to decay, falls quickly and looks very dilapidated.

† See Chap. XXIX. p. 318.

‡ "Recovered," the word being a contraction of the French *re-couvrir*, to recover; another bit of old French in the Scotch tongue.

something to drink. This revived him, and he talked quite brightly of my visit and the gifts the story had brought, thinking, as he always did, that somehow "Chairlie was at the buddom o't!" which, in a sense, he was.

Next day, he called on Mr. Beveridge, who noted at once a marked change upon the man. "Time was," he says, "telling sadly upon him; his limbs were stiff and shaky, and his appetite was poor." Though he was generally tidy in person, his beard was fearfully overgrown, and William took him to a barber, who shaved him "clean and snod" in what seemed to John an incredibly short space, no doubt the first time he had ever sat under tonsorial fingers. On coming out, he laughingly remarked, "how cleverly the chiel' had done the job!" He was greatly refreshed by the operation, and still more by the steaming cup of tea provided by Mrs. Beveridge on their return. He then toddled home to his brother's house at Rubislaw, near the city, where he spent the night.

The last time John called on Mr. Beveridge was in the following summer, two years before his death. He looked greatly improved in strength and spirits, and was remarkably merry over "Good Words" and the kindly presents from admirers it still brought him. He stayed the greater part of the day, revelling as usual in the happy past; and William parted with his "good old friend, alas! never more to meet again in time."

In January, 1881, I sent him a volume which gratified him much—"Leaders of Men: a book of Biographies specially written for Youth," by "H. A. Page," our good friend, Dr. Japp, who has produced many such high-toned books for the young. There John's story, as given in

"Good Words," was reproduced, beside such goodly company as those of the Prince Consort, Commodore Goodenough, George Moore, Lord Lawrence, and Robert Dick of Thurso. And John *had* already been a "Leader" in his sphere, humble though it was. But his influence in this respect may now be only beginning, and it is to be hoped that he will yet become a source of "light and leading" to an army of kindred spirits, stirred by his life to prove his deeper delights.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JOHN'S HERBARIUM PRESENTED TO ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY.

DUNCAN'S extensive collection of plants still lay decaying and useless in the old weaving shop at Droughsburn. The most of his specimens he had already *named*; but the *localities*, widely scattered, had never been affixed. These he knew himself with his remarkable memory, and many of them had been taken note of by John Taylor during his frequent visits. It had often occurred to his botanical friends to have the now rapidly deteriorating gatherings carefully examined, and fully named and localised, while his now failing memory could be relied on. It was a great and difficult task, involving much time, patience, and care, as well as technical knowledge. It could not be successfully carried out by any outsider, however capable and willing: for the silent man would reveal nothing except to one in close and sympathetic intimacy; much less would he allow any but such a friend to touch them. Always jealous of the least interference with them by any hands, however tender and knowing, except his own, he was now more careful than ever that they should be violated by no one, unless under his own eye and direction. They were

truly dearer to the fading botanist than the prized hoard of the veriest miser.

Happily, however, amongst his friends there were more than one that possessed the requisite intimacy, and knowledge as well as will, for the delicate, difficult and long-continued work. His friend James Taylor, of Clashfarquhar, at last determined that it should be done, having already gradually approached the shy old student on the subject. It was not an easy thing to manage, for the proposal was associated, not only with an upturning of all his receptacles, but with a confession of decay and near decease which his unusual vitality and keenness made painful, even when he was far above fourscore. In 1880, Mr. Taylor determined to act before it should be too late, and wrote to John to that effect. He had also sounded him on the wisdom of presenting them to the Aberdeen University, as both a fitting and honourable memento of his own long devotion to science and an incentive to others to taste its undying joys. This idea pleased the old man vastly. As he had abundantly shown, nothing gave him more pleasure all through life than to extend the number of the lovers and students of science ; and this would be a very good means of doing so, which he hoped would be more fruitful of good result than had been his own endeavours. James Taylor communicated his ideas to John M. B. Taylor ; and among all John Duncan's friends and disciples there was none with the necessary knowledge who would be more willing to give the time and trouble required for the work. To John Taylor, it would truly be a labour of love, for the sake of the man, the plants and the science.

On the 17th of April of that year, the two friends paid

a visit to Droughsburn, where they found the old man pretty vigorous in mind and body, and happy at seeing them. During that and the following days, the whole of the gatherings of nigh fifty years were brought to light from all the recesses and chests in the old shop, and not a few of them for the first time for many years. These researches showed an immense accumulation of botanical materials, but also sad inroads, by moth and decay, on even the finest and rarest specimens. It was, however, truly surprising how well preserved they had remained as a whole, considering their age and the confined and unpromising circumstances under which they had been kept so long. It was found that, when properly selected and arranged, they would form a collection not unworthy of the knowledge and enthusiasm that had gathered them, and the University to which they would be presented. His friends expressed their gratification to the old botanist, and thus increased his joy, which he expressed in a way child-like in its reality and beautiful to see.

James Taylor returned home that evening, after seeing all things put in order for their transfer. John was too exhausted with the labours and excitements of the day to accompany his friend along the burn side, but deputed that office to the younger man. John shook hands warmly with his guest in the doorway, being evidently much affected; and they parted for what proved to be the last time. John then lay down to rest, and rose refreshed when John Taylor returned from seeing his friend off to Aberdeen. After entering the shop, where John received him, he was surprised and touched when the old man went to one of his chests, and taking his copy of Dickie's "Flora," impressively

handed it to him, in a way that conveyed more than his words, saying: "There, Johnnie, I'm to gee ye that. See that ye'll get on noo. Ye ken Botany, and ye're noo to tak' my place." His young friend was much moved. He received the volume as a proof of a friendship he prized and the highest incitement to further study, and gave his aged tutor the desired pledge. It was one of those moments in a man's history that live for ever in the memory and heart, and deeply sway the after life, as the young man strongly felt.

John Taylor remained at Droughsburn for three days more, gathering together the whole collection and adding to the names and localities, which his use of short-hand enabled him to do with rapidity. Old John felt the greatest pleasure in getting the herbarium gathered and packed up for transport, and in thinking of its destination and future influence, even although it involved parting with the treasured possessions of half a century.

His gift of the plants to the University, though tinged with the sadness of parting and the decay and death it signified, was a spontaneous, free-will offering for the sake of his beloved study, made without one thought of reward or even desire of praise. He frequently spoke of the gratification it gave him to think of the use they would be to the students; that "they nicht see them and ken them," and thus be induced, more of them, to love the wild flowers and study the science that described them. During their examination, the sight of many of them recalled dear memories, which roused latent humour, stirred old merriment, and also struck long-silent chords of sorrow. Amongst others, when the leaf of the water-lily was turned up, he

again referred to the day of danger in the Loch of Drum, where he nearly lost his life—an incident which seems to have made a lasting impression on the man, as it was calculated to do, and which he mentioned to me again some time before his death.

When they were all finally bound up and packed carefully in a great corn-sack, which they filled, he looked proud of their bulk, and referred merrily to the burden they would be to John Taylor to get them to Aberdeen. They recalled, he said, a similar burden of plants which formed the herbarium of Dr. Murray,* author of "*Northern Flora*;" when, after his death in 1837, they were borne by the carrier to Haddo House, where the gardener then lived who had purchased them.

During these days, he went over his books with Mr. Taylor, and also his letters, pointing out where they were, in view of his decease. Uncovering his grey hairs, he spoke solemnly of his death and his desire to be buried in Alford with a decent funeral. He made his friend promise, if possible, "to put some queer stane on his head," to mark

* Dr. Murray was once a medical practitioner in Alford, near which he lived, at Smithyhill, and seems to have been a man in many respects much before his time. He was imbued with a pure love of science, especially Botany, and his "*Northern Flora*" was a praiseworthy effort to catalogue the plants of the north of Scotland at an early date. His memory is still warmly cherished in the Vale, where stories are told of his scientific enthusiasm. His herbarium, which was examined by Dr. Dickie, was bought at his death in 1837, by the Haddo House gardener, who afterwards went to Australia, but it has since been lost sight of. Can any one throw light on its history? A short account of Dr. Murray in the *Aberdeen Herald*, from the pen of his friend, Dr. Templeton, of Aberdeen, was all that appeared of this uncommon man and scientist.

the spot where he should be laid ; and he indicated one of a species of volcanic boulders, widely scattered over the district, locally known as "heathens." * This was the only desire for fame, posthumous though it would be, John had ever spontaneously expressed. The wish thus uttered by him to have an honourable grave, even in his poverty, was at once natural, simple and pardonable, and it is common amongst the very poorest everywhere, and not least in Scotland ; as in the case of Widow Smith in "Jonas Fisher," † who would have died in perfect peace but for one thought that vexed her mind—to have, if it were His will, "a decent funeral." Like her, John Duncan

"Wanted neither help nor food,
But one thing his whole heart did crave :
That, saved from pauper's lot, his corpse
Might rest within a decent grave."

John also presented his friend with some other volumes in memory of the giver, saying, "I hae had my day o' them," and he accompanied the gift with his best counsels and dying blessing as from a father to a son, which intellectually and morally he had been. He advised him, with special emphasis, to continue and extend his study of

* These boulders are of a special kind of diorite, containing, as Mr. J. S. G. Wilson, of the Geological Survey, informs me, in addition to the usual constituents, another mineral not yet determined. They form a remarkable stream in Aberdeenshire, stretching from their parent source in the Highlands of Glen Bucket. Such stones are so called because found on the wild *heath*. From the same word, we have *heather*, the heath plant ; and the *heathen*, as remaining pagan in the wilder country after the towns were Christianised.

† "Jonas Fisher : a Poem in Brown and White," by the Earl of Southesk. A remarkable book, traversing a great part of the religious and social problems of the day.

Nature, which had been fraught to himself with so much blessing ; for he had been able above many—

“ To recognize,
In Nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of our purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of our hearts, and soul
Of all our moral being.”

He also sent two volumes as a last gift to James Taylor.

When John Taylor left, bearing the precious and heavy load of plants on his strong shoulders, John brightly called it “ a gey bir’n,” as he viewed it with sparkling pleasure, subdued by sadness. The old man accompanied him to the stile, staff in hand, as in the old days, though without the old vitality. He then shook hands with him three times in succession, with a look and pressure of deep emotion, and then turned away in silence and with a full heart.

It took John Taylor all his leisure till December to complete the selecting, arranging, localising, cleaning, and cataloguing of the immense collection. The specimens had been classed and named by John according to the Linnæan system, to which he adhered throughout. Mr. Taylor re-arranged them and made a list of the whole according to the Natural System also. It was a very laborious piece of work, which could only have been done by one who viewed it really as a loving labour.

John Taylor reports that of the 1428 species that form the flora of Scotland and England, John’s collection, dilapidated though it was, contained, when it came into his hands, 1131 specimens, and, of course, had once included many more, if not most ; that John was familiar with most

or all of the others ; and that of the 650 species mentioned in Dickie's "Flora" as belonging to Aberdeen, Banff, and Kincardine, he wanted only a few specimens. A large number in his herbarium were utterly destroyed by moths and other agents, and others were so deteriorated that they were useless for preservation. After careful selection, as presented to the University, the collection contains some 750 species, divided as follows :—

1. A general collection of about 500 species, arranged according to the twenty-four classes of Linnaeus, including ferns, in various books.

2. A book containing an almost complete collection of species, about 150, representing the flora of the Vale of Alford, many being rare.

3. A book of about 50 specimens of the grasses of the Alford district.

4. A book of about 50 specimens of the cryptogamic plants of the same district, chiefly mosses and lichens.

The first (1) was from his general collection, gradually decimated, by more than forty years' keeping in many cases, though added to as years rolled on. The two next were those shown at the Alford Horticultural Show in 1871. The fourth (4) was the collection he made the following year, which was then all named, but which he did not present for competition.

The dates of the specimens range from about 1836 or 1837, when he began Systematic Botany, till 1871. The books containing the general collection are formed chiefly of coarse grey or brown paper, parts of newspapers and blotting paper, all stitched in home-made covers, which are formed generally of sheets of paper pasted together.

In examining them, it was found that the moths had done least damage to the plants kept in blotting paper, and slightly more to those in newspapers, but that the destruction was almost total in those preserved in thick grey paper. Tea paper, as used by grocers, John found a very good preservative, and he utilised it in his later collections, which are well laid down.

The old newspapers that enclosed his early gatherings are interesting memorials of the times in which he began botanising. The *Aberdeen Journal* frequently appears, from 1839 onwards. Here are some numbers of the *Aberdeen Constitutional*, obtained from Charles Black, who took it out at Whitehouse, as a Conservative. There is a copy of the *Scotsman* of 1840, price 4½d. This is a leaf of the *Scottish Furist*. That is a fragment of the memorable but fleeting notices of the day, containing a list of the opposers of intrusion in the Formartin district of Aberdeenshire, who pledged themselves to leave the Erastian church. And so on ; each new page revealing glimpses of the past, civil and sacred, religious and social, and of the numerous movements, now matters of history, that characterised the middle of this century.

By the end of December, John Taylor had completed his labours on the herbarium, and steps were then taken for its presentation to the University of Aberdeen. This took place on the last day of 1880, Mr. James and Mr. John Taylor representing John Duncan ; and Dr. James Trail Professor of Botany, the University. The herbarium was accepted by the professor, who, after examination, expressed a high opinion of its value, and deposited it for safe keeping and exhibition in the Natural History Museum of

Marischal College. There it now lies, and there it is to be hoped it will long be preserved, as a very imperfect but not unworthy monument of botanical study and rare scientific enthusiasm in humble life; not only a means of practical instruction, but, from its unique history, a strong impulse for good, both scientific and moral, to every student that may have the privilege of examining its widely-gathered contents.

Accounts of the presentation appeared in all the local and in some of the metropolitan papers, with a sketch of the botanist's life, written chiefly by John Taylor. Some of the local journals included a detailed list of the rarer species, drawn up by the same hand. The ceremony was certainly as unostentatious and simple as it well could have been. It was, nevertheless, quite in keeping with the character and studies of the man that had presented the collection. Surely it was one that meant more than met the eye.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PUBLIC APPEAL MADE ON HIS BEHALF, AND ITS GENEROUS RESULTS.

THIS presentation of the herbarium and the subsequent accounts of the man revealed the painful fact of his being a pauper. It was only then that I became positively assured of his depressing financial condition. At once, I prepared an appeal in his favour, which appeared on the 5th of January in the chief newspapers in Britain, and which was speedily transferred to others in all parts. In this appeal, notice was directed to the man as "one of those silent enthusiasts that are an honour to our country, earning daily bread by incessant toil, but filled with a pure love of nature and science, the joy of which had been its own reward; for, unlike many enthusiasts, he never let the flowers still the music of his shuttle." It was pointed out that he had pursued the study of science "amidst difficulties, discouragements, and trials more than common, with a beautiful devotion that had been as honourable as it was pure, telling the world nothing of his labours, and utterly unknown till dragged into notice in 1878." I also gave some particulars of his life and studies, and spoke of his accepting pauperism rather than the pain of making money by the sale of his beloved

plants and books. I pointed out that "he then lived widowed, simple-minded, independent, pious, and happy, but, in absolute poverty, at last obliged to accept a pauper's dole;" and concluded with an appeal to the scientific and generous to help, at such a season, "with their superfluities, which to him would be abundance, to lift him above such pain and shame—heavy on an independent, sensitive heart—before he should pass away for ever, and we should be only able, instead of bread, to give him a stone."

The response was immediate and generous, subscriptions being spontaneously sent from all parts of the empire, including India. These gifts were still further increased after I gave an account of him in *Nature*, on the 20th of January. That scientific serial at once took up the case in the warmest way, solicited subscriptions, and, besides numerous sums sent direct, collected through its own office above £70.

Many of the chief journals also advocated the cause in the strongest terms. Amongst many others, the *Times* referred to him as "a remarkable Scotchman, whose knowledge of Botany was scientifically thorough and wonderfully wide;" and to his need of seeking parish relief, through sheer decay, as "peculiarly galling to one who had hitherto led so independent a life." The *Pall Mall Gazette* spoke of him as one who was "as remarkable in many respects for his devotion to the study of nature as either Edwards or Dick;" and as "a hard-working, spare-living man, who had denied himself every luxury save that of studying Botany;" and said that "to the appeal there ought to be a prompt and generous response." The *Glasgow Evening*

Times, in an earnest, well-written leader, urged its readers to listen, "amidst the clatter of politics and the rush of business, to the world's still small voices, calls, and claims, many of which were too often allowed to utter themselves unheard, or, if heard, to remain unanswered," saying that this was a clamant example. It referred to his herbarium as "a noble work . . . many a patent of nobility and many a pension having been conferred for a less valuable and less dignified piece of labour;" but it did not fear that "many a comforting message would be sent to the brave old botanist." The *People's Journal*, which is extensively read by the humbler classes all over Scotland, specially took up the case, declaring that it was "incumbent upon all who desired to honour worth of character and to reward work well done, to see at once that provision was made for the free-hearted donor of the herbarium, who had no thought of reaping any advantage when he presented it to the University."

Most of the subscriptions were accompanied with the kindest, most appreciative and, in many cases, very touching words of sympathy and admiration. Her Majesty sent "the poor man" a donation of £10, as having been "interested in his story and work." Several of the nobility subscribed; amongst others, the Duke of Argyle, who gave £10, saying that "the subscription ought to be zealously supported by all who are interested in the pursuits of science, and who honour the high moral and intellectual qualities for which John Duncan was so distinguished." The Dowager Lady Stanley of Alderley not only subscribed herself, but successfully brought the case before her numerous friends, recommending it to "the many who love

science, and the still greater number who admire virtue." Many distinguished scientists contributed. Amongst these, were the late veteran, Charles Darwin, who wrote as "a fellow-botanist ;" an eminent professor of Botany, as "an old botanist like himself," sending him the kindest of letters ; another, as "a fellow-worker in natural science ;" and others in like strain—a distinguished emeritus professor in Aberdeen contributing "as an old weaver."

The words of kindness were warm, and as varied as the writers. One hoped "he might be spared for many years to enjoy, not charity, but the willing gifts of admiring although unknown friends ;" another gave in "sympathy for the worthy veteran ;" another contributed "in memory of a brother botanist and for Christ's sake ;" another "admired his steady, persevering industry as beyond all praise," and wished he were "a richer man to do more ;" another sensibly "came to the conclusion that he was one to be helped as well as admired ;" another thought "he had set a noble example of perseverance in the cause of science ;" another was "thankful for the opportunity of contributing ;" while still another "would like to see the good old man and shake his hand." Mrs. Alfred Morrison, of London, affected by "the touching story of the fine old man," of whose falling on the parish it was "piteous to think," sent £30 and the present of a handsome easy-chair to comfort his declining years.

Some of the letters were not a little curious. One benevolent lady, who was sorry to hear that one who was, like herself, a great lover of nature, was in want of aid, said, "he must promise to spend her gift in getting ten barrels of coals, a pair of warm blankets, some clothing, and

the balance in good food." Another contributor sententiously observed that "if the prophets and others sent for our instruction are not now stoned, they are apt to be starved, even in this generation." Another gave five shillings "to keep the wolf from the door till once his position was known to the public, of whom none could have a poorer opinion than the writer; for whoever tries to uphold fallen humanity tries a most difficult task—hog won't eat hog, dog won't eat dog, but man will devour his fellow-man in true cannibal fashion;" and concluded by asking John to "read the thirty-seventh psalm, and to trust with implicit confidence in the Great 'I Am,' and when plenty comes in to supply your every want, as doubtless it will, thank God first and man next."

