

SAMUEL CROCKETT

CLEG KELLY, ARAB OF
THE CITY: HIS PROGRESS
AND ADVENTURES

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His Progress and Adventures**

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Cleg Kelly, Arab of the City: His Progress and Adventures

ADVENTURE I. THE OUTCASTING OF CLEG KELLY

"It's all a dumb lie – God's dead!"

Such a silence had never fallen upon the Sunday school, since the fatal day when the gate was blown into the middle of the floor by Mickey McGranaghan, a recent convert (and a temporary one) to the peculiar orthodoxy of Hunker Court. But the new explosion far outstripped the old in its effects. For it contained a denial of all the principles upon which the school was founded, and especially it confounded and blasphemed the cheerful optimism of Mr. James Lugton, its superintendent, otherwise and more intimately known as "Pund o' Cannles."

The statement which contained so emphatic a denial of the eternity of the Trinity was made by Cleg Kelly, a barelegged loon of eleven, who stood lone and unfriended on the floor before the superintendent's desk in the gloomy cellar known as Hunker Court school. Cleg Kelly had been reported by his teacher for incorrigible persistence in misconduct. He had introduced pins point upwards through the cracks in the forms. He had an instrument of wire cunningly plaited about his fingers, by means of which he could nip unsuspecting boys sitting as many as three or four from him – which is a great advantage to a boy in a Sunday school. Lastly, he had fallen backwards over a seat when asked a question; he had stood upon his hands and head while answering it, resuming his first position as if nothing had happened so soon as the examination passed on to the next boy. In fact, he had filled the cup of his iniquities to the brim.

His teacher did not so much object to the pranks of Cleg Kelly himself. He objected mainly because, being ragged, barelegged, with garments picturesquely ventilated, and a hat without a crown, he was as irresistible in charm and fascination to all the other members of his class as if he had been arrayed in silver armour starry clear. For though Hunker Court was a mission school, it was quite a superior mission. And (with the exception of one class, which was much looked down upon) the lowest class of children were not encouraged to attend. Now Cleg Kelly, by parentage and character, was almost, if not quite, as the mothers of the next social grade said, "the lowest of the low."

So when Cleg's teacher, a respectable young journeyman plumber, could stand no more pranks and had grown tired of cuffing and pulling, he led Cleg up to the awful desk of the superintendent from which the rebukes and prizes were delivered.

Thereupon "Pund o' Cannles," excellent but close-fisted tallow chandler and general dealer, proceeded to rebuke Cleg. Now the rebukes of "Pund o' Cannles" smelt of the counter, and were delivered in the tones in which he addressed his apprentice boys when there were no customers in the shop – a tone which was entirely different from the bland suavity which he used when he joined his hands and asked, "And what is the next article, madam?"

"Do you know, boy," said the superintendent, "that by such sinful conduct you are wilfully going on the downward road? You are a wicked boy, and instead of becoming better under your kind teacher, and taking advantage of the many advantages of this place devoted to religious instruction, you stick pins – brass pins – into better conducted boys than yourself. And so, if you do not repent, God will take you in your iniquity and cast you into hell. For, remember, God sees everything and punishes the bad people and rewards the good."

The superintendent uttered, though he knew it not, the most ancient of heresies – that which Job refuted.

It was at this point in the oration of "Pund o' Cannles" that Cleg Kelly's startling interruption occurred. The culprit stopped making O's on the dusty floor with his toe, amongst the moist paper pellets which were the favourite distraction of the inattentive at Hunker Court; and, in a clear voice, which thrilled through the heart of every teacher and scholar within hearing, he uttered his denial of the eternity of the Trinity.

"It's all a dumb lie – God's dead!" he said.

There was a long moment's silence, and small wonder, as the school waited for the shivering trump of doom to split the firmament. And the patient and self-sacrificing teachers who gave their unthanked care to the youth of the court every Sunday, felt their breaths come short, and experienced a feeling as if they were falling over a precipice in a dream. At last Mr. James Lugton found his voice.

"Young and wicked blasphemer!" he said sternly, "your presence must no longer, like that of the serpent in Paradise, poison the instruction given at this Sabbath school – I shall expel you from our midst –"

Here Cleg's teacher interposed. He was far from disliking his scholar, and had anticipated no such result arising from his most unfortunate reference of his difficulty to the superintendent. For he liked Cleg's ready tongue, and was amused by the mongrel dialect of Scots and Irish into which, in moments of excitement, he lapsed.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said, "but I am quite willing to give Kelly another chance – he is not such a bad boy as you might think."

The superintendent waved his hand in a dignified way. He rather fancied himself in such scenes, and considered that his manner was quite as distinguished as that of his minister, when the latter was preaching his last memorable course of sermons upon the imprecatory psalms, and making solemn applications of them to the fate of members of a sister denomination which worshipped just over the way.

"The boy is a bold blasphemer and atheist!" he said; "he shall be cast out from among our innocent lambs. Charles Kelly, I solemnly expel you upon this Christian Sabbath day, as a wicked and incorrigible boy, and a disgrace to any respectable mission school."

The attitude of the superintendent was considered especially fine at this point. And he went home personally convinced that the excellent and fitting manner in which he vindicated the good name of Hunker Court upon this occasion, was quite sufficient to balance an extensive practice of the use of light weights in the chandler's shop at the corner of Hunker's Row. He further entirely believed judicious severity of this kind to be acceptable in the highest quarters.

So as the resisting felon is taken to prison, Cleg Kelly, heathen of eleven years, was haled to the outer door and cast forth of Hunker Court. But as the culprit went he explained his position.

"It's all gammon, that about prayin'," he cried; "I've tried it heaps of times – never fetched it once! An' look at my mother. She just prays lashings, and all the time. An' me father, he's never a bit the better – no, nor her neither. For he thrashes us black and blue when he comes hame just the same. Ye canna gammon me, Pund o' Cannles, with your lang pray-prayin' and your short weight. I tell you God's dead, and it's all