The manner in which some of the subscriptions were gathered was also interesting. Families interested in botany and the botanist united together in personal gifts, from the oldest to the youngest, as in Lord Claude Hamilton's. Some public works and offices joined in small subscriptions, which together became considerable, such as the Addiewell Chemical Works. Aberdonians in several places sent joint presents to their countryman. One gentleman in Glasgow fastened one of the leader appeals to a sheet in his office, which drew many an unreluctant coin from his visitors. Other kindly hearts in various parts, near and distant, became generous beggars amongst their friends. Not a few who contributed large amounts desired to be nameless. One wrote from a sick bed, making suggestions for increased subscriptions, which happily, from the prompt fulness of the gifts, it was unnecessary to adopt. Several newspapers acted as recipients of moneys,

the *Aberdeen Free Press* and *People's Journal* being specially active.

Several societies took an earnest and praiseworthy part in increasing the fund and honouring the man. On the 7th of January, the evening of the day when the appeal appeared in the Edinburgh papers, the annual meeting of the "Aberdeen, Banff and Kincardine Association" took place, at which the case was advocated, and above £5 collected on the spot. In 1878, after the "Good Words" story appeared, the Largo Field Naturalists' Society, one of the most active and successful Field clubs in the country, at once elected John an honorary member—the first honour of the kind received by the old man, who was intensely gratified. After the appeal, it sent a handsome subscription to the fund, and watched its progress and appropriation with the greatest interest; Dr. Laing, of Newburgh, its indefatigable president, being greatly attracted by "the self-taught botanist," and delighted at this means of perpetuating his memory. The Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club also at once elected him an honorary member, with every expression of admiration and a donation of £5. The Banff Field Club speedily followed with the same honour and similar assistance. In February, the Edinburgh Naturalist's Field Club circulated an urgent appeal to the members, containing my letter to the *Scotsman*, which resulted in a substantial sum. The Ross-shire Educational Institute quickly subscribed above £3. In March, at the monthly meeting of the Aberdeen Natural History Society, Mr. John Taylor gave an interesting account of his scientific father, illustrated by the exhibition of his "nogman" or sun-watch, and the herbarium itself. On the

motion of the president, Professor Struthers, supported by Mr. James Taylor, "as an old friend of thirty-five years," Duncan was cordially elected an honorary member, "as an honour to him, but still more an honour to themselves."

In all these endeavours to give deserved recognition to a man who, as Professor Struthers then said, had "cultivated science, working at the loom, with the *res angustæ domi* pressing upon him," it is remarkable that the active Edinburgh Botanical Society did not join in bestowing honour on such a student of the science which it is one of its functions to foster. The veteran Professor Balfour, its founder in 1836, who took a warm interest in Duncan, at once brought the matter before the council of the society, with a view to his being elected ; but his motion was overruled in his absence, on the curious plea that Duncan neither was a member of the Society nor had contributed to it by paper or otherwise ! Such a rule would for ever preclude any society from honouring even the most distinguished ; and, surely, the sooner it is rescinded, the better for the society and the science it represents. A still more surprising instance of silence, where the earliest and most active efforts might have been and were expected, as was publicly expressed at the time in local journals, with indignant astonishment, was that of the University of Aberdeen, to which the herbarium had been generously and unconditionally gifted by the more than penniless student, but without one thought of fame or reward. But so it was and so has remained. Nothing has been said or done in the matter either by the Faculty most concerned, or by the Senatus that should have supplied its neglect.

These simple details are given as not only interesting

to admirers of the humble and silent student, thus late but not reluctantly acknowledged by his fellow-men ; but as showing that a sound heart does exist in humanity, notwithstanding its apparent callousness, amidst the over-eager race for power, pelf, and self-indulgence, and that it requires only to be fully informed and truly touched in a deserving cause, to well out into most substantial and generous sympathy. The appreciation of the honours thus bestowed, as felt by the old man himself, was simply inexpressible. They were valued a thousand times more than the comforts by which they were accompanied, and became a well-spring of quiet blessedness in his declining days and on his dying pillow, that it must charm every contributor to have had an opportunity of bestowing on such a susceptible, uncomplaining and grateful heart.

The subscriptions were chiefly sent through the author, but many were transmitted direct to their aged recipient himself. He was then, however, far too weak to attend to them, or even to sign the receipts ; and they were very kindly taken charge of by the Rev. James Gillan, parish minister of Alford. He acknowledged them all to their thoughtful donors, and was kindly indefatigable in everything connected with the decaying old man, as were also several others in the neighbourhood. In all, the handsome sum of above £320 was subscribed.

On receiving the first earnest of this pleasant harvest from admiring friends, steps were at once taken by Mr. Gillan and Mr. Reid, the kindly Poor Inspector, to increase John's personal comforts in the cottage, and to supply the more generous fare required for his increasing infirmities than the little he had ever allowed himself, even in his

robust years. He was removed from the workshop, where he had slept till then, to the best room in the cottage. This apartment was lined with wood and otherwise improved, and a new bed was erected in it for his use, close by the fire. He was clothed in a new warm suit, the first he had received for fifty years ; a comfortable arm-chair was purchased, and everything was done to add to his comfort that money could procure or kindly hearts suggest. His parochial dole at once ceased ; and the parish doctor, who had been attending him with all kindness, now became his personal feed physician, an uncounted joy to the late receiver of hated but helpful relief. His capable and kindly nurse, Mrs. Allanach, whose husband had been removed from her about a year before, and who had been attending him during his weakness for a very inadequate sum paid by the Board—larger, however, in the special circumstances of both, than was generally allowed—had her allowance suitably increased to a satisfactory amount. All debts due by John, before and since he had given up work, were fully discharged ; and the old weaver sat in his own cosy chair, by his own bright fire, once more a free and independent man, owing nothing, as he had done for fourscore years.

To prevent possible difficulty at his decease, or the unworthy dissipation of his estate, a Trust Deed was formally drawn up, disposing of his effects in detail, and trustees, present and permanent, were appointed.* The

* The trustees are Robert O. Farquharson, Esq., of Haughton, near Alford, chairman of the School Board of Alford, and his successors in that office ; the Rev. James Gillan, of the parish of Alford, and his successors ; the Rev. William G. Brander, of the Free Church of Alford, and his successors ; William Anderson, farmer, Wellhouse, near Alford ;

whole was duly signed by John on the 15th of April, and the deed registered and deposited in official keeping, the original in Edinburgh, and an extract in Inverness.

By this deed, the provisions of which were cordially concurred in by the old botanist and lover of nature and science, the whole sum that remained after his death, together with any other moneys realised from his effects, was to be invested, and the interest devoted, for all time, to the formation of a scholarship or scholarships, or, in the absolute discretion of the trustees, to the purchase of prizes, all to be called after his name, "for the encouragement of the study of Natural Science, especially Botany, among the youth, both boys and girls, of the parishes of Alford, Leochel-Cushnie, Tullynessle, Tough, and Keig," in the Vale of Alford. The trustees are empowered to fix "the amount and number of each scholarship, scholarships, or prizes, and the conditions, rules, and regulations on which they shall be awarded ;" and, what is a wise provision, too frequently omitted in such educational endowments, "to alter, vary, or modify the same from time to time, as the trustees may think necessary for adapting them to growing improvements in education in the future, with a due regard to the purpose for which the scholarships or prizes are instituted."

In carrying out these most praiseworthy intentions of the deceased scientist, the trustees, at a meeting held immediately after the funeral, determined, at present and for some time to come, to devote the proceeds of the

James Reid, Inspector of Poor for Alford ; James Taylor, of Clashfarquhar ; John M. B. Taylor; and the author. The number of trustees never to be less than five.

existing fund, which is above £200, to the foundation of annual prizes, offered to each of the schools in the above parishes—first, for the best collections of native plants in the district, gathered and named during the year by the candidates, male or female, in order to encourage practical botanising in the field; and, second, to the successful candidates after examination on Botany, according to the three years' course laid down in the Specific Subjects of the "Revised Code" for Scotland, in order to encourage a theoretical study of the science.

It was further generously and wisely enacted in the Trust Deed, that John Duncan's large library of valuable scientific and other books should be made over to the parish of Alford, for the promotion of the same purposes in connection with science; and that their present custody be given to the Alford Mutual Improvement Association, and after it ceases to exist, to the School Board of the parish; a few books only being reserved, to be presented by the trustees as souvenirs to intimate friends.

It is devoutly to be hoped that these incitements to practical work and study will rouse interest in subjects painfully neglected in our schools, the pleasure of which will alone be a great reward, apart altogether from their higher results; and introduce the youth of the district in which John made his own happy triumphs, to the delights of scientific research and a knowledge of the beauties of nature around them, to which the untrained eyes of their fathers were blind.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GROWING DEBILITY—AND THE AUTHOR'S LAST VISIT.

FOR a year before his death, John's vitality began rapidly to decline. About this time, he took a severe bleeding at the nostril, which was with difficulty stopped before the doctor arrived ; and it was distinctly observable that, after that, his memory was seriously impaired and never again recovered its wonted power. His fainting on the way to church in May, 1880, was a significant premonition of decay, but one which the keen, healthy old veteran was very slow to heed.

He still continued weaving on till July, when growing debility and irretrievably spoiling a web he was trying to put into his loom at last convinced him, however reluctantly, of the necessity of giving up work. His bed was removed from the rafters above the looms, where he had slept for twenty-eight years, and a covered close bed was erected in the shop ; as it was becoming dangerous for him to climb the rude ladder that led to the upper box where he had lain so long. The door between the shop and the kitchen, which had been built up when John took the place, to secure greater seclusion for himself, was now again opened, that Mrs. Allanach might more easily attend upon him with his increasing needs. The fire in the shop

smoked so badly, as it had always done, that it could seldom or never be lighted with any comfort, so that he had to do without it, as he had greatly done all these years.

He now often wandered about in sleep, and was often affected with strange hallucinations. One night, for example, he hurried in his shirt into the cottage at midnight, in the greatest consternation, urging them to save themselves ; for, he said, he had just been up the brae, where he had seen the gable of the house falling in, and had rushed home to alarm them ! His door had therefore to be kept locked at night, to prevent him unconsciously going outside, as he had sometimes done. Mrs. Allanach slept in the kitchen within easy distance of his bed, with the alert, sleepless ear of the thorough nurse, and had to attend upon him several times every night.

He was still, nevertheless, able to walk about, round the cottage and garden, for he was restless and his old habit of wandering was strong upon him to the last. He even took considerable journeys along the Leochel to see old friends. One day that winter, he had gone down the burn alone—for he was too self-reliant to ask assistance, the offer of which his undying independence resented—and was found by Mrs. Allanach, who was alarmed at his absence, lying unconscious by the burn side alone, having fainted as on the way to church. He was with difficulty brought round, and was hardly prevailed upon to try to get home, wishing to be allowed to lie down again undisturbed.

Shortly after that, he made his last journey up the glen. He set out after midday, alone and without notice as usual, determined, it appeared, to visit his friend Charles Birse at Scuttery, two miles or more up the Leochel. The frost

had been very keen for days, and the roads were covered with ice, which made walking difficult even to the strong. Poor John fell on the way and cut his face badly, but not having fainted, he was able to gather himself up and continue his journey. When he appeared at his friend's, they were alarmed to see him covered with blood, for the wound had bled profusely. Mrs. Birse soon bathed the place, and washed the blood from his face and dress. With the help of a little stimulant, he was restored to somewhat of his old blitheness, and a warm cup of tea completed the renovation. The sturdy old traveller would not allow any one to accompany him homewards, saying he was quite able for the journey himself. Knowing the man, they allowed him to depart, after seeing him so far on his way.

It proved too much for him, however, with the loss of blood he had sustained and the state of the roads, and he fainted about half-way home. It was a blessing he did not fall into the burn which runs by the highway. There, happily, he was observed by Mary Munro, a young servant at a neighbouring farm, who chanced to pass along the road shortly after, fetching home a load of turnips in a wheel-barrow. She found him partially recovered, holding hard by the paling that ran along the stream, but so exhausted that, even with her strong arms, he could not move a step. She therefore emptied the turnips from the barrow, put him into it, and carried him along the road and up by the Droichs burn towards the cottage. Here she was noticed by Peeny Allanach, who had come to seek him. He was brought home by the two kindly women, and put to bed, utterly prostrate. He was unable to rise again for a fortnight. The doctor was sent for, and prescribed for

him, being of opinion that this loss of blood was the first serious cause of his death, which did not take place, however, for more than six months after. How very ill he must have been, to allow himself to be "hurled in a wheelbarrow," only those who knew the unconquerable mettle and high pride of the keen old soul can fully understand.

After this, he was less able to walk about, and had to be more carefully watched, to prevent his going far from home. But this needful care the stout spirit took very ill with—he had always been so very self-reliant and so accustomed, above most men, to do for himself even the most detailed domestic offices. He declared to the close of his life, even when most helpless, that his good nurse "took far ower muckle charge o'm;" and he used to oppose her assistance, saying that "that even his mither cu'dna hae done mair for him when he was a bairn; and he wasna gain' to be made a bairn o' noo!" Yet with all this, his appreciation of her kindness was very high, and it was frequently so expressed to herself and others.

I was very desirous to see the old man again, especially after I heard that he had become so weak, fearing that he might pass away before I should accomplish the visit. The winter of 1881, which was, as will long be recalled, one of the severest within the memory even of the aged, quite prevented my undertaking the journey across the uplands of Banff and Aberdeen, where the snow was unusually deep and where the railways were frequently blocked. At length, with the milder weather of March, I succeeded in reaching the Vale of Alford once more, six months before his death. The very day I arrived, the third of the month,

one of the heaviest snowstorms of the season began, and rendered all exit from the Vale impossible for about a week—a captivity made most agreeable through the happy hospitality at the comfortable manse. It was with the greatest difficulty, and only with the help of alpenstocks, that Mr. Gillan and I struggled up to Droughsburn through the snow, which had almost effaced the road in a few hours. During my stay, I managed daily to reach the cottage, though it looked well-nigh impossible, but only by taking the straightest path over field, dike and hill; for all landmarks were hidden from sight under the continuous blinding drift—a severe experience never to be forgotten.

I had written John of my coming, so as to prepare him for it, and he had been eagerly anticipating it for some time, rising at nights to go to meet me, and sometimes, during the day, asking his nurse to do the same or to accompany him. The unexpected shower of gold that had fallen upon him in the evening of his life in consequence of my appeal, had refreshed and strengthened him. It now roused his interest in my coming, and that morning he had been considerably exhausted by going to the door several times, eager for my arrival. When we entered, we found him seated in his great cosy chair, in the best room, close by the cheerful fire, beside Mrs. Allanach; for he could not now long be left alone. He looked tidy and comfortable, but painfully changed for the worse since I had seen him. His early excitement in anticipation of our coming had told upon his strength, and he looked quite absent-minded. When the minister shook hands with him, John scarcely recalled him and returned his greeting with a vacant look. It had to be explained to him who I was,

and even then, for some time, it did not seem to dawn fully upon him, so rapid were the transitions of strength and weakness, intelligence and dulness, through which he now passed. We seated ourselves and talked to the bright old lady and the other inmates, allowing him time to recover. This he gradually did, and he was able by-and-by to take part in the conversation with considerable brightness. But the day was too far advanced for him to become what he had been earlier, and he had soon to retire to rest. On seeing this, we left, after cordial parting and a promise from me to return on the morrow. We found our way home again with increasing difficulty, through the gathering storm.

The room in which he now lived was small but comfortable. The walls were adorned with pictures, plain and coloured, of Da Vinci's "Lord's Supper," Rubens's "Bearing the Cross," and other Bible scenes. The small window was hung with gauze curtains, and had a pretty bead basket pendent in its centre. The floor was covered with thick "clooty carpets" of John's weaving, and the whole formed a snug nest, pleasantly contrasting with the wild drifting snow without that obscured the windows.

During the four succeeding days while I stayed in the Vale, I spent as much time with John at Droughsburn as his strength was able to bear, retiring to the kitchen when he needed rest, to talk with his intelligent landlady. Her kindness to the weak old man, who was now restless, wandering and in many respects troublesome, and required unremitting attention, was beyond all praise; and it was well for John that he had such a nurse in his last days, who had known him in his vigour and respected his talents

and character. She was ably assisted at all times by her daughter Penelope,* as active and constant in work as the celebrated queen whose name she bore, and who had developed, since I saw her first, into blooming womanhood. At that time, too, a niece called Jessie was staying with them, whose power of managing John, as well as Peeny's, was remarkable; for that required, in his weaker turns, both strength and tact, fun and firmness.

When I arrived next morning, John looked bright and strong, and rose from his chair, though with difficulty, to welcome me. He expressed his concern at seeing me covered with the drifted snow, which was so deep round the cottage that it almost blocked up the door and shut out the light. He said it was "a terrible time," which reminded him of the winter of 1838, after he first knew Charles Black, and, like me, had to struggle through the drifts to get to Whitehouse; and of an earlier winter at Drumlithie, in 1811, when the corn was so bad after it that "it crunched between his teeth." These memories showed that this was one of his strong, clear-headed seasons, which it would be well to take advantage of. After morning greeting in the busy kitchen, I seated myself at the table beside John, and gradually led him to continue the reminiscences of his past life which the snowstorm had begun.

He was unusually clear and communicative, recalling what he had been in 1877, when we climbed the hill together; and I secured a long series of important notes regarding his history, which have been already embodied

* The long word "Penelope" was colloquially shortened into "Penny," or more frequently into "Peeny."

here. It was surprising to observe how minute were the details he gave, especially of his earlier days ; for, as with all old folks, the distant was nearer than the near in his memory. His recollections of his mother stirred his best affections. He always spoke of her with loving respect ; and when Mrs. Allanach did him any kindly service, such as wrapping the clothes round him in bed, he would murmur, in tremulous tones of feeling, that it reminded him of his mother. Never did he speak spontaneously, however, of another who should have been more to him than even a mother, and whom he once expected to be such. When I introduced the tender subject, after conversation had led naturally to it, he talked of his wife with painful hesitation ; and speedily tried to dismiss it, by saying, "Ye see, that's a' by noo," evidently desirous to forget for ever the secret shame and pain of his life. When I asked if he would not now care, after all these years, to meet her in the other world, the idea seemed to be new to him and gave him a deep and painful shock. He moved his hands deprecatingly, and was silent—which revealed the untold intensity of the hidden grief her conduct had caused him.

He was very lively in regard to his wanderings, and recalled, with astonishing vividness, his old impressions of the many places he had visited, some of which have already been given under that head. His military days were well remembered, and he was glad he had gone through them, telling tales of them with zest. His characterisation of the persons he had known was well put and often humorous. His memory of his friends and the happy past he had spent with them gave evident pleasure, though attended with sadness in proportion to their former intimacy, expressed

by the gathering moisture in the eye. The flowers roused his enthusiasm, and were linked with more of his past life and deeper memories than anything else, with a single exception. In talking of them now, he recalled the technical terms with surprising ease, though it cost him much effort, often unsuccessful, to remember the rarer ones. His harder or more dangerous adventures in search of them were dramatically related, and roused much of the old fire in eye, voice and manner. When he failed to recollect a word, he would bend his neck, scratch his head, say, "that was what-ye-ca'—what-ye-ca' ;" and if he did not succeed, which was always painful to him, he would excuse himself by saying that his "memory was noo gey failin', though it was ance a very guid ane ;" while regretting that I "hadna kent him in his better days." After he had talked for an hour or so, he got exhausted and had to give up. When I offered him refreshment, of which abundance had been provided, he accepted it with reluctance, but he often refused it, saying : "I was never muckle o' a drinker—never indulged ; I ha'd awa frae intoxicatin' liquors. Whisky's a hasty* concern, destructive to baith mind an' body, raisin' ye up to a great pitch and then lattin' you fa' doon a' at ance." It was noticeable that moral conceptions always roused his vigour, even under weakness.

At intervals, he passed through states of extreme debility, when he could with difficulty rise from his chair, and consciousness and memory became confused. This he himself attributed to rheumatism, but its true cause was the natural decay of great age, and, in the doctor's opinion, loss of blood and sluggish and intermittent action of heart.

* Quick and fiery, as in the phrase "a hasty fire."

On these occasions, he confounded time, place, and circumstances. For instance, when Mr. Gillan and I left the first day, he forgot, in one of these collapses, who we were, and, confusing us with ever-present memories of Charles Black, who lived at the mouth of the Nith, he suddenly asked "Whar' are yon men? They'll hae had to cross the Solway!" In these states of excessive weakness, his temper was much affected; for temper is the first and surest indicator of mental and physical condition in all of us, even in the healthiest. He would then become very cross and difficult to deal with, speaking sharply, refusing assistance when most necessary, and exhibiting a general spirit of rebellion, while it lasted. But the temper passed with the weakness that caused it, and he soon again became bright, hopeful and repentant. As Mrs. Allanach put it, "he was sune up and sune ower" at these seasons. When they came on, her management of him was that of a skilled tactician, combining firmness and kindness, as in the case of a sick child. She would talk to him quietly and cheerfully, express surprise when repulsed, clap him softly like an infant, and say, "Noo, noo! Ye're nae John ava the day; nae half a John," and use like soothing, bantering, and cheering words. Her attentions would be at first repelled; but he would by-and-by smile, return the clapping, and express sorrow, excusing himself by saying, "Fowk wears oot," and asking her never to mind him.

But it was no wonder, poor old body, that he became cross and moody, for his weakness at times was very great; while the old strong will, hard to subdue and never altogether overcome, rebelled against this unusual and depressing debility. The fretfulness exhibited was simply

the natural outward expression of this inward struggle between latent independent strength and the unaccountable and unaccustomed feeling of helplessness and need of assistance, which he had always objected to in his self-dependent solitude. His prostration was so great at times that he became quite blind ; asking them, for instance, to light the candle which was burning before him ! He was, on such occasions, put to bed for a while. He would soon rise again, refreshed and amiable, and become quite talkative, all the former clouds being dispelled and forgotten. His life was now a succession of April sunshine and shower, and the light, when it came, beamed all the brighter after the previous gloom.

During one of these blithe blinks, he mentioned to me the songs he used to sing, recited vigorously and humorously several lines in " Johnnie Cope," a favourite with him and Charles Black ; and, poor dear soul, now as the inner fire under these inspiring strains of other days blazed up into stronger flame, he rose from his chair, leant forward with his hands on the table, and, in trembling but surprisingly vigorous notes, sang a verse of the favourite old ballad called " The Blaeberries "—

" Will ye go to the Hielands wi' me ? "

He talked of the story it contained, and of " Scots wha hae " and " Auld Lang Syne ; " the last being mentioned with a natural sigh, raised by the feeling of waning strength and the remembrance of departed joys.

The fund his friends had recently subscribed, and his present comforts due thereto, affected him beyond expression, and brought the tears of genuine gratitude to his eye.

His deep gratefulness welled up in broken, child-like words all too weak to express his crowding feelings. In reality, the weight of obligation to distant unknown and generous sympathy seemed to oppress the old heart like a happy burden which at times seemed too heavy to be borne. I reminded him that he now sat "a free man." The very sound of the words inspired him with joyous vigour which sparkled in his eye, and was speedily succeeded by the gathering mists of emotion, and he only could brokenly utter, "Very good, very good, very good! admirin' good!" Then in real tones of earnestness, with a touch of anguish, he exclaimed, "I wis', I wis' I had seen you sooner!" as the recollection of the misery of the dark night spent in his cold bed in the winter of 1873, and the subsequent degradation of heart through absolute penury, once more returned, and let us hope, for the last time.

To relieve his sadness, I spoke encouragingly of the reputation he had deservedly won, and the late but genuine recognition of his life-long devotion to science, which would survive when he was gone. He looked proud of the honour, and sadness giving way to joy, he quietly said, "Ay, ay! Dae ye say sae?" Then the annoyances he had suffered for the sake of the flowers from the ignorant and unsympathetic came back to his mind in contrast to the present appreciation, and brought the remark, "They'll no seek to bather* me noo! But e'en then I was ower mony for them—ower knowin'!" He then recounted the story of the juniper bush on the braes of Tough.† His constant feeling, frequently expressed, was one of grateful comfort which he could scarcely realise as now his, and he always

* Bother.

† See p. 332.

deprecatèd its desert by saying, "Ye're makkin' me ower grand, ower grand ! Dinna be ower guid to me !"

In his weak states, his natural humility and fear of being made "over grand," as he put it, was curiously expressed. He could not then be prevailed upon to sit in the fine arm-chair that had been purchased for him—insisting that it "far ower fine, far ower braw" for him ; and, like the sturdy old soul he had been, accustomed all his days to hard fare and plain living, he said he had had always a hard seat to sit on, and he would use it to the last ! He was also timorous in trying to sit down in it, for it went away from behind him on its smoothly running casters, as he tried with difficulty, from his stiff joints, to take a seat there.

He was especially and proudly grateful for the Queen's gift, as presented to a poor, hidden man like him ! To raise his spirits, I suggested the possibility of Her Majesty visiting him, as she had done others, not being very far distant while staying over the hill at Balmoral. "Ay," said he, more than once, his face lighting up, "it was great prefarment, very great prefarment." Then, thinking himself still young and able to go out into the world, he continued, "Fowk'll be jokin' me aboot it !" But the reality of his position suddenly returned, and he added, "Ah, had it been but half a dizen years syne"—"half a dizen" being his constant expression at that time for a considerable period—"half a dizen years syne, I cu'd hae spoken till'r and thankit 'er. But noo, it'll be sune ower. Eh, man, ay ! Half a dizen years back, and I cu'd hae held discoorse wi' her ! But noo, noo it's ower late ; it canna be !" Then, after a pause of sadness, he continued, with

growing earnestness, "Ah, but she's a nice 'umman, a very hyoom'le * 'umman, and has aye been sae, I believe. God bless 'er!" The following night, the subject had recurred to him, and he rose in a dazed state in the dark, calling to Mrs. Allanach to "tell the Queen's men I'm ower waik to gae to kep† them the nicht, I'm no weel ava;" and he would only return to bed when she promised to do as he had asked her.

But the ever-present, ever-recurring subject of his thinking and talking was his life friend, Charles Black. As Mrs. Allanach said, "I never heard him speak sae muckle aboot ony body as aboot him; it was really won'erfu' hoo he likit that man." It was the same in talking to myself—that was the dominant topic of conversation, brightening his eye, inspiring new vigour when weak, and soothing him like a charm when irritated and when nothing else could. His memories of their first meeting, early studies at Whitehouse, and later intercourse were now the sweetest solace of his dying days.

The night before my last visit, he had not slept well, and was restless and excited. From my much questioning, he had thought me a lawyer after I left, an idea that recalled a disagreeable reminiscence of the time he was brought to court about his wife's son. When I entered, I saw he was dull, feverish and ill at ease, and he received me not in the most gracious manner, confounding me, I afterwards ascertained, with a fellow who had deceived him and got a lot of his books. He was very unwilling to

* Humble, meaning that she did not stand upon her elevated rank in her intercourse with her subjects.

† Too weak to go to meet them.

converse at all, and rising up shortly afterwards and moving his hands in angry deprecation, said, "I'll hae nae mair o't." Mrs. Allanach, who was seated by, explained to him who I was, that I had come a far way to see him, and had travelled that morning through the deep drift to say good-bye. But he would listen to nothing, and cried, "I ken naething aboot it and dinna care!" I remained silent, till Mrs. Allanach succeeded somewhat in allaying his annoyance and making him smile. He then rose, went to the window, and looked out at the huge snow-wreaths heaped against the panes, and at the shrouded landscape. He spoke of the "sair time" it was, which would be heard of for long. Deeming it wise to leave the room, to allow him to rest for a time, I went to the kitchen, followed shortly by his nurse, after she had settled him in his chair and still further pacified his perturbed spirit. Peeny went, in a little, to attend upon him, as her presence and services often succeeded when others' failed.

Not long after I left his room, he sent word by Peeny, that he was very sorry he had spoken as he had done and that he hoped I would return. I did so immediately. He received me with a smile and cordial shake of the hand, and said he did not know who I was at all but thought I was another man altogether, one who had stolen his books. We at once entered on the pleasantest relations, his old brightness having returned, and we sat long together alone by the fire, talking of many things, as we had done before. Poor good soul, he could not make amends enough for the temper he had unwittingly showed me, and his heart now opened out more than it had hitherto done. Nor could he refrain from frequently returning to the subject, saying :

"It was a mistak' in me—a great mistak'. I thocht it was somebody come to scrutineeze me. I didna ken ye ava, and I sent word wi' the lassie when I did. O, had ye but seen me twenty or thretty years syne! I was a different concern a'thegether then, and cu'd hae ga'en about wi' ye and shown ye the flo'ors, ilk ane o' them." I told him that I should like to have known and botanised with him then, but that I was happy and proud to know and respect him now; as I had done long before I saw him, having heard so much about him from his friend Charles. I told him also how Charles remembered and loved him, and ever would do so, till he should follow him to the grave. These words brought all the spirit into his face and thrilled him with a new tide of life, and he wept with mingled sadness and joy, hiding his face in his hands, while the tears rolled between and gradually relieved him.

He then handed me Charles's last letter to him, received a month before, which he asked me to read, though he had heard it often before. I read it in parts, broken by our mutual comments as I proceeded, while his increasing tears flowed unstinted and unheeded. Charles, addressing him as his "dear and much respected freend," said he was truly glad that the appeal in his favour had been so well responded to, and that his comfort in his old age was now secured. He thought he should have been able to see him, as he had long wished to do, if it had not been for the trying weather and the weight of sixty-seven years. He spoke of the pleasure Geology had also been to him, in which his study of Botany had greatly assisted him. "I often think," he went on, "if you and me had known something of it forty years ago, it would have told us wonderful

tales about the Great Creator." After some account of his family, Charles continued, "I really do intend to come and see you before long, and I trust we will be spared to meet each other. We will have much to speak about, for God's mercies and blessings to us both have been great, though we must confess we have been ill-deserving." After wishing him to write him if he could or to get some friend to do so for him, and expressing the happiness of himself and his wife to think that he was "so comfortable for the remaining years of his life," he subscribed himself his "old and true freend."

The effect of these simple, sincere words upon the man, supplemented by my accounts of Arbigland and Charles and Charles's love of him, was deep and touching. He wept truly like a child, in child-like unreserve and affection, that made it difficult or impossible not to join in his strong emotion; and part of his love for his friend overflowed on me in terms of confidence and appreciation. During the recital, he continually ejaculated, "Eh, ay! eh, ay!" When I concluded, he said, "I canna, canna say what I feel: an' the tears winna come richt"—for "the tears of bearded men" are wrung from the very depths. At length, he became calm, and drying his eyes, excused himself by saying, "I'm sair owercome the day, some way or ither; but I'm glad ye're here."

In the succeeding composure, we discoursed of the perennial subject of the flowers, to which he ever recurred; for Charles and the plants were indissolubly united in John's heart. "I wu'd hae been much overjoyed," he said, forgetting his weakness in the pleasure roused by his favourites, "to hae ga'en to the hills wi' ye, an' it hadna been sick

a terrible day." He spoke again of his introduction to the subject, through his "father" Charles, of his first "vulgar" attempts under his guidance, and of his subsequent progress and delight in the study. He talked also of the blessing his books had ever been to him. He had not, he said, bought many at a time, but only as he could afford them; and they were well chosen, he thought, for he "never likit varieties in readin' ony mair than in eatin'. Books," he warmly continued, "are *real* freends." "Yes," echoed I, quoting Wordsworth, "they are—

"‘A substantial world, both pure and good.’"

"They're a' that," he eagerly assented, "I cu'dna hae dune without them!" The plants then suggested Dunnottar, and the memory of his youthful strength and happy adventures there swept through his aged heart like an exhilarating breeze on the thymy crags themselves. Then, recalling the struggles of the Covenanters for God and for freedom, he spoke of these for some time, and then exclaimed, "O, I aye likit to read about thae times fine—excellent! And Charlie likit them tae; and he had a fine idea o' them."

After leaving him to rest for a little, I returned to bid him farewell. I told him that his comfort was now secured, and that he should not be removed from the cottage—a possibility that had disturbed him. He still deprecated being "ower weel treatit and made ower grand." I mentioned to him that a good lady was willing to send him any books he wished; but, while grateful for the kindly offer, he said that he did not care for more, as he could not now use them. I promised to write Charles Black of my visit and all we had said and done. "O yes!" replied he, with a

return of the old emotion, "write him for me, and tell him I write wi' a tear i' my ee, and thinkin' aboot auld lang syne." "I'll say," said I, "the very words you have used, John." "Ay, dae ye," replied he; "ay, dae ye. It'll gar * *him* drap a tear tee!"

I assured him that there were many interested in his happiness, and that I should be his friend to the very end. He then stood up in his frailty, and in tones of earnest solemnity, lifting his hands towards me, as in patriarchal blessing, exclaimed, "Ay, ay, that's vera guid, vera guid. Gweed be wi' ye, Gweed be wi' ye!" We shook hands warmly and long. Then, as cheerfully as I could under natural emotion, I told him I should come to see him again in summer, when the snow was gone and the flowers were blooming, and when he could tell me about them. "Ay, dae sae—every individual ane o' them." Then I left him as he stood, bathed in tears. It was for the last time. When next I saw the good man, he lay in the calm majesty of death.

* Make, or force.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE HAPPY AND HONOURED CLOSE.

JOHN remained in much the same condition for several months after my visit to Droughsburn in March. He was surrounded by every comfort, attended by the most assiduous of nurses, and regularly visited by his friends ; Mr. Gillan taking special charge of his affairs, and receiving and acknowledging all gifts, which continued to be sent. The poor soul still passed through the same rapid changes from remarkable keenness to extreme dulness, accompanied at times with exhibitions of trying temper, regretted and apologised for when the spasm had passed. He had no active pain, no real disease. His astonishing vitality made it evident that he would not depart till the last particle of the dying taper had burnt out.

In the beginning of May, when crossing the room one Sunday, he suddenly fell on the floor and cut his temporal artery. It bled profusely, but Mrs. Allanach quickly stopped it by applying a spider's web to the place. He was sponged and put to bed, but, in his feverishness, he could not rest there. In getting up, he re-opened the wound, and they sent for Dr. Simpson, who had been most attentive to him throughout, being much interested in his uncommon patient. The bleeding, meantime, was once more prevented by the same

simple but effective means. When the doctor arrived, he said at once that his life had been saved by the skilful use of the "moos wabs."* John, who had then one of his blither seasons, replied that he knew something better, which he could have got at the end of the house if the snow had not been on the ground, the remains of the severe winter—the *Plantago major*, Greater Plantain, or "the healing leaf" already spoken of,† whose virtues were known and praised by Pliny, George Herbert, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Shenstone, and many others. He said it was the best thing for stopping bleeding and healing cuts he knew, as he had often proved. He also said it was very good for allaying thirst, but not nearly so good for feverish thirst as Water Cress. How vital and tenacious are all ideas once truly grasped and acted on, as in John's astonishing memory of plants and their properties even in sickness and death!

When the doctor was mixing a soothing draught for his patient, John inquired what he was compounding, for his eyes were still as keen as in younger days and his old medical instincts all alive. The doctor told him it was *Hyoscyamus niger*, or Henbane,‡ and remarked that he had not found it in the Vale of Alford, but that he had seen it at Dunnottar, when he was a student in company with Professor Dickie. At once John's infirmity was forgotten under the charm of the thousand associations stirred by that one word, Dunnottar, and he talked of his youthful adventures and its Covenanting memories. To the last, the

* Spiders' webs. The word is Teutonic, originally meaning moss, and applied to things like it, as the Scotch word, and the French *mousse*, moss or foam.

† See p. 94.

‡ See p. 19.

keen old spirit asserted itself. Some time after this, the doctor had put some bromide of potassium into the porter which had been prescribed for his morning porridge, a dish he still greatly relished. When John was asked if he liked it, he said that he did, but that he "didna like the doctor's smugglin'," referring to his clandestine use of the drugs without telling him all about what he was doing.

John's weakness increased greatly after this accident, and his need of attendance became more constant and exhausting. At length, in the beginning of July, Mrs. Allanach found the work too much for her and her daughter, and she asked her son-in-law, John Taylor, who had then some leisure, to come to assist her and attend to his old friend. Mr. Taylor came at once, and remained with him till his death, a month afterwards. He nursed him, anticipating and supplying his wants like more than son, inspired by reverence and affection for the man, which was now raised to tenderness by the patient's weakness. It was an admirable and fortunate arrangement. It was also a strange and unexpected happiness to the old botanist, that one of his most attached pupils should return the benefits he had received from him by soothing his dying pillow. The task was not light, either by night or day, for John gradually became helpless, and had to be lifted in and out of bed ; but the strong arms that bore him were both able and willing.

The last time John was capable of going outside was on the 16th of July, when he was unusually vivacious, and went twice to the cottage door, leaning on the arm of his friend, to gaze, in the sweet summer light, on the dear familiar scene, on which he had looked so long, across the

overflowing Droicks burn. The sight of his once beautiful garden—

“Where sweetnesse evirmore inough was ;
With flowré white and blewe, yellowe and rede,”

as Chaucer sings, now saddened him, from its very strength of untended life ; while he that had so diligently watched over its flowers was now fading away. He never stood under the blue heavens again, and only once was able to rise from bed, to which he now retired for the last time.

His friends still continued to visit him regularly to the end. Some of the neighbouring clergymen kindly came to read and pray with him, services the good man always enjoyed. One day, when very weak, after a special message of emergency had brought the doctor, the Rev. Mr. Brander, of Alford, called. On seeing the man so ill, he sat for some time in silence by his bedside, and then softly asked him if he would like him to read a little. The old man faintly replied, “It winna need to be muckle, than,” evidently feeling himself too weak to bear more. The sweetest pastoral of the ancient Hebrew shepherd, so singularly appropriate to the time, was quietly recited ; soothing the dying man with its invigorating assurance, that when he should walk through the Valley of the Shadow, into which he was just entering, he should fear no evil, because accompanied and comforted by the Good Shepherd.

The whole poem seemed like a rapid review of his life. He had verily, in a more literal sense than common, been surrounded by “green pastures,” though at times he had had to pass through trials, which had proved to be “still

waters." Now, in old age, he had a table prepared for him, in the presence of his enemies, penury and despair, for of human enemies he had none ; his head was anointed with the oil of gladness, and his cup was running over with the freewill offerings of admiration and the tendance of affection. "Surely," the old man's heart would deeply respond—"surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life ;" while the faith that had consistently and firmly sustained him throughout his long and trying life, would, even in dissolution, enable him triumphantly to believe that he should "dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." When he had finished the lyric, Mr. Brander asked if he should pray with him. John replied in weakness, "Ay, jist a few words ;" and words fit though few were offered for the departing pilgrim.

After his decease, a friend of the dead met a man in the neighbourhood who affected piety of the sterner, exclusive sort, and who would in a moment ask any one the question "Are you saved?" In speaking of John's recent death, this friend inquired if he did not think John Duncan was a God-fearing man, according to the general opinion. He replied, with the rigid cruelty of that class of religionists, that he was sure he was not. When asked why he thought so, he referred to this episode of the shortened reading and petition, which had been retailed with exaggeration in the neighbourhood, and he mentioned, with an ominous shake of the head, that John had, on his death-bed, asked the minister's prayer to be short! This saint forgot his Master's repeated injunctions and example, to avoid long prayers, which, according to Him, were a sign, not of sanctity, but of heathenishness—a truth echoed by all

His best disciples, who have felt, with Luther, that "the fewer words, the better prayer." Perhaps if this man had known the whole circumstances, his judgment might not have been so harsh; let us hope so—for, as Hood truly and sympathetically reminds us—

"Evil is wrought by want of thought
As well as want of heart."

Happily and justly, this rash estimate was not shared by the clergyman to whom John's natural words were spoken. As he says, he knew the man and liked the blunt, honest answers he used to receive from him on religious as well as other matters, "which scorned the slightest tinge of pretension and waived all ceremony." One day shortly after, on parting with him, Mr. Brander remarked that God was "the hearer and answerer of prayer." Opening his closed eyes and looking up into his face, John replied, with an emphasis and in a way that could not be mistaken, "Ay, ay, I ken that!" "It is impossible," says Mr. Brander, "to describe the manner in which these simple words were uttered; but to me they conveyed a full conviction of the firm faith and the quiet repose of apostolic assurance of the man."

In the middle of July, Mrs. Morrison's gift of a fine arm-chair arrived, delayed thus long through the illness of the generous donor—alas! too late to be used by the old man, whose declining years it was meant to comfort. About the same time, he received an invitation to attend a Joint Meeting of Scientific Societies, held at Elgin on the 29th and 30th of the month, the first of the kind in the north, the secretary being unaware that John was so near his end. Three of the societies concerned had elected him

an honorary member, and the old scientist would have been welcomed with enthusiastic respect ; but his earthly studies were now closed, and he looked forward shortly to join "the great assembly" on the other side—

"Where everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers."

This he did ten days after the pleasant union at Elgin.

He now gradually grew weaker and more helpless, and his breathing became increasingly laborious, though he had no suffering. To the last, he enjoyed bright intervals, when he talked freely with his attendant, of the past and the future. Mr. Taylor asked him one day if he had any advice to give to the young who might read the story of his life. He counselled them, amongst other things, as a dying man reviewing his past experiences, "To keep good company, and to study some branch of Natural Science, which would save them many a blot, and inspire them with untold pleasure." To the very close, the delights of science and the intellectual and moral gains it had brought to himself and would bring to all, were ever present to him, and were the subjects of many an exhortation.

He had no fear of dying, but was filled with a calm, trustful peace in its prospect ; as he said one morning, "I'm just waitin' my time." On being then asked if he had any message to send to me, he replied, in great weakness, "Just tell'm I'm deein' !" "And are you going to a better place ?" returned John Taylor. "Ay !" was the prompt, firm, but simple reply. "Have you anything to say to Charles Black ?" "Just the same as to Mr. Jolly ;" and Mr. Taylor says that at the mention of Charles's name, "a glow of joy passed over his countenance, and his eyes

brightened." Mr. Taylor then read, with his consent, the third and the fourteenth chapters of St. John's Gospel, which breathed soothing peace to the dying Christian, and whispered to him of the near "mansions" in the "Father's house" which he hoped soon to enter. After the reading was concluded, John remarked, in quiet accents of peace, "I'm very frail, but I hae nae trouble noo;" words that had, no doubt, a mental as well as a physical reference.

Some time before his death, he again spoke of his grave, and expressed a desire to be buried in Alford churchyard, without, however, indicating any special spot there. He wished his last resting-place to be marked by "ane o' nature's rough stanes"—some natural stone undressed by any tool, like the lover of nature he had been. A similar wish has not unfrequently been expressed by other lovers of nature, both scientific and poetic: amongst others, by Macodrum, the poet of North Uist, who lies in the solitary graveyard of Kilmuir on its far-seen knoll, under a mass of rude, grey, gnarled gneiss, selected by himself; in the midst of the green "machars" * whose praises he had sung, and within hearing of the solemn requiem of the wild Atlantic that lashes in grandeur the island of his birth.

John continued gradually to sink. But his tenacity of existence was even yet quite astonishing, and his candle burnt down to the very socket. He became so wasted and light that he could be lifted like an infant. At times, there still recurred paroxysms of strength and almost fierceness,

* The Gaelic name for those wide flats that face the Atlantic, on the western side of the Uists. The same word for a plain occurs as the name of one of the triple divisions of Galloway, "the Moors, the Machars, and the Rhinns."

each succeeded by a relapse into greater weakness, like the sudden upward flickerings of the expiring taper before it subsides into final darkness. His breathing grew more and more difficult, and was attended by an ominous sound in the lower chest ; but he never complained of any suffering. Like Fontenelle, he frequently said, " I hae nae pain ; " and he might have added, like the brilliant Frenchman, " I have only a little difficulty in keeping up life." In his quiescent periods, which lasted longest, he was perfectly calm and resigned, waiting peacefully for the close. His gratitude for the unremitting services rendered him was deep, and amidst all his helplessness, it was frequently expressed in thrilling whispers of thanks. Some days before his death, when he was lifted in his friend's arms, he murmured the feeble but earnest words, " May the Lord bless you ! " twice repeated. When asked, on the same day, if he had any message for me—for Mr. Taylor wrote me regularly of his state—he muttered several things in an inaudible voice, the only words that could be made out being, " I'm very sober."

A day or two before the end, Mr. Brander prayed with him very briefly. In doing this, he used the expression " the God of Nature and the God of Grace." Notwithstanding his deep prostration, the words struck an old congenial chord, and the dying man opened his eyes, and with an earnest gaze and firm grasp of the hand, he whispered—it was all he was able to do—" Very comprehensive ! He *is* the God of Nature and the God of Grace ! " They then parted for ever, and as the clergyman walked down the burnside, he felt, as he says, " that in John's heart, these words had touched two chords, the one

responsive to the harmonies of Nature, which he had listened to so long, and the other almost ready to burst into the melody of Heaven."

The evening before he died, John Taylor raised him gently into a sitting posture, and propped him up with pillows, which seemed to relieve him. In reply to a question if he did not feel easier, he gratefully murmured, "Oo, ay!" and lay back in full repose. These liquid vowels were the last syllables he ever uttered. His mouth never rightly closed again after speaking them, and he died with his lips in the same attitude of grateful consent with his lot, in which his spirit had lived so long and so truly, humble and hard as it had been, and from which, by a wise transmutation of soul, he had extracted such deep joys.

He continued to breathe heavily to the last, his chest doubly heaving with each involuntary respiration. When softly asked how he felt, he seemed to make an attempt to reply, but the features were fixed and no sound issued. John Taylor remained faithfully with his friend and teacher till the end. After four o'clock on the morning of Tuesday, the 9th of August, no pulsation could be felt, beyond an occasional flutter which told that the heart yet beat. Life was slowly ebbing—ebbing out into the great ocean of eternity.

He survived, however, till past noon. A kindly neighbour who had come to inquire for him was then sitting by his bed, while John Taylor watched in silence for the latest lingering breath. A sudden change in the countenance arrested their attention, as she rose to go. One long but silent respiration followed, like a higher ripple in a quiet sea, and then another longer and harder, and all was over :

it was the last. It was eighteen minutes past twelve. Mrs. Allanach, who had been urgently sent for, and her two daughters, then softly but eagerly entered the room on which the great shadow had just descended. "I doo't he's awa!" said Mary Emslie. "He's gone," returned John Taylor. "Oh, dear!" burst out his old nurse, "it's sad I su'dna hae seen the end, though I hae watched lang for't." Then followed the strange dread silence felt at such a moment, only broken, or rather more truly expressed, by the ticking of the clock, which stood like a calm sentinel in the corner of the room and repeated the inexorable tread of time, now loudly audible though till then unheard. The women looked at each other for a little with the silent utterance of natural awe and emotion, and then began to prepare for the last offices to the dead.

Mr. Taylor soon after set out for Alford to make arrangements for the funeral. A cold north-east wind was then blowing, and the sky was overcast with heavy clouds, recalling the chilling penury in which the life of the departed had been spent. On his return, these had all passed away, the day became clear and bright, and the sun went down behind the hill above the cottage in unusual glory. By the time he reached home, the orb of the harvest moon hung in the south, large, round, and red. As he entered the chamber of death, the moon looked in through the little window in placid beauty, lighting up the room, and flushing the pale face of his dead friend with a touching halo, as he lay stretched on the table in the centre, beneath the snow-white linen that now shrouded him. The sweet evening light and the double beams of sun and moon that had gilded the scene, were beautiful and appro-

priate emblems, as he could not but think them, of the real glory that had irradiated his lowly pilgrimage, and dispelled the sorrows that brooded there by the blessed influences of nature, the delights of higher thought and the sanctities of religion. The young man stood for a time in silence and veneration, and consecrated himself anew to kindred noble aims.

Everything was prepared by attentive friends for the funeral, which was delayed for some time that I might be present. I arrived in the Vale on Saturday, and went up that afternoon to Droughsburn, in a beautiful autumn evening that flooded the valley of the Leochel with a charming light. "To me alone there came a thought of grief." The exquisite stillness, the quiet sweetness of the hollow in which the cottage nestled, with its blue smoke rising heavenwards, all spake of "something that was gone." The garden was there in its unconscious vigour, but the kindly hand that had gathered its flowers from far and tended them so well was cold in death. The roof of the old workshop was dilapidated and sunken downwards. Its thatch was broken and covered with parti-coloured moss, where flourished stitchwort, sorrel, groundsel, ragweed, broom, and spiky grass; and the lintel bent under the weight of the falling roof, as if in sympathy with its departed lord. And the dead hero lay in his coffin in the centre of the silent room, while his shrunken face looked upwards with eager marble gaze that seemed straining into futurity.

His shroud was appropriately adorned with a selection of the plants from which he had drawn his dearest joys. These had been expressly chosen by John Taylor, to

symbolise his life, as well as, like John Milton's "bells and flowerets" for his dead friend—

"To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lay."

They went with him to the grave. On his breast, lay a sprig, in full blossom, of his favourite, the *Linnaea borealis*, to signify his devotion to the science created by the man whose name it bore; and beside it the uncommon Serrated Winter-green (*Pyrola secunda*),* as a proof of the discoveries he had made of the rarer species and their habitats. At his head, drooped some faded rose leaves, as sweetest tokens of the decay of even the best and dearest. By his side, was placed a specimen of the *Mimulus ringans*,† as a specimen of the plants he had introduced from a distance; in his right hand, a bunch of water-cress, suggestive of the hardships he had endured in his studies and the simple tastes that had sufficed him; and at his feet, a branch of the Spurge Laurel,‡ with its bright green leaves and scarlet berries, a cherished plant which grew in the garden before his door—a fit emblem of the man himself, sending forth its pretty florets before the leaves, like our own blackthorn, amidst the snows and blasts of winter, and only reaching its highest beauty in the maturity of autumn. He lay on a bed of the sweet-scented peppermint, amidst which the Droichs burn had so often sung to him its quiet song, as it perfumed the air with its grateful fragrance. The sight of the dead was an impressive, inspiring vision and an abiding memory.

But amidst the natural sadness, the dominant feeling was one of "silent homage paid to mind." As Mr. Taylor

* Found by him on the opposite side of the Leochel. See p. 395.

† See p. 322.

‡ *Daphne Mezereum*. See p. 324.

accompanied me on my return down the valley, not far from the cottage, we passed through a field of newly mown hay, which shed its delicate odour on the evening breeze ; and it seemed to us to carry a happy augury of the future greater influence John Duncan might yet wield, which, faint though pleasant as it had been in life, would, like the hay and the Scented Woodruff, become stronger and sweeter after death.

The funeral took place on Monday the 15th of August. The day was calm and agreeable. The enclosing hills seemed to shut out the cottage more seclusively from the world, and the quiet that pervaded the scene breathed

“Austere

But happy feelings of the dead.”

The gathering was large and representative, of neighbours and friends, several from a distance, come to do the last honours to departed worth. The chastened assembly stood round the door beside the old wild-flower garden, that spake of its dead master. Mr. Gillan read the prayer of Moses, the man of God, with its sad burden of the “labour and sorrow” of life, written amidst the dim light of the ancient Jewish faith ; followed by St. Paul’s powerful argument regarding the “mystery” of immortality, appropriately based on the analogies of plant life, and his pean of victory over death and the grave, which closes with the philosophical assurance that “our labour is not in vain in the Lord”—on which the experience of John Duncan was a suggestive commentary. The minister of the church John had so long attended offered a trustful and intelligent prayer, touching on the lessons of the life now closed. Friendly hands then bore the coffin to the hearse by the

side of the Droichs burn, which flowed, under John's aromatic flowers,

“Dancing to its own wild chime,
As laughing at the lapse of time.”

The procession then wended its solemn way down the Leochel, along which John's eager feet had so often trod, to the old churchyard of Alford, amidst its tall trees, where he had wished to be laid. There, surrounded by uncovered heads, his dust was reverently deposited, while a handful of earth and a flower were dropped by the author on the coffin. Then the whole was buried from sight and covered over with kindly sod, embedded with wild flowers, which now blossom over the quiet heart that had loved and studied them so long.

He rests close by the entrance to the church, beside honoured dead of the Vale of Alford, the lowly weaver not the least of these.

A tall granite obelisk now marks the spot, bearing the simple inscription: “To the Memory of John Duncan, Weaver and Botanist. Born at Stonehaven, 19th December, 1794. Died at Droughsburn, 9th August, 1881. Erected with part of the Gifts of Admirers throughout Britain, the rest being devoted to the Promotion of Science amongst the Young in the Vale of Alford.” After the date of his death, across the middle of the tablet, a sprig of his favourite, the retiring and uncommon *Linnaea borealis*, is sculptured, with its double leaves and drooping florets; as an appropriate symbol of the rare and enthusiastic love of nature that had brightened and blessed the life of him who sleeps so well below. In accordance with his dying wish, a rough block of one of “nature's stones,” on which no tool has ever passed, will be placed upon his grave.

CHAPTER XL.

DUNCAN'S CHARACTERISTICS AND CHARACTER.

IT will now be well to gather the scattered threads of our presentation of the man, and weave them into a closer web, while inserting additional colours to complete the fabric.

Physically, John Duncan inherited an excellent constitution, being remarkable healthy, "teuch," as he said of himself, and unusually enduring ; and he was never laid up with sickness all his days. In stature, he was short, being at his best only five feet seven. Muscular and spare, he was never "what you call a heavy man," as he remarked—a style of body which his abstemious habits, great activity, and much walking preserved to the end. His general appearance, especially in his later years, was what was reckoned "odd," even in his own time, as has been frequently noted, and his peculiar, old-fashioned garb increased the quaintness of his aspect ; so that latterly, in the streets of Aberdeen, he drew the attention of passengers as a kind of Rip Van Winkle of the early century, just reawakened to the modern world.

His head was larger than common, and indicated unusual capacity of both thought and feeling.* It showed

* Its dimensions, as taken by his friend John Taylor, who is a practical phrenologist, were— $22\frac{1}{8}$ inches in circumference, $5\frac{3}{8}$ inches.

the projecting brows of the keen observer, the broad forehead of the thinker, the lofty crown that betokened kindliness and piety, and the breadth between the ears that indicated immense energy and power of work. His countenance was striking and pleasant, and his firm features proved him to be a man of strong, nervous temperament, keen, clear-sighted, and active, full of the vigour and resolution that command success, with the quiet shrewdness and humour of the Scottish peasantry; while the deep-set eyes, their colour hidden by the penthouse brows, looked as if they could see much where most would see nothing.

His extreme shortsightedness interfered all his life with his proficiency as a reader, and to some extent with the prosecution of his botanical studies, necessitating in these more stooping and groping than would otherwise have been required. But, as is often the case with near-sighted people, he never needed to use spectacles, and his eyes remained good to the last; so that he could read the smallest print with ease till he was eighty-seven, and never used any other than a very small-print pocket Bible.* This continued nearness of sight had also another interest-

from the ear to the top of the forehead, and $7\frac{3}{8}$ inches from the ear to the crown. The measurement from the ear to the occiput or top of the back is not to be depended on, from the accident by which it was broken. (See p. 74.) The average measurements in this country are—20 to 21 inches in circumference, $4\frac{1}{2}\frac{8}{10}$ from ear to top of forehead, or individuality, $5\frac{1}{2}\frac{8}{10}$ from ear to top of head; the last two, according to George Combe, being the average of twenty representative specimens.

* The "Paragraph Bible" issued by the Religious Tract Society, the print of which is sufficiently trying even for young eyes. The possession of a copy of the Scriptures with the modern innovations on the old verses and the like, shows also his intelligent love of progress in even such conservative religious subjects.

ing aspect, for it prevented him, notwithstanding his enjoyment of nature, from ever seeing and enjoying the general aspects of a broad landscape, whether of earth or sky, with their special beauties. In fact, it rendered him blind for life to the pleasures of expansive scenery, a sore deprivation to a man who loved nature so deeply. This was, no doubt, one reason for his preferring Botany to Astronomy, seeing that long sight is all-in-all for the stars, whereas with plants, he could bring the subjects of his study as close to his eyes as he pleased.

His tastes were throughout severely simple. He was always content with the very plainest fare, limited to the lowest scale conceivable for bare subsistence. Like Chaucer's model parson, "he cowde in little thing han suffisance;" nay, as Dryden, describing the same good man, says, he "made almost a sin of abstinence." Of meat, he ate little all his days, for it then was much more costly and uncommon than now; and he never saw it except when visiting his better-to-do friends. At home, the staple food of his life was plain water brose and porridge, sometimes with milk, but often without, taken not seldom three times a day. In the field, it was a piece of bannock or a little oatmeal, and water from the mountain stream, seasoned with nature's own savour in water-cress and appetite, as has been told. Even tea, for the most of his life, he never used, but rather despised as a womanish luxury; and it was only when the infirmities of age made some stimulant desirable, that he began to relish it.

Could anything be more natural, unsophisticated, and primitive? And yet, on such fare—hardly more than the widow's "handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a

cruse"—this man lived an unusually long and active life of both work and thought, and enjoyed the highest health and vigour. In this respect, his experience is a fresh testimony to the fact which modern scientific cookery is demonstrating—that a simpler, more vegetarian diet would be healthier and better for us all.

Yet with all this plainness of food, or perhaps because of it, his appetite was unusually strong, and remained so to the last. He was, as one of his young friends at Milton observed, "a hale-stamach man," that is, a man with a whole or healthy stomach. His simplicity of taste, notwithstanding this strength of digestion, is well illustrated by an incident related by James Black.

John ate, as a rule, Mr. Black observes, whatever was placed before him heartily and contentedly, and one thing only at a time, never mixing meat and potatoes together, for instance ; and James had often to resort to artifice, to avoid giving offence, in order to get the due proportions observed. This want of preference sometimes made his friend think that his sense of taste was defective, an idea that was increased by his general "hard and horny" aspect ; and tempted, as he confesses, by him who sat "squat like a toad" by the ear of mother Eve, he determined to test it one day when John came late to dinner, and he himself was left free to experiment.

There was a bottle of pickles on the table. "Will you have some pickles, John?" asked he. "Oo, ay," replied John, "I carena. Pickles? What's that?" Not being able to answer precisely, James merely said, "Mixed pickles, John ; very nice indeed!" "Oo, ay," returned he ; "weel, I can eat onything, wi' ae single exception—honey ; I

canna manage honey." In a trice, James forked out some of the biggest pieces he could find and put them on John's plate. Now came the moment to solve the problem, whether John had any taste in that queer, leathery-looking mouth of his. If that lump of cucumber nearest his hand, so green, so cold, so intensely acid, does not result in at least a wry face, the thing is settled in the negative.

Once, twice, thrice—missed ; meat every time. John had got on to the war, the Russo-Turkish war then raging, and he was a keen "bag-and-baggage" man. James began to think of doing something to help him to express himself and lead to his taking the cucumber ; when lo, he spits a great lump of gherkin on his fork, whole, as he lived ! But no. "Confound the Turks !" said James ; "take your dinner, John, or it will be spoiled." But the exhortation was unheeded. Waving his hand above his head, fork, gherkin and all, John tried to give vent to his indignation. As James feared he might notice the pickle there, he struck in, "Quite right, John. I would sweep the last sinner of them out of Europe, sweep every harem and mosque of them, and sweep the very earth on which they trod—sweep and make such a dust till you couldn't see your finger before you, and the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn were coloured like clay bree !" John held up his hand with the gherkin before him, and, bringing it down firmly on the table, he summed up his friend's harangue in a single word, so like him—"Purged !"

John gazed at the orator with a look of admiration, and evidently satisfied that his heart was in the right place, promptly popped the entire pickle into his mouth ! Now came the proof that what James had taken for leather

or something like it was not leather at all, but a live membrane, just like yours and mine. One squeeze, and John's mouth filled to overflowing with water, which oozed out all round. He raised the edge of the tablecloth; looked to the floor, meaning to drop it; noticed the carpet; shut his eyes, shuddered visibly, and bolted it! A moment's silent pause after this feat, and then, turning over with his fork the remaining pieces on the plate and closely examining them, he asked what that stuff was called. James answered, with all gravity, "Mixed pickles, John." "Mixed?" replied he, in perplexity. "I think it *is* mixed. But what is it mixed wi'?" "Well," explained James, "they consist of various kinds of vegetables, mixed together and pickled." "Oh! It disna mater," returned John. "That's twa things noo, then." "What two things?" persisted his friend. "Honey and that stuff—I can eat nether. Dae ye eat muckle o' that yersel' noo, Jamie?" queried John. "Well, not much," replied James. "Na, I was thinkin' sae!" chuckled John, as he attacked his dinner and the Turks again. When he finished, he examined the pickle bottle and its label with silent criticism, and seemed finally to come to the conclusion that such fierce condiments were actually in use amongst civilised nations.

His extreme poverty induced a marked peculiarity—namely, an exaggerated estimate of the value of money. This seems a paradox in one who had so little of it and pursued it less, and whose whole life seemed to be a despising of it for higher things. Nevertheless, it is true. His labour at the loom was so unremunerative, even with so capital and laborious a workman in the prime of life, and every mite he saved represented so much hard toil

and daily self-denial in expenditure, that he placed, and couldn't but place, an inordinate value on even a few shillings. He once told James Black of "a great loss" he had sustained during a harvest in the Lothians, when a rascal borrowed from him and decamped. "How much was it?" inquired James. "A lot, a great lot o' money," he replied. Being curious to find out how much it really was, but knowing John's wonderful reticence, he bluntly asked him to state the exact amount. "Nearly a paper note," warily returned John. "Perhaps fifteen shillings?" suggested his friend. "Oo, a lot mair than that," he earnestly replied. "Seventeen and six?" "Ay," said John, impressively and sadly, as if again realising the pain of the theft; "ay, ilka bawbee o't! Think o' that!" And James did think of it, and with surprise and pain, as he says, and to this day still recalls it, for it was an incidental but striking revelation of his poverty.

Yet, dear as money thus become to him—and may none of us ever know the dire need that forced in poor John such natural but excessive estimate—he could not hoard it, as some natures would have done in the circumstances, or gather it to increase his comfort, or invest it in a house and holding of his own, as some of his friends did. Like them, he did invest his savings, but in something very different—in what was dearer to him than all other possessions, in his one dissipation, the tools of his intellectual trade, in books! This sheds a strong side light on the value he put on books, on the strength of his intellectual appetite, and on the pure necessity mental food was to him. As he said at our last interview, "I cu'dna keep frae buyin' buiks." It also increases our astonishment, shared by his

neighbours, at the large library he was able to acquire under such narrow circumstances, which was surprisingly extensive even by middle life. But it is the old story over again, of the will finding a way.

John's temper was naturally warm, if not keen ; but it was generally held in good control, even in argument, till that waxed too hot, when he would strike out in some characteristic expression. As to his command of temper, Charles Black is very decided, and similar testimony is borne by other friends. In his later years, when the infirmities of age weakened his self-restraint, he began to manifest impatience and give way to bursts of crossness as we have seen ; but these were generally evanescent, and passed away with the weakness that caused them. It speaks highly for his moral strength, that, possessing naturally fervid combative feelings impatient of opposition, and having passed through those peculiar domestic trials that affect temper perhaps above everything else, he should have maintained throughout life the generally even disposition he did. His treatment of his wretched wife under her continued persecution of him for so many years, is a monument to the man's philosophy and forbearance, which nothing but a strong will, sustained by high moral purpose and powerful self-control, could have achieved.

His kindliness of heart was a marked characteristic ; as one of his friends said, "he wi'dna do hairm to onything." When staying at Netherton, after carrying a web to a "gude wife" near Monymusk, he was returning through the heather according to custom, when his attention was drawn by the piteous screams of a poor hare that had been caught in a hidden snare. John, "whose heart was all

compassion even to the lower animals," as Mr. Beveridge, who relates the story, remarks, cut the string and let poor poosie go free. On returning home, he told the adventure with much feeling; but, instead of praise, was met with contemptuous upbraidings for his sheepishness in letting off "the bawd;" surely, when it was in his power to make the pot play brown, he might not have been so silly! John indignantly retorted that, besides being dishonest and a crime requiring to be hidden, it would have been pitiless cruelty to kill the poor beast, which they should never get him, at least, to do, whatever they might say or think.

There lived at Netherton, in a cottage near the weaving shop, an idiot lad, who, like many such weakly children, was the apple of his mother's eye. At intervals, this poor creature would crouch for days, gazing into the fire and refusing all food. Duncan took a kindly interest in the harmless soul, and they became fast friends. Jamie would sit for hours beside John, amused by his drollery, while he watched the wonderful play of the loom and was soothed by its music. Nothing roused John's fiercest anger more than any attempt, however slight, to make fun of his simple and serious companion, which many tried to do in those rougher times; and he would at once seize on the first thing that came to hand and throw it at the offender, after warning, in order to punish him severely, if he did not at once desist. All which and like friendliness and protection won the very heart of the innocent.

When John was forced to stoop to pauperism, the parochial board kindly ordered, for several years, a distribution of six hundred-weight of coals to the paupers in mid-winter—a grateful boon, especially in the cold work-

shop at Droughsburn. This he only once accepted in full for himself, kindly and characteristically asking it to be given, except one hundred-weight, to a poor imbecile who had long lived in the neighbourhood, and whom he deemed more needy than himself—a simple but beautiful action, in its degree recalling the noble self-denial displayed on the field at Zutphen: “thy need is greater than mine!”

He was noted for his obliging helpfulness on all occasions, and he was prepared at any time to walk long distances to assist his neighbours in every way he could. Many was the patient he cured, many the garden he dressed, many the tree he pruned, the pleasure of the deed his sole reward. Charles Black expressively says that in natural kindliness, “John Duncan was ‘a man after God’s own heart.’”

It was also a pure delight to him to share his stores of knowledge with all that showed the least desire to receive them, a pleasure that rose almost to the strength of propagandism. As one of his Auchleven friends remarked, he was “grateful and proud to be listened to,” and he felt “obliged to you if you paid attention to him.” His desire to lead the young to higher things was a beautiful trait constantly acted upon, and a proof of high moral health.

His gratitude for benefits received, however small, was sincere and intense. Mrs. Emslie, of Auchleven, says that it was something extraordinary; and that it was generally expressed in the simple words, “Ye’re very kind, very kind,” but uttered in such a tone of over-gratefulness, as it seemed to her, that it made her refrain from offering him even a cup of tea so frequently as she would have done.

He was honest to the very core, and no pain was greater to him than that of getting into debt. In spite of his small wages from an increasingly poor and decaying trade, he owed no man anything till he was compelled in his destitution to fall on the parish. So sterlingly upright was he in all things, that, as Mr. Brewster, the secretary of the Auchleven Society, put it, "he was above, far and away above, even using any other person's information without full acknowledgment." At my last visit to John, in speaking on the subject and of a case in which he had suffered by its violation, he exclaimed, "O honesty, honesty! I do like honesty!"

His orderliness in all he did would have made him be counted a martinet by most. This was apparent in the neatness with which he kept his property in the confined space where he lived. In all his transactions in trade, he cultivated thorough business habits, regularly keeping a ledger and rendering accounts for everything he weaved—a proceeding uncommon and quite unnecessary in the work of a country weaver.

His tidiness in person and dress and his care in the preservation of his possessions were something quite remarkable, as has already been seen in the way he brushed and folded his clothes. The fact that he possessed and used the same suits for fifty years, and preserved them presentable to the end, requires no comment. His desire to keep his dress from possible harm reached the eccentric: as when he walked almost constantly with turned-up trousers, even in the critical city; and when, on entering a carpeted room, he always dusted even a drawing-room chair with his napkin and blew off any possible remaining dust,

before depositing his precious hat upon it, old and worn though it was—oblivious that the lady of the house might be of opinion that it was his hat that required brushing and not her chairs in her best room! The success is simply beyond praise with which he preserved the frail contents of his herbarium, without any of the means now abundantly available to botanical students—under such miserable and seemingly impossible conditions, amidst the constant and virulent attacks of insects, specially potent in such confined thatched cottages, their choicest nurseries and habitations.

John's unusually reticent and retiring disposition made him, to a great extent, shy and distrustful of strangers, and indeed of all but his intimates; so that he seemed to outsiders "a terrible distant creature," as Mrs. Allanach felt even to the end. He never blossomed out, never opened his sensitive affections, except amongst his most trusted and congenial friends; and it was only then that the real depth and kindly warmth of his heart made itself fully felt. This backwardness in the presence of others checked the outward expression of his feelings even to his friends, unless when strong emotion compelled utterance, as at my last interview with him. At these times, such exhibitions surprised and pained himself, as they always do beings of that type, especially in Scotland; feeling as if the holy of holies had been forcibly violated and opened to vulgar gaze.

His natural secretiveness had also been greatly increased by the bitter need he had, during the most of his life, of hiding the domestic griefs which preyed on his heart, and which might have led to questionable indulgences

to hide them from himself, had he not possessed higher resources. Even his best friends were sometimes disappointed and pained by this want of emotive utterance, except when he was much moved. James Black, between whom and John—though radically dissimilar in many respects—there existed a true and lasting friendship, and whose warmth of nature is a dominant characteristic, used to feel pained by this chilliness of outward manner in meeting him. “He never,” he complains, “came spontaneously forward to shake hands. I had every time to lay hold of his and do all the pressing and shaking, while he neither aided nor resisted. And such hands! So stout, so rough, so gnarled, so funnily put together! Warm, clean, and dry, but otherwise as lifeless and meaningless to the feeling as a small bunch of early horn carrots! Had they been flowers and his digits petals, John would have described his thumbs as reflex. His fingers seemed to have no tips; whatever he laid hold of, he grasped far back towards his palm. I have felt,” he continues, “hands that pressed warmly, hands that throbbed and quivered as if they would impart some thought or wish unspoken—for there are persons, like Adam Bell, in whom every hair seems alive,—but John Duncan seemed, in saluting, to be pre-occupied as far as his feelings were concerned, and to look on the transaction as an unmeaning ceremony. He did not even say ‘Good-bye’ in parting, but only a simple, careless-seeming ‘bye.’”

Yet with all this apparent outward callousness, his feelings were truly deep and strong. They rose on occasions to the poetic, as when he was silently and electrically beatified on meeting Charles Black for the last time;

though even then his manner belied his heart.* But this reserve did not surprise Charles, who is infected with a similar undemonstrative reticence, and hates everything like "fracas." He knew, as he said, "John's very heart," believed in and felt the reality, and the outward expression in manner passed as nothing in his eyes, or as but the bashfulness of a lover. Such men as John and Charles are quite unable to express their feelings by external signs of hand or habit, though they show it in the eye and in a hundred silent ways ; thinking the sacredness of the heart as desecrated when thus made "a public show of," as Charles often says. In everything connected with the emotions, including his religious feelings, John was, as a friend expresses it, "undemonstrative, if not taciturn." Yet this external coldness was only the upper soil, hiding a deep fountain of feeling, that welled up at times even to tears. "Frequently," writes the Rev. J. M. Shirreffs, his second minister at the Milton of Cushnie, "he appeared to be much affected in church, and I have often seen him quietly weeping there."

In walking with his friends, the same still reserve pervaded his action. "At these times," as James Black relates, "we talked, in general, but little ; John ever busy amongst the herbage, muttering names and properties, now plucking a plant and putting a piece into his mouth to try its taste, and then handing me a leaf or other part, say of Wood-sage, with the remark, 'If that binna fale,† ca' ye me knotty-stick !' It was bitter indeed, as I felt, and I could have called him 'knotty' out of spite. Then, in the ditch by the roadside, he would talk to himself and me, calling out

* See p. 363.

† Also written *fell*, bitter, hot, biting ; used by Burns.

Myosotis, *Veronica*, and a host of similar technicalities, accompanied with admiring expressions like 'bonny blue floories,' and the like.

"John," he continues, "was my human protoplasm, man in his least complex form. He seemed to be a survival of those 'rural swains' who lived in idyllic simplicity, as pictured in our pastoral poetry, and whose even tenor of existence our modern complexity renders impossible. As for his goodness, his pure simplicity of nature," he observes, "I never saw any evil in him. I do not say there was none, but I say, in real earnest, that I never saw any in the good, inoffensive soul."

While they were resting one day during a botanical ramble in Tough, and James was indulging quiet reflection on many matters suggested by the bent enthusiast, John awoke him from his reverie by some remarks on the medicinal properties of *digitalis*, which he had in his hand. Just then a man appeared on the road, naked down to the waist. He walked sideways, with one arm raised to the level of his shoulder and pointing forwards, and the other slanting downwards behind him. On he came, without observing them, his whole features contorted as if he were oppressed by some hidden, overwhelming power. He passed them, unconscious of their presence, and held on his strange path in the same silent and constrained attitude till out of sight. When he disappeared, John burst out spontaneously with the lines of Addison, uttered in the most earnest tones—

"When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My wondering soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise."

He then discoursed of reason being God's greatest gift to man, saying how thankful we ought to feel to be thus "clothed and in our right mind," and asking his friend if he had ever viewed the possession of decent dress as a proof of sanity.

John inherited a good deal of naïve mother-wit, combined with no little latent humour, though his sallies in this direction were considerably checked by his reticent nature and stern religiousness. He liked to give common things characteristic names, calling the teapot, for instance, "crook-moo'," and the kettle, "the black duchess." During the Disruption excitement, when his contempt of the Erastian "Moderates" who remained in the "Auld Kirk" for the sake of "the loaves and the fishes," was keenest, he used to remark that "fyow o' them cared to gang to Auchterless, but when they did change, they likit aye to gang to Auchtermair!"—Auchterless* being the name of an Aberdeen parish frequently punned upon in this and similar ways.

John had several humorous stories which he used to tell in genial society. When he observed any exhibition of silly pride, accompanied by super-fineness of speech, he told a story of a Scotchman in humble life who went to Jamaica and became rich. On returning home, he treated his former acquaintances with supercilious hauteur, and, despising his mother tongue, used only the finest English at his command. He pretended not to know even the names of any of the common objects of the farm where he had been brought up. Pointing one day to a "riddle" or sieve

* Part of the pun lies in the first syllable also, "aucht" being Scotch for "possessed." The name of the place is Gaelic.

for corn, he asked its name with a grand air; but before he could receive a reply, happening to trample on it, he turned it sharply on its side and caused it to give himself a severe blow on the front part of the leg. The pain made him at once forget his fine Attic accents, and the native Doric burst out in the vigorous exclamation, "Damn the riddle!" which at once exposed his hollow pretensions, amidst a general titter. When any one put on airs and affected an unnatural polish, John would quietly remark, "Ay, just bide a wee, and ye'll sune hear him 'damn the riddle!'"

On asking a friend to accept a suit of his own weaving, made from native wool prepared by the fireside, he recommended the home-made cloth by saying, "Ay, man, there's a *bane in't** even aifter it's gaylees† dune; far better than the Galashiels sey,‡ though no just sae braw"—an apt way of putting the facts regarding good home-spun. In talking to one of his disciples, John said that there were two things at the very least that a good botanist required, though these were not all: "Tae wit, a gweed memory and to be licht 'o fut"—that is, good at walking; to another friend, he remarked that Botany needed "a gweed e'e and a gweed understandin'"—the four requirements constituting, no doubt, a capital equipment for the successful study of flowers.

Although he seldom spoke of his unhappy married life, he once told a young friend whom he was counselling to thrift, and to whom he was talking of the influence of "sillar" in the world, this experience of his relations to his ill-conditioned wife. Weaving in Aberdeen becoming

* Bone in it.

† A good deal.

‡ Serge.

scarce at one time, he was obliged to take employment at a distance as a labourer, in order not to "fa' ahent,"* that is, not to get into debt, which he abhorred. When he returned home, his wife sat sullen by the fire without asking him to come near it. John stood in silence for a time at the door, until shame compelled her at last to speak. "Weel, man, ye've won hame?" said she. "Ay, hive I," returned he, "and three poun' ten i' my pooch!" "Hae ye, man, though?" exclaimed his wife, at once brightening up, in more friendly tones. "Come in by." In telling the tale, John concluded by saying, "Af'n hae I mint on that sin syne, Willie. Fin ye hae plenty o' sillar, fowk'll aye bid ye 'come in by'!"

John was never very smart at repartee, his whole style being too staid and slow for such rapid coruscations of the moment, though the steel of opposition did occasionally strike real fire out of him. In argument, he could "give a good cut" to an opponent, as "I hae aft'n felt," Charles Black says; and as many of those who tried to make fun of himself and his plants also did to their cost, as we have seen. John looked to most, as James Black justly observes, like a harmless pill that you could easily swallow, though it generally turned that you were in the power of "a marvellously potent little agent." But hard hitting was not much in John's line; he was too subdued and kindly for that—dealing more in quiet, humorous replies when occasion offered.

Charles Hunter met him one day near the Free Church of Keig, as he was returning to Netherton after some absence, carrying a bundle on his back, his oil jar in one

* That is, fall ahind or behind.

hand and his weaver's lamp in the other. "Here ye are again, John," said Charles, "and wi' yer lamp i' yer hand." "Ay," replied John, with an arch gleam in his eye, "but I'm no like the foolish virgins; I hae my oil tae!" He once engaged to work with a friend near Woodside, who, as market gardener, employed several hands. One of these was a professional gardener from Ellon, whose incapacity in his trade struck John very forcibly. "That Ellon man o' yours," said he one day to his employer, "has been terribly honest wherever he served his apprenticeship." "How?" asked his master, not catching John's meaning. "'Cass," returned John, with a sly twinkle, "he has ta'en terrible little wi'm!"

Sometimes his humour almost approached the grim. He was speaking one day to a friend about some vigorous botanists who, having gone a-plant-gathering on Sunday, had on that account incurred public censure. "Weel," says John, who sympathised with them in spite of his sabbatarian creed, "if yon chaps gang tae hell, they'll no be easy to bin'; and the fiends 'ill need to dish them up in eyrons,* and even then they'll float and stay the storm. A gey fyow o' sick like wou'd mak' even hell bearable! Mind on Sodom, which e'en ten gweed men wu'd hae saved!"

Like all old Scotchmen of any individuality, John always spoke in broad Scotch, except in reading a formal paper, when technical terms required to be used, or in talking on religious subjects, when Biblical or theological language became appropriate. He used, of course, the broad Aberdeen or Kincardine Doric, very *recherché* and fine, with the genuine flavour of the old pure speech in word and phrase. His expressions were always clear,

*. Irons; that is, in iron chains.

pointed and forcible, and generally piquant and picturesque. Like all old men who have had a varied experience, he frequently illustrated and clinched what he said with appropriate anecdote, proverb, sentiment, or verse from a song. In speaking to me one day, for instance, of a greedy fellow who would part with nothing even to a friend in need, he said he was—

“ Like the wife o’ Glenshee ;
He likit better to get than to ga’e.”

Not seldom the words he used were unconsciously poetical. When we were crossing a little burn together, he wished me to notice “hoo bonnily the watter trinkled !” Once, in referring to the “bad harvest” of 1811, when he was in Drumlithie, he characterised the following year, which had abounding plenty, as “rinnin’ ower !” In speaking to him, I wished greatly to take more notes than I was able of his telling Scotch and naïve remarks, but that would have stopped the natural flow of the words ; for in such talk, as in a quotation from a poet, the chief value lies in the exact expression, the *ipsissima verba*, of the moment, which the speaker himself could scarcely repeat and with difficulty correctly recall.

Solemn and retiring as John looked to all outsiders, he could beam amongst his friends, as we have seen. On these occasions, he took an active part in all the frolics of their happy meetings, and often added to the general harmony by singing a song. He could sing several songs, and his want of voice, which was, as Charles Black expresses it, of a “heather and dub” * order, was more than

* Aberdeen Scotch for “rough,” like travelling through heather and mossy pools or dubs.

made up by his vigorous and sympathetic rendering of the sentiment. Amongst others, his favourites were "The Blaeberries" already mentioned, "Johnnie Cope," "Scots wha hae," "John Anderson, my Joe," and "Auld Lang Syne."

Strangely for the ardent Scot he was, though singing more than one of his songs, John had no great favour for Burns, and he never possessed a copy of his poems. In this respect, he represented the prejudices of the stricter religionists of the country, to whom by nature and training he belonged. Here he was the very antipodes of his friend, Charles Black, who had, as John said, "an awfu' notion o' Robbie," and even in the Whitehouse days, had learned most of his poems by heart. Charles used to quote him on all occasions with felicity and ease, sometimes in the poet's freer utterances, to John's surprise and horror, duly expressed in strong remonstrance. John liked many of Burns' pieces, and had a great appreciation of "Man was made to Mourn," which Charles used to recite well; John feeling that it admirably expressed the soul-hidden sorrow through which he had passed, though he did not relish the anti-Calvinism of the poem.

When I asked him his opinion of the poet, he said he liked him "nae that ill, only he just didna tak' sick a notion o'm as Charlie, for Robbie was terrible ramsh whiles;" that is, he was too rough and outspoken at times for his taste, as he is even to admirers not of the unco'-guid order, when he utters his over-mastering virility. To Charles, he frequently characterised the poet as "a filthy loon," his offences against decorum overbearing, in John's intolerant puritanism, his eminent merits in other departments.

This want of poetic appreciation of Burns is related to a defect in John's constitution, a certain deficiency of poetical feeling. In this also he formed a marked contrast to his greatest friend, to whom, as Charles says of himself, poetry with all it signifies forms half his life. John purchased few books of poetry, though he had some general collections and the works of individual poets. Yet it is certain that he was not wanting in appreciation of the poetic aspects of nature, especially as connected with flowers, in regard to which his feelings rose, beyond question, to poetic strength. He also possessed some poetic sensibilities, often uttered in appropriate and deep-felt words, of which examples have been given. Indeed, it is quite impossible for any one to love and study the floral world with John Duncan's intense enthusiasm without being inspired with a great deal of true poetic feeling ; for, as Cowley asks regarding flowers—

“Where do we finer strokes and colours see
Of the Creator's real poetry?”

Charles Black's opinion was that he had “not a particle of poetry in his composition ;” but this opinion was formed thirty years ago, before John had developed deeper and broader tendencies. The truth on this subject seems to be, that John's original endowments in imagination and the related intellectual and emotional faculties that constitute the poet were comparatively small, and that his appreciation of poetical literary form was narrow, though he had a real enjoyment of its rhythm and expression as exhibited in the simpler forms of poetry, and especially in song and ballad ; but that his abundant and life-long intercourse with the beautiful and wonderful in nature in-

creasingly inspired him with poetical sentiment, especially when, in his later years, he caught glimpses of the deeper problems of the universe. He used to enjoy natural descriptive poetry, for example, especially when connected with flowers, and a favourite piece of his was Mrs. Heman's poem, "The Voice of Spring," beginning "I come, I come ! ye have called me long," which he often carefully transcribed on paper and used to quote. But his very devotion to other pursuits, combined with the practical tendencies of his nature, prevented his ever taking up poetical literature as a study. As John said himself, he "hadna time for sick things."

In this connection also, his perception of the beauties of art, especially high art, was very small, as expressed in painting and especially in sculpture. His life had never introduced him to these, and thus far artistic taste had never been kindled in him. He did not despise them : he never saw them. James Black, for instance, had some pretty examples of the artistic in his house, but these never once seemed to attract John's notice. His perception and love of the beautiful were strictly limited to its presentation in wild nature, and there they were real and delightful as far as they went.

His capacity for true friendship was unusually deep and lasting. It flowed in a narrow stream, but its concentrated energy was all the more powerful. His love for Charles Black was pure, unselfish, genuine, and undying, far "passing the love of woman," as Charles says. It became a clear, perennial fountain of joy that flowed unstinted through the quiet wilderness of his life, like the divine stream that accompanied ancient Israel, refreshing, strengthening, and cheering him ; as necessary and as blessed to him as the

Nile to the land of the pyramids. In his silent, self-contained, and comparatively solitary existence, this union with one man—the “friend of his bosom, this more than a brother”—to whom he tendered the worship of his deepest heart, was more to him than troops of friends; and, in his forced and painful widowhood, dearer and better to him than wife and child. Its intensity and purity were something quite uncommon, and revealed a largeness of soul found only with the few, and in hearts of finer mould. It stirred the very springs of life with more than even the overmastering fervour of early love, and was a permanent holy passion that burnt on his dying pillow and was extinguished only by death. What this affection was to him in his silent heart of hearts was revealed, as by a momentary lightning flash, in the beatific effect it had upon the self-suppressing man at his last meeting with Charles. All this reads like a bit of old romance or a passage from a modern novel, though it was but the literal truth. It recalls, at least, in no mean degree, the world-famous friendships between men celebrated in history and poetry.

And Charles's love for John was as deep and tender, as permanent and full of blessedness. He frequently says, “Naebody would credit the love I had for John.” It still wells out at all times and in all forms, and it has become all the more sacred now that it has been hallowed by the grave. “The dear old man!” as Charles recently wrote to a friend; “he was the lealest and truest friend I ever had. If I said, ‘Rest his soul!’ would I be sinning?”

Is the capacity for such romantic attachments between man and man dying out amongst us, amidst the shallow sentiments, artificial stimulants, and prevalent philistinism

of modern society? Let us be thankful of this new proof that such beautiful love can and does still exist.

Of Duncan's deep and earnest religiousness of nature, we have already had abundant proof. It was an abiding and essential element in his life, all the truer that it was too holy to be talked about in rude, every-day speech, though expressed in silent action. Sombre and puritanic, and in some respects stern, uncompromising and Covenanting in its character, as his training, early influences and natural earnestness made it, his religion was a living, regulating power and a vigorous element of strength in his solitary homeless life with its hidden sorrows, and had proved a stable support and the source of strong and energising moral power and dignity.

All the clergymen who knew John bear the same strong testimony to his sincere and abiding devoutness. The opinion of the Rev. David A. Beattie, his first pastor at Cushnie Free Church, is that of all the rest, though less decided than others. "He was," he says, "a regular attendant on the ministry, and always in his place when weather permitted. His attentive and reverend appearance as a worshipper in the house of prayer is still vividly present to me. His full countenance and placid eye are like a picture before my mind. I found, when visiting him, that he was always ready to listen to divine things, and would add a remark or two of his own which showed that he had a manifest personal experience of the power of the gospel in his own breast. I don't know when the incorruptible seed of grace was dropped in his heart, but it seemed to be there, and during my acquaintance with him, it appeared to spring and grow up and show fruit in a

humble childlike walk. He was like one of a class of lowly plants whose evergreen freshness pleases the eye at all seasons. I did not witness the bud of his early promise, but I saw the vigorous root grow stronger and thrive before its transplantation to a better clime."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SECRET?

THE school did nothing for John Duncan; as far as scholastic matters were concerned, the man was totally unlettered. He was never inside a school door, except the few evenings he took in the night school at Drumlithie, when about twenty, after he had made some progress in reading under the tuition of the kindly women that first taught him the letters. His disadvantages in this respect were the greatest possible, and sadly affected his progress throughout life, in spite of his indomitable will and ceaseless industry to remove them, making even reading a constant and trying toil. But these early losses only make his after triumphs in study all the more remarkable, and raise them near to the rank of genius. Think of a lad brought up alone with an unwedded mother, whose poverty was so extreme as barely to supply the simplest needs of both, and whose living had to be eked out by her little boy selling rushlights; * left of necessity, like a city arab, to run

* One fact is a striking proof of their extreme poverty. His mother, not being able to afford to buy vegetables for dinner, used to send Johnnie to the roadsides and hedges to gather the young shoots of the stinging nettle (*Urtica urens*) to make "nettle broth," then more common than now among the indigent; but, what was very unusual,

wild about the streets, while she was absent earning a needed pittance ; sent at ten to work for his own living, at a service in which he was treated with exceptional cruelty ; not knowing a single letter till his sixteenth year, and unable to put pen to paper till nearly thirty ; so extremely shortsighted that the page had to be held absurdly close to his face and to be readjusted at the beginning of every line—a defect that necessarily impeded scientific investigation ; even, at his best, able to read with difficulty and to the last requiring to spell out many words in every page, for, as William Mortimer phrased it, “he took a terrible time to read anything ;” having to read and read again all he deciphered, in a way that raised the risibility, while it excited the admiring astonishment, of even the ignorant amongst whom he dwelt :—and yet, in spite of all these extraordinary difficulties, hard to realise by those who have not known them, reading so extensively as he did, conquering so thoroughly and permanently all he studied, and achieving marked success in several departments of inquiry, and eminence at least in one science crowded with technicalities above most subjects, the very look of which to his unlettered eyes must have seemed a terrible array of angry bayonet points sufficient to deter all but the determined, of the stuff that only such as he are made of. Yet these are the simple facts in the life of our weaver, and these were the results.

he also brought home the leaves of the Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) aromatic and bitter (being a sister species of wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) and of “Southernwood”), to make “muggart kail” for their daily use—a broth surely requiring long training to relish, and even then being “gey fale,” or considerably bitter, as John said.

The disabilities which his early want of education imposed upon him throughout life were keenly felt by the man himself, though so bravely combated and so splendidly overcome. At one of his later visits to James Taylor, several botanical friends called while he was there for a field day among the flowers, all well educated and most of them college-bred. In speaking afterwards to James Black of this meeting, John thus expressed himself, "Oh, had I only had learnin' and youth, I cu'd hae followed the best o' them. Even as it was, I saw and understood a hale field lyin' afore me. Oh, what a loss is the want o' learnin', man! I only see its full scope beside men like thae. I'm like—like the single leaf o' the plantain, they like the thousand-leaved yarrow; I'm like the Hart's-tongue, they're like the Maidenhair; I'm like the ping-ping o' hailstones, they're like the searchin', penetratin', giddy whirl o' blue drift! My ilka effort has been slow an' laborious"—and here he drew his finger zigzag across the table at which he was seated, in illustration of the process—"unwieldly like the gambols o' an elephant, as compared wi' the free and easy motions o' a fine dancer!" That put his own case at once justly, forcibly and poetically.

His love of knowledge was intense and insatiable, the genuine appetite of the born scientist, and, as far as his opportunities lay, omnivorous; and his acquirements, in the circumstances, were remarkable for amount and breadth. At first, this desire to know was a strong, unregulated longing, drinking up all that came in its way, and appropriating even the doubtful quackery of Astrology. But it gradually developed into a true philosophical thirst, especially after entering on Systematic Botany with Charles Black, satisfied

only with scientific truth based on scrupulous investigation and rigorous induction. In producing and cultivating this scientific spirit and these scientific habits of study, his pet subject, Botany, is capable of doing admirable service, above many others, from its remarkable exactness of characteristics and classification and its unusually copious and precise nomenclature. Its educative value in this respect should be more realised in the training of our children, being combined as it is with the physical exercise, the intercourse with nature, practical work in the field, and orderly neat-handedness which its real study gives its students—all which, and much more, it richly did for John Duncan.

Duncan avoided one great danger connected with such physical studies—the narrowing, purely intellectual tendencies they are apt to engender. He wisely co-ordinated them with wider social and religious subjects possessing humanitarian relations. He also constantly sought to make his studies serviceable in daily life, as when he utilised Astronomy in dial-making, and Botany in the cure of disease; for this practical side of John's intellectual work was a marked characteristic that pervaded all he did. Moreover, these broader moral inquiries, combining with his investigation into the plants and stars, gave him views of the philosophy of things, and an insight into the wonders and beauties of nature greatly hidden from the mere narrow physicist, which he would otherwise have lost and to which he frequently gave expression, in his higher moments, to intimate friends. On these occasions, he became impressive and uttered himself in unwonted strains of philosophy, such as found vent on his death-bed a little before the close, when exhorting John Taylor to the earnest

study of science : " the wonders o' the secrets o' nature are such as nae man wu'd believe till he sees them wrocht oot!"—that is, it is only intimate scientific knowledge of the operations of nature that reveals their incredible wonderfulness, a truth echoed by all deep investigators. This humble, unlettered weaver did obtain, in no mean degree, some of those far-reaching glimpses into the problems of the universe with which Nature always rewards her deeper students, and by which she enables them to "see into the life of things," and to feel

"A presence that disturbs them with the joy
Of elevated thoughts."

Then, like all true students of Nature, after all his life-long enthusiastic searchings after truth, he came at the end to the deep-felt conviction of how little he knew; all that he had achieved only enabling him to realise how much remained unknown, and how, like the best, he had only been picking up a few pebbles on the shore of the boundless ocean. In speaking to James Black, a year or two before his death, of the pleasures of knowledge, of which Botany had given him such exquisite taste, he said that his eyes were now beginning to open up to new fields of investigation into plant-life—plants living and growing on plants in myriads! He had gathered many a plant, and was only then beginning to perceive that, instead of having one plant in his hand, as he had so long thought, he had a whole bundle! He now began, he said, to see and understand a new great field of inquiry, and God alone knew where it all ended; he only saw it was big. That was a true glimpse of the Great Vision of knowledge and existence. Then, filled with gratitude for the past and this new insight

into the future, he solemnly exclaimed: "But my day is done. I hae tried hard and done little. But oh! I *am* glad o' what I ken, and glad o' what I now begin to learn!"

John Duncan's life furnishes, in this connection, another marked proof of the vital significance of early influences, those "impressions before letters," as Hood facetiously but truly calls them:

"Before with our A B C we start,
Those things in morals, as well as art,
That play a very important part."

As we have seen, the circumstances and environment under which John was reared deeply coloured his whole existence. The cliffs of Kincardine and the pile of Dunnottar, with its wonderful story and powerful impressions, towered grandly over his career, and were lost sight of only in death. It was there, during his filial solitary wanderings for rushes, nettles and mugwort, and his early sports and explorations, that he imbibed the dominating influences of his life—his healthy frame, his keen observation, his love of flowers, his delight in nature, his self-contained resources, and his deep religiousness.

This furnishes another proof of how tenderly solicitous we ought to be, to surround our children in their infancy and youth with the breezy freshnesses of nature. It should once more impel us to take all earnest measures to make their nurture generous and natural, and their memories sweet and pure; so that the aroma of early days may rise like a perfume throughout their lives, and that, though turning out but "common earth," they may, like the clay in the Eastern parable, carry a fragrance with them for ever, from having "once lived with the rose."

Could anything have surpassed the serene contentment of Duncan's lot, and the genuine happiness he drew from what would seem to most of us poor and meagre if not quite inadequate elements? Think of the poverty-stricken conditions under which his whole life was spent, from his branded birth in a lodging on Stonehaven pier to an honoured tomb in Alford churchyard—the hard and scanty comforts his ceaseless but ill-requited toil afforded him all his days; his wrecked home from which he expected so much, and his living thenceforth by alien firesides, from which he was often forced to seek refuge by quieter and more comfortable hearths; the astonishingly ill-lighted, unventilated, ill-conditioned cribs in which from first to last he had to sleep; the ancient garments in which he was obliged for the greater part of his life to clothe himself, making him an oddity and a wonder to his neighbours, from his sheer inability to renew them through want of the requisite means. And then think of the deep and perennial pleasures, the real riches of life, he was able to extract from such unpromising and seemingly antagonistic elements! It argues in the man "a benign simplicity," a rare wisdom, for which he is truly to be envied, and for which most men would barter all they have. And his happiness did not arise from dull, unfeeling acquiescence in these poor materials, or from an incapacity of soul for higher things, like the phlegmatic insensibility and low content of too many of our poorer population. His spirit was keen, sensitive, aggressive, unsatisfied with common husks, and filled with a divine discontent that urged to higher things.

What then was the source of this strange peace, what the hidden spring of his felicity?

This question would take long to answer in full, for life is a twisted cable of many cords ; but there are always some main strands that run through every man's history and give it its special character. Let us unwind a few of these in the rope of John Duncan's story. They are not difficult to unloose.

The secret lay, primarily, in the possession and constant cultivation of pure and simple tastes in regard to the daily needs of life. His appetites were satisfied with the plainest substantial fare. It is surprising how very plain may be the food we need, in both eating and drinking, if only it is good and wholesome—a fact that science, now that it has condescended to study the relation of our tables to our stomachs, increasingly demonstrates. The more we act on the real scientific wisdom of plainness in these things, the healthier and happier we shall be. "Can a man," wisely asks good Jeremy Taylor, "quench his thirst better out of a river than a full urn, or drink better from the fountain which is finely paved with marble than when it wells over the green turf?"

But in spite of such demonstrations towards plainness, we are all of us, even the poorest, suffering from the insidious growth of luxury, attendant on the general increase of material wealth. We are forgetting how little man really requires for health, and we are losing the capacity of enjoying the plain and good in food, dress, house and "comforts." Thus are we constantly requiring to be reminded, by living examples, of the true facts of the case, the really homely conditions of human happiness. To these John Duncan's life should once more recall us, and thereby do good service. By his narrow possessions and

narrower bounds, his "plain living and high thinking," are we not reminded of the hut of the old slave-philosopher at Nicopolis, with its straw pallet, its one lamp, and its sublime contentment? Not that we should follow the extreme bareness of either the freedman or the weaver. That is scarcely possible, and would not be desirable. But it would be well for us to perceive, believe, and act on the belief of how much healthier and happier we should be if we imitated more their severe and rational simplicity.

John Duncan's style of life, its uncommon bareness and satisfaction with lowly things, were a surprise even to his poor neighbours, who pitied and in many cases laughed at him in consequence; and it is to be feared that many of us will be amongst the pitiful—though not the scornful, let us hope—even after all we have read. But to such he might have replied, in the words of Epictetus—he certainly acted on them—"I secretly laugh at those who pity me. I am poor, but I have right principles concerning poverty. What is it to me, then, if people pity me for my poverty? I am neither hungry, nor thirsty, nor cold; but because they are hungry and thirsty for superfluities, they suppose me to be so too."

Another part of the secret of John's happiness undoubtedly consisted, like that of the good Epictetus, in subordinating the "externals," the things without us, our surroundings, and keeping and using them in their due place and rank; and in cultivating the "internals," the things within us, of the head and heart—knowing, as Marcus Aurelius, the imperial disciple of the philosophic slave, explains, that "the external things reach not the soul, but stand without, still and motionless, and that all

our perturbation comes from inward opinions about them." John Duncan followed this true principle of selection in seeking his pleasures, and used the lower things, which most of us are so apt to value too much and for themselves, as materials for higher joys. This seems a commonplace in morals, but none the less is it the only means of becoming possessed of that highest alchemy "that turns all it touches into gold," and by which, as Dryden sings, "all great souls still make their own content." Duncan seemed to deny himself very much that most think necessary even for comfort; but it was for better gains, which he certainly won. There lies the whole problem in a nutshell—in selection, in the wise choice of our pleasures.

Another element in John's happiness was the special nature of the higher pleasures he pursued—his study of Natural Science. The cultural and educative value of the sciences connected with external nature, when rightly studied, is surpassed by none; they exercise, so healthily and fully, such a wide range of the perceptive and reflective faculties, and, where broadly studied, the moral and æsthetic, while energising and strengthening the physical, in a way that promotes general mental and bodily health and imparts a high degree of deep and quiet enjoyment. In John Duncan's case, delight in these pursuits rose to an intense and beautiful enthusiasm, if not to the absorbing power of a passion. Nothing could excel the pure devotion with which he followed the study of flowers amidst penury and misunderstanding, enduring unusual privation, undertaking remarkable self-imposed toil, and traversing for their sake the whole country, in a way which brought him into contact with strange society but which

was as wise as it was rare. Beyond doubt, Duncan found from sweet experience, as he wrote in one of his own essays, "a sort of spell or charm about flowers, independent of fashion or the pleasures of sight and smell, which tended to soothe the spirits and compose the mind.* From their study, he extracted the very elixir of life, and sipped the honey of existence.

As a whole, it seems only the simple truth, that notwithstanding the sorrows he felt and the hardships he passed through, few men have lived a happier life than poor John Duncan; for his joys and renovations were ever present and perennial, and always satisfying. He appears to have come very near Emerson's "rich and royal man," inasmuch as he "knew what sweets and virtues are in the ground, the waters, the plants, the heavens, and how to come at these enchantments."

And the happiness of John Duncan is open to most of us, if not more or less to all, if we will but seek it where he found it—that is the comforting, the blessed thought. Whatever our daily bread-winning work, be it weaving or book-making, if we will only go out into Nature, and intelligently and earnestly study and feel her wonders, beauties and serenities, his secret will become ours. For there, as the same philosophic poet truly urges: "The knapsack of custom falls off our backs with the first step we make into these precincts. There is sanctity which shames our religion, and reality which discredits our heroes. We have crept out of our close and crowded houses into the night and morning, and we see what majestic beauties daily wrap us in their bosom. How willingly we would escape

* Essay on Practical Gardening. See p. 266.

the barriers which render them comparatively impotent, escape the sophistication and second thought, and suffer nature to embrace us! The tempered light of the woods is like a perpetual morning, and is stimulating and heroic. The uncommunicable trees begin to persuade us to live with them and quit our life of solemn trifles."

But why, why, while we are immersed in beauty and surrounded by such ever-present, ever-open sources of purest pleasure, solaces in our sorrows, health-givers amidst our intermittent sicknesses, physical and mental; why is it that we do not seek them?

It arises mainly because "our eyes have no clear vision." "God has introduced us," Marcus Aurelius tells us, "as spectators of himself and his works, and not only as spectators but interpreters of them," and yet we pass away without having once caught a glimpse of their beauties and sanctities. "You take a journey," he pleads with his Roman readers, and through them with us, "to Olympia to behold the work of Phidias (the Olympian Jove), and each of you thinks it a misfortune to die without a knowledge of such things; and will you have no inclination to understand and be spectators of those works for which there is no need to take a journey, but which are ready and at hand?"

And why have we no clear vision? Chiefly because our eyes have never been opened to see such things; our education has been thus far neglected with most of us; we have never been introduced to Science in our youth, when our faculties were clear and ductile. The responsibility for this general blindness lies primarily at the door of our schools, with their narrow curriculum. As one of John's

friends, writing of the misunderstandings to which John was subjected, says: "Most of us knew only the weaver. We did not know the botanist and the student, because we did not know and love the flowers. Nor can we be blamed. Flowers in school would have seemed sadly out of place. We therefore grew up ignorant of their secrets. The uninitiated cannot be expected to read Flora's richly illuminated book. Hence the charm Duncan felt in conning it over, line by line, was wholly unfelt by us."

There lies the chief source of our blindness—"Flowers in school would have seemed sadly out of place!" Surely it is now time that this past reproach should be removed. Surely we have crossed the threshold of a better day, when flowers will not only daily adorn the teacher's desk and smile in every window, but, along with other natural things, be taught and understood in every school in the land; till they are loved and sought for in after life, and till they become a means of deeper joy and higher education that will lead our people more and more out to "the breezy common" of nature and natural studies.

Such are some of the elements of the rare happiness, self-helpfulness, and peace achieved by this lowly scientific weaver, with a keen temperament, amidst extraordinary disabilities, and under the most unlikely conditions; and his story will not have been written in vain, if it should help any of us to become what Crashaw celebrates, what every one sighs and seeks to be, however erroneously and blindly, and what John Duncan greatly was—

"A man all his own wealth,
His own music, his own health;
A happy soul, that all the way
To heaven hath a summer's day."

APPENDIX.

LIST OF PLANTS

GATHERED OR VERIFIED BY JOHN DUNCAN.*

PART I.

PLANTS FOUND IN THE VALE OF ALFORD AND THE SURROUNDING DISTRICTS OF ABERDEENSHIRE.

CLASS I.

DICOTYLEDONOUS PLANTS.

Order I.—Ranunculaceæ.

- Anemone nemorosa, *L.*
- Ranunculus aquatilis, *L.*
- „ hederaceus, *L.*
- „ flammula, *L.*
- „ ficaria, *L.*
- „ acris, *L.*
- „ repens, *L.*
- „ bulbosus, *L.*

Caltha palustris, *L.*

Trollius Europæus, *L.*

Order II.—Nymphæaceæ.

Nymphæa alba, *L.*

Order III.—Papaveraceæ.

Papaver dubium, *L.*

„ *rhæas*, *L.*

Order IV.—Fumariaceæ.

Fumaria capreolata, *L.*

„ *officinalis*, *L.*

Corydalis claviculata, *De Cand.*

Order V.—Cruciferaæ.

Barbarea vulgaris, *Brown.*

Cardamine amara, *L.*

„ *pratensis*, *L.*

„ *hirsuta*, *L.*

Nasturtium officinale, *B.*

Cochlearia officinalis, *L.*

Var. C. Groenlandica, *L.*

Draba verna, *L.*

Thlaspi arvense, *L.*

Teesdalia nudicaulis, *B.*

Sisymbrium thalianum, *Hooker.*

Alliaria officinalis, *De Cand.*

Subularia aquatica, *L.*

Capsella bursa pastoris, *De Cand.*

Lepidium Smithii, *Hook.*

Sinapis arvensis, *L.*

Raphanus raphanistrum, *L.*

Order VII.—Cistaceæ.

Helianthemum vulgare, *Gaertner.*

Order VIII.—Violaceæ.

Viola palustris, *L.*

„ *canina*, *L.*

„ *tricolor*, *L.*

„ *lutea*, *Hudson.*

* Prepared by Mr. James Taylor, Clashfarquhar, near Aberdeen.

Order IX.—Droseraceæ.

Drosera rotundifolia, *L.*
Parnassia palustris, *L.*

Order X.—Polygalaceæ.

Polygala vulgaris, *L.*

Order XII.—Caryophyllaceæ.

Silene inflata, *Smith.*
 „ *maritima*, *Withering.*
 „ *vespertina*, *L.*
Lychnis flos-cuculi, *L.*
 „ *diurna*, *Sibthorp.*
Sagina procumbens, *L.*
 „ *nodosa*, *L.*
Arenaria verna, *L.*
Stellaria media, *With.*
 „ *holostea*, *L.*
 „ *graminea*, *L.*
 „ *uliginosa*, *Murr.*
Cerastium vulgatum, *L.*
 „ *viscosum*, *L.*
 „ *semidecandrum*, *L.*
 „ *arvense*, *L.*
 „ *latifolium*, *L.*

Order XIII.—Linaceæ.

Linum catharticum, *L.*

Order XIV.—Malvaceæ.

Malva rotundifolia, *L.*

Order XV.—Hypericaceæ.

Hypericum quadrangulum, *L.*
 „ *humifusum*, *L.*
 „ *pulchrum*, *L.*
 „ *hirsutum*, *L.*
 „ *perforatum*, *G.*

Order XVI.—Geraniaceæ.

Geranium sylvaticum, *L.*
 „ *pratense*, *L.*
 „ *molle*, *L.*
 „ *dissectum*, *L.*
 „ *Robertianum*, *L.*
Erodium cicutarium, *Smith.*

Order XVII.—Oxalidaceæ.

Oxalis acetosella, *L.*

Order XVIII.—Leguminosæ.

Ulex Europæus, *L.*
Genista Anglica, *L.*

Spartina scoparium, *L.*
Ononis arvensis, *L.*
Anthyllis vulneraria, *L.*
Medicago lupulina, *L.*
Trifolium repens, *L.*
 „ *pratense*, *L.*
 „ *medium*, *L.*
 „ *procumbens*, *L.*
 „ *filiforme*, *L.*
Lotus corniculatus, *L.*
 „ *major*, *Scop.*
Vicia sativa, *L.*
Var. angustifolia.
 „ *sepium*, *L.*
 „ *cracca*, *L.*
 „ *sylvatica*, *L.*
 „ *hirsuta*, *Roch.*
Lathyrus pratensis, *L.*
Orobus tuberosus, *L.*

Order XIX.—Rosaceæ.

Prunus communis, *Hudson.*
Var. spinosa, *L.*
Spiræa ulmaria, *L.*
Geum urbanum, *L.*
 „ *rivale*, *L.*
Rubus Idæus, *L.*
 „ *corylifolius*, *Smith.*
 „ *fruticosus*, *L.*
 „ *saxatilis*, *L.*
 „ *chamæmorus*, *L.*
Fragaria vesca, *L.*
Comarum palustre, *L.*
Potentilla anserina, *L.*
 „ *reptans*, *L.*
Alchemilla vulgaris, *L.*
 „ *arvensis*, *L.*
Agrimonia Eupatoria, *L.*
Rosa villosa, *L.*
 „ *canina*, *L.*
Pyrus aucuparia, *Gaertner.*

Order XX.—Onagraceæ.

Epilobium parviflorum, *Schreb.*
 „ *montanum*, *L.*
 „ *tetragonum*, *L.*
 „ *alpinum*, *L.* (on Benachie)
Circæa lutetiana, *L.*

Order XXI.—Haloragiaceæ.

Hippurus vulgaris, *L.*
Myriophyllum spicatum, *L.*

Order XXII.—*Lythraceæ*.

Heplis portula, L.

Order XXIII.—*Portulacaceæ*.

Montia fontana, L.

Order XXIV.—*Paronychiaceæ*.

Spergularia rubra, St. Hill.

Spergula arvensis, L.

Order XXV.—*Crassulaceæ*.

Sedum villosum, L.

„ *acre*, L.

„ *Anglicum*, L.

Order XXVI.—*Saxifragaceæ*.

Saxifraga aizoides, L.

Chrysosplenium alternifolium, L.

„ *oppositifolium*, L.

Order XXVII.—*Umbelliferaæ*.

Hydrocotyle vulgaris, L.

Sanicula Europæa, L.

Bunium flexuosum, With.

Pimpinella saxifraga, L.

Angelica sylvestris, L.

Heracleum spondylium, L.

Anthriscus sylvestris, Hoffm.

Daucus carota, L.

Torilis anthriscus, Gaertner.

Order XXVIII.—*Araliaceæ*.

Adoxa moschatellina, L.

Hedera helix, L.

Order XXX.—*Caprifoliaceæ*.

Sambucus ebulus, L.

Linnæa borealis, Gronov.

Order XXXI.—*Rubiaceæ*.

Galium verum, L.

„ *saxatile*, L.

„ *uliginosum*, L.

„ *palustre*, L.

„ *β. Witheringii*.

„ *boreale*, L.

„ *aparine*, L.

Sherardia arvensis, L.

Order XXXII.—*Valerianaceæ*.

Valeriana officinalis, L.

Fedia (or *Valerianella*) *olitoria*, Moench.

Order XXXIII.—*Dipsacæ*.

Scabiosa succisa, L.

Knautia arvensis, Coult.

Order XXXIV.—*Compositæ*.

Apargia autumnalis, Willd.

Hypochaeris radicata, L.

Sonchus arvensis, L.

„ *oleraceus*, L.

Crepis virens, L.

Leontodon taraxacum, L.

Hieracium pilosella, L.

„ *murorum*, L.

„ *sylvaticum*, L.

„ *boreale*, Fries.

Arctium lappa, L.

Cnicus lanceolatus, Willd.

„ *palustris*, Willd.

„ *arvensis*, Hoffm.

„ *heterophyllus*, Willd.

Centaurea nigra, L.

„ *cyaneus*, L.

Artemisia vulgaris, L.

Antennaria dioica, Gaertner.

Gnaphalium sylvaticum, L.

„ *uliginosum*, L.

Filago Germanica, L.

„ *minima*, Fries.

Petasites vulgaris, Desf.

Tussilago Farfara, L.

Solidago virgaurea, L.

Senecio vulgaris, L.

„ *sylvaticus*, L.

„ *Jacobæa*, L.

„ *aquaticus*, Hudson.

Bellis perennis, L.

Chrysanthemum leucanthemum, L.

„ *segetum*, L.

Matricaria inodora, L.

Achillæa ptarmica, L.

„ *millefolium*, L.

Order XXXV.—*Campanulaceæ*.

Campanula rotundifolia, L.

„ *latifolia*, L.

Order XXXVII.—*Vacciniaceæ*.

Vaccinium myrtillus, L.

„ *Vitis-Idæa*, L.

SUB-CLASS III.

COROLLIFLORÆ.

Order XXXVIII.—Ericaceæ.

- Erica tetralix*, *L.*
 „ *cinerea*, *L.*
Calluna vulgaris, *Salisb.*
Arctostaphylos uva-ursi, *Spreng.*

Order XXXIX.—Pyrolaceæ.

- Pyrola secunda*, *L.*
 „ *rotundifolia*, *L.*
 „ *media*, *Swartz.*

Order XL.—Aquifoliaceæ.

- Ilex aquifolium*, *L.*

Order XLI.—Gentianaceæ.

- Gentiana campestris*, *L.*
Menyanthes trifoliata, *L.*

Order XLIII.—Boraginaceæ.

- Echium vulgare*, *L.*
Lithospermum arvense, *L.*
Myosotis repens, *Dow.*
 „ *palustris*, *L.*
 „ *cœspitosa*, *Schutz.*
 „ *arvensis*, *Hoffm.*
 „ *versicolor*, *Lehm.*

- Lycopsis arvensis*, *L.*
Symphytum tuberosum, *L.*

Order XLIV.—Scrophulariaceæ.

- Veronica serpyllifolia*, *L.*
 „ *scutellata*, *L.*
 „ *beccabunga*, *L.*
 „ *officinalis*, *L.*
 „ *chamædrys*, *L.*
 „ *hederifolia*, *L.*
 „ *agrestis*, *L.*
 „ *arvensis*, *L.*
Bartsia odontites, *Hudson.*
Euphrasia officinalis, *L.*
Rhinanthus crista-galli, *L.*
Melampyrum pratense, *L.*
Pedicularis palustris, *L.*
 „ *sylvatica*, *L.*
Scrophularia nodosa, *L.*
Digitalis purpurea, *L.*

Order XLV.—Labiatæ.

- Mentha aquatica*, *L.*
 „ *arvensis*, *L.*

- Thymus serpyllum*, *L.*
Teucrium scorodonia, *L.*
Ajuga reptans, *L.*
Galeopsis tetralcit, *L.*
 „ *versicolor*, *Curtis.*
Lamium purpureum, *L.*
 „ *incisum*, *Willd.*
 „ *amplexicaule*, *L.*
Stachys sylvatica, *L.*
 „ *palustris*, *L.*
Nepeta glechoma, *Benth.*
Prunella vulgaris, *L.*

Order XLVI.—Lentibulariaceæ.

- Pinguicula vulgaris*, *L.*
Utricularia vulgaris, *L.*
 „ *minor*, *L.*

Order XLVII.—Primulaceæ.

- Primula vulgaris*, *Huds.*
Trientalis Europæa, *L.*
Lysimachia nemorum, *L.*
Anagallis tenella, *L.*

Order XLVIII.—Plumbaginaceæ.

- Armeria maritima*, *Willd.*
 „ *serpyllifolia*, *L.*

Order XLIX.—Plantaginaceæ.

- Plantago major*, *L.*
 „ *lanceolata*, *L.*
 „ *maritima*, *L.*
Littorella lacustris, *L.*

SUB-CLASS IV.

MONOCHLAMYACEÆ.

Order L.—Chenopodiaceæ.

- Chenopodium album*, *L.*
 „ *Bonus-Henricus*, *L.*

Order LI.—Scleranthaceæ.

- Scleranthus annuus*, *L.*
 „ *Var. biennis*, *Syme*

Order LII.—Polygonaceæ.

- Polygonum bistorta*, *L.*
 „ *viviparum*, *L.*
 „ *aviculare*, *L.*
 „ *convolvulus*, *L.*
 „ *amphibium*, *L.*
 „ *lapathifolium*, *L.*

- Rumex crispus*, *L.*
 „ *obtusifolius*, *L.*
 „ *aquaticus*, *L.*
 „ *conglomeratus*, *Murr.*
 „ *acetosa*, *L.*
 „ *acetosella*, *L.*

Order LV.—*Callitrichaceæ*.

- Callitriche verna*, *L.*

Order LVI.—*Urticaceæ*.

- Urtica urens*, *L.*
 „ *dioica*, *L.*

Order LVII.—*Myricaceæ*.

- Myrica gale*, *L.*

Order LVIII.—*Betulaceæ*.

- Betula alba*, *L.*
Alnus glutinosa, *Gaertn.*

Order LIX.—*Salicaceæ*.

- Salix pentandra*, *L.*
 „ *fusca*, *L.*
 „ *cinerea*, *L.*
 „ *aurita*, *L.*
 „ *caprea*, *L.*
 „ *nigricans*, *L.*
Populus tremula, *L.*

Order LX.—*Cupuliferaæ*.

- Quercus robur*, *L.*
Corylus Avellana, *L.*

Order LXI.—*Coniferaæ*.

- Pinus sylvestris*, *L.*
Juniperus communis, *L.*

CLASS II.

ENDOGENOUS FLOWERING PLANTS;
MONOCOTYLEDONOUS.

SUB-CLASS I.

Order LXII.—*Orchidaceæ*.

- Listera ovata*, *Brown.*
 „ *cordata*, *Brown.*
Goodyera repens, *Brown.*
Orchis mascula, *L.*
 „ *latifolia*, *L.*
 „ *maculata*, *L.*
Gymnadenia conopsea, *Brown.*

- Habenaria viridis*, *Brown.*
 „ *albida*, *Brown.*
 „ *bifolia*, *Brown.*

Order LXIII.—*Iridaceæ*.

- Iris pseudacorus*, *L.*

Order LXIV.—*Trilliaceæ*.

- Paris quadrifolia*, *L.*

Order LXVII.—*Juncaceæ*.

- Juncus effusus*, *L.*
 „ *conglomeratus*, *L.*
 „ *glaucus*, *Ehrh.*
 „ *acutiflorus*, *Ehrh.*
 „ *lamprocarpus*, *Ehrh.*
 „ *uliginosus*, *Libth.*
 „ *bufonius*, *L.*
 „ *squarrosus*, *L.*
Luzula sylvatica, *Bich.*
 „ *pilosa*, *Willd.*
 „ *campestris*, *Brown.*
Narthecium ossifragum, *Huds.*

| Order LXIX.—*Juncaginaceæ*.

- Triglochin palustre*, *L.*

Order LXX.—*Typhaceæ*.

- Sparganium ramosum*, *Huds.*
 „ *natans*, *L.*

Order LXXI.—*Lemnaceæ*.

- Lemna minor*, *L.*

Order LXXII.—*Naiadaceæ*.

- Potamogeton pusillus*, *L.*
 „ *gramineus*, *L.*
 „ *lucens*, *L.*
 „ *rufescens*, *L.*
 „ *oblongus*, *Viv.*
 „ *natans*, *L.*

SUB-CLASS II.

Order LXXIII.—*Glumaceæ*.

- Eleocharis palustris*, *Br.*
 „ *multicaulis*, *Smith.*
Isolepis setacea, *Br.*
Scirpus sylvaticus, *L.*
 „ *pauciflorus*, *Lightf.*
 „ *cæspitosus*, *L.*
Eriophorum vaginatum, *L.*
 „ *angustifolium*, *L.*

Order LXXIII.—*Cyperaceæ*.

- Carex* dioica, *L.*
 „ pulicaris, *L.*
 „ stellulata, *Gooden.*
 „ vulgaris, *Fries.*
 „ flava, *L.*
 Var. β Ederi, Auct.
 „ fulva, *Good.*
 „ binervis, *Smith.*
 „ panicea, *L.*
 „ pallescens, *L.*
 „ limosa, *L.*
 „ glauca, *L.*
 „ præcox, *Jacq.*
 „ pilulifera, *L.*
 „ ampullacea, *Gooden.*

Order LXXIV.—*Gramineæ*.

- Anthoxanthum* odoratum, *L.*
Nardus stricta, *L.*
Alopecurus pratensis, *L.*
 „ geniculatus, *L.*
Phleum pratense, *L.*
Agrostis canina, *L.*
 „ vulgaris, *L.*
 „ alba, *L.*
Catabrosa aquatica, *Beauv.*
Aira cæspitosa, *L.*
 „ flexuosa, *L.*
 „ caryophyllea, *L.*
 „ præcox, *L.*
Molinia cærulea, *Mærch.*
Holcus mollis, *L.*
 „ lanatus, *L.*
Arrhenatherum avenaceum, *Beauv.*
Koeleria cristata, *Pers.*
Poa fluitans, *Scop.*
 „ pratensis, *L.*
 „ trivialis, *L.*
 „ nemoralis, *L.*
 „ annua, *L.*
Triodia decumbens, *Beauv.*
Briza media, *L.*
Dactylis glomerata, *L.*
Cynosurus cristatus, *L.*
Festuca bromoides, *L.*
 „ ovina, *L.*
 Var. β duriuscula.

- Festuca* elatior, *Auct.*
 „ gigantea, *L.*
Bromus asper, *L.*
 Var. commutatus, Schrad.
 „ mollis, *L.*
Avena pratensis, *L.*
Triticum repens, *L.*
 „ caninum, *Huds.*
Lolium perenne, *L.*

CLASS III.

ACOTYLEDONOUS PLANTS OR
CRYPTOGAMIA (CELLULAR).

SUB-CLASS I.

ACROGENÆ.

1. *Polypodiaceæ*.

- Polypodium* vulgare, *L.*
 „ phegopteris, *L.*
 „ dryopteris, *L.*
Aspidium oreopteris, *L.* (*lastræa*,
 Presl.)
 „ filix mas, *Sw.*
 Var. incisa.
 „ dilatatum, *Willd.*
 „ spinulosum, *Presl.*
Asplenium ruta-muraria, *L.*
 „ tricomanes, *L.*
Athyrium felix-fœmina, *Bernh.*
Pteris aquilina, *L.*
Blechnum boreale, *Sw.*

Order III.—*Ophioglossaceæ*.

- Botrychium* lunaria, *Sw.*

Order IV.—*Lycopodiaceæ*.

- Lycopodium* clavatum, *L.*
 „ selaginoides, *L.*
 „ selago, *L.*

Order VI.—*Equisetaceæ*.

- Equisetum* umbrosum, *Willd.*
 „ arvense, *L.*
 „ sylvaticum, *L.*
 „ limosum, *L.*
 „ palustre, *L.*
 „ hyemale, *L.*

PART II.

INTRODUCED PLANTS FOUND IN A SEMI-WILD CONDITION IN VALE OF ALFORD AND SURROUNDING DISTRICT.

EXOGENOUS PLANTS.

Ranunculaceæ.

- Helleborus foetidus*, L.
Aquilegia vulgaris, L.
Chelidonium majus, L.

Cruciferae.

- Camelina sativa*, L.
Brassica rapa, L.
 „ *campestris*, L.
Sinapis alba, L.

Caryophyllaceæ.

- Saponaria officinalis*, L.

Linaceæ.

- Linum usitatissimum*, L.

Malvaceæ.

- Malva sylvestris*, L.
 „ *moschata*, L.

Rhamnaceæ.

- Rhamnus catharticus*, L.

Rosaceæ.

- Prunus avium*, L.
 „ *cerasus*, L.
Crataegus oxyacanthus, L.

Crassulaceæ.

- Sempervivum tectorum*, L.

Grossulariaceæ.

- Ribes rubrum*, L.
 „ *grossularia*, L.

Saxifragaceæ.

- Saxifraga umbrosa*, L.

Umbelliferae.

- Ægopodium podagraria*, L.
Peucedanum ostruthium, *Rock*.

- Coriandrum sativum*, L.
Myrrhis odorata, L.

Caprifoliaceæ.

- Sambucus nigra*, L.
Lonicera xylosteum, L.

Compositæ.

- Hieracium auranticum*, L.
Cichorium Intybus, L.
Carduus Marianus, L.
Tanacetum vulgare, L.
Senecio Saracennicus, L.
Doronicum Pardalianches, L.
Matricaria Parthenium, L.

Boraginaceæ.

- Anchusa sempervirens*, L.
Symphytum officinale, L.
Hyoscyamus niger, L.

Scrophulariaceæ.

- Linaria vulgaris*, *Mench*.
 „ *repens*, *Ait*.
Scrophularia vernalis, L.

Labiatae.

- Mentha viridis*, L.
Ballota nigra, L.

Chenopodiaceæ.

- Salix purpurea*, L.
 „ *fragilis*, L.
 „ *Russeliana*, *Smith*.
 „ *alba*, L.
 „ *viminialis*, L.
 „ *herbacea*, L. North-east corner of Benachie; discovered first by Dr. Cruickshank.

ENDOGENOUS PLANTS.

Gramineæ.

- Phalaris Canariensis*, L.
Poa aquatica, L.

PART III.

PLANTS FOUND IN JOHN DUNCAN'S HERBARIUM NOT INDIGENOUS TO THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND, BUT GROWING IN THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND, ENGLAND OR WALES; OR IN OTHER PARTS.

CLASS I.

DICOTYLEDONS.

Ranunculaceæ.

- Anemone apennina, *L.* English?
 Ranunculus hirsutus, *Curt.* This is
 R. Philonotis of *Ehrh.*
 „ *auricomus*, *L.* Arctic.
 Adonis autumnalis, *L.* English;
 ? Continental.
 Actæa spicata, *L.* English lime-
 stone districts.

Berberaceæ.

- Epimedium alpinum, *L.* English;
 ? Continental.

Papaveraceæ.

- Papaver argemone, *L.* South of
 Scotland,
 Glaucium luteum, *Tourn.* Ditto.

Cruciferaæ.

- Draba rupestris, *Brown.* Duncan's
 plant is Arctic. This plant
 was found on Stobimain,
 close to Ben More, near
 Balquidder; and in the
 Cairngorm district.
 „ *aizoides*, *L.* English and
 Arctic; also Continental.
 Cheiranthus cheiri, *L.*
 Cardamine impatiens, *L.* English,
 rare.
 Sinapis tenuifolia, *Brown.* England;
 South of Scotland.
 Arabis turrita, *L.* English.
 Koniga maritima, *Br.* Said to be
 found on sea-coast of Aberdeen (?).
 A plant described under various
 specific names by botanists. It is
 the *Clypeola maritima*, *L.*, *Glyce*
 maritima, *Tindl.*, and *Pteroneurum*
 maritimum of *Reichenb.*

Resedaceæ.

- Reseda luteola, *L.* Scottish, rare;
 cultivated.

Leguminosæ.

- Trifolium frugiferum, *L.* Scottish.
 „ *ornithopadiodes*, *L.* About
 Edinburgh.
 Medicago falcata, *L.* English and
 Continental.
 Lathyrus latifolius, *L.* Outcast of
 gardens.

Rosaceæ.

- Spiræa filipendula, *L.* English; rare
 in Scotland.
 Dryas octopetala, *L.* Alpine, and
 Arctic.
 Potentilla reptans, *L.* Very rare in
 the district.
 „ *verna*, *L.* South of Scot-
 land.
 „ *apaca*, *L.* Arctic; one of
 G. Don's plants.
 „ *tridentata*. Iceland; ditto.
 Agrimonia Eupatoria, *L.* Coast.
 Poterium sanguisorba, *L.* Rare, Scot-
 tish.

Droseraceæ.

- Drosera Anglica, *Hudson.*

Saxifragaceæ.

- Saxifraga granulata, *L.* South of
 Scotland.
 „ *nivalis*, *L.* John's plant is
 Arctic, got from *J. T.*
 „ *Hirculus*, *L.* Ditto.
 „ *pedatifida*, *L.* Ditto; one
 of *G. Don's* plants.

Caryophyllaceæ.

- Dianthus deltoides, *L.* Coast.
 Saline quinquevulnera, *L.* Cultivated.

Stellaria glauca, *With.* South of Scotland.

Arenaria trinervis, *L.* Very rare.

Cerastium arvense, *L.* Ditto, Scottish.

Holosteum umbellatum, *L.* Very rare, English.

Hypericaceæ.

Hypericum perforatum, *L.* Scarce.

„ *Androsænum*, *L.* West of Scotland.

Balsaminaceæ.

Impatiens Noli-me-tangere, *L.* English.

Geranium nodosum, *L.* Gardens; Continental; doubtful English.

„ *rotundifolium*, *L.* South of Scotland, very rare.

„ *pusillum*, *L.* Ditto, ditto.

„ *lucidum*, *L.* Rare, English.

Erodium moschatum, *Sm.* South of England.

„ *maritimum*, *Sm.* Ditto.

Oxalidaceæ.

Oxalis corniculata, *L.* Gardens; in extreme south of England; allied to *O. stricta*.

Grassulaceæ.

Sedum rupestre, *L.* South of England.

Cucurbitaceæ.

Bryonia dioica, *Jacq.* Gardens; English.

Liliaceæ.

Polygonatum multiflorum, *All.*

Umbelliferaæ.

Sium latifolium, *L.* Rare, Scottish.

„ *angustifolium*, *L.* Ditto.

Eryngium maritimum, *L.* Very rare, Scottish.

Chærophyllum temulentum, *L.* Duncan got this from a new locality shown by J. T.

Rubiaceæ.

Galium cruciatum, *L.* Very rare.

„ *mollugo*, *L.* Ditto.

Dipsaceæ.

Scabiosa columbaria, *L.* Rare, Scottish.

Compositæ.

Sonchus palustris, *L.* Rare, English.

„ *alpinus*, *L.* One of G. Don's plants.

Hieracium auricula, *L.* Gardens; perhaps *H. dubium* of *Smith*.

„ *boreale*, *L.*, for *H. subaustum*, *L.*

„ *murorum*, *L.*

Var. Lawsoni.

Cnicus acaulis, *Willd.* Rare, Scottish; chalky soils of England.

Senecio tenuifolius, *Jacq.*, a form of *S. Jacobcea*, *L.*

Onopordium acanthium, *L.* Rare, Scottish.

Campanulaceæ.

Campanula hederacea, *L.* West of Scotland.

Jasione montana, *L.* Very rare.

Ericaceæ.

Pyrola rotundifolia, *L.* } Rare;
Menziesia cærulea, *Smith.* } these are
Andromeda polifolia, *L.* } got from
J. T.

Gentianaceæ.

Villarsia nymphaeoides, *Vent.* Cultivated sp.

Gentiana acaulis, *L.* Gardens.

Boraginaceæ.

Myosotis sylvatica, *Hoffm.* Continental. This may be, as Dr. Dickie says, a luxuriant of *M. arvensis*, *L.*

Lithospermum officinale, *L.* Gardens; rare, Scottish.

„ *purpureo-cæruleum*, *L.* Gardens; English.

Plantaginaceæ.

Plantago media, *L.* Extremely rare.

Scrophulariaceæ.

Veronica montana, *L.* Rare.

„ *anagallis*, *L.* Rare.

Veronica fruticulosa, *L.* Gardens ; Continental. Dr. Walker and Mr. Brown are the only two said to have got this plant.

„ *Buxbaumii*, *Pen.* A much disputed species.

Melampyrum sylvaticum, *L.* Rare.

Scrophularia aquatica, *L.* Rare, Scottish.

Labiatae.

Nepeta cataria, *L.* Cultivated.

Betonica officinalis, *L.* English ; rare Scottish.

Mentha viridis, *L.* Cultivated.

„ *piperata*, *L.* Ditto. Hooker's "Flora" gives Alford.

Clinopodium vulgare, *L.* I have a note of finding this plant in 1857 at Cairnside, on Deeside.

Origanum vulgare, *L.* Cultivated.

Salvia pratensis, *L.* Ditto ; rare, English.

Verbenaceae.

Verbena officinalis, *L.* Cultivated ; very rare, English.

Primulaceae.

Primula farinosa, *L.* This is the English plant. All ours are *P. Scotica*, *Hook.* ; found only in Inverness, Sutherland, and the Orkney Islands.

Samolus Valerandi, *L.* A widely distributed species in ponds and watery places ; but mostly introduced.

Lysimachia vulgaris, *L.* Very rare.

„ *nummularia*, *L.* Ditto.

Anagallis arvensis, *L.* Mostly introduced.

Polygonaceae.

Polygonum fagopyrum, *L.* Cultivated.

Scrophulariaceae.

Mimulus luteus, *L.* *

Chenopodiaceae.

Chenopodium maritimum, *L.* English.

„ *murale*, *L.* English sea-coast.

Beta maritima, *L.* English sea-coast ; rare in Scotland.

Salicornia herbacea, *L.* Salt marshes, mouth of Ythan, in Aberdeenshire.

Eleagneae.

Hippophaë rhamnoides, *L.* Sea-coast, England.

Euphorbiaceae.

Euphorbia exigua, *L.* Introduced with agricultural seeds.

„ *Cyperissias*, *L.* English.

CLASS II.

MONOCOTYLEDONS.

Orchidaceae.

Listera ovata, *Brown.* Rare.

Epipactis latifolia, *Sw.* Very rare.

Habenaria chlorantha, *Bab.* Very rare.

Corallorhiza innata, *Br.* Scottish.

Selaginellaceae.

Isoetes lacustris, *L.*

„ *Sub-sp. echinospora*, *Dur.*

Pilularia globulifera, *L.*

Amaryllidaceae.

Narcissus poeticus, *L.* Gardens ; an outcast.

Butomaceae.

Butomus umbellatus, *L.* Introduced into Scottish lochs.†

Naiadaceae.

Zannichellia palustris, *L.* South of Scotland.

* John was the first to point out to me the *Mimulus luteus* found in the Don. It is not indigenous, but belongs to North-West America and Chili. It is now plentiful in burns and streams along the coast. It is one of those plants that wander from country to country, and from climate to climate ; indeed it seems to be a great traveller.—J. T.

† Brought by Duncan from Duddingston Loch, near Edinburgh, and planted near Netherton of Tough ; it speedily died out.

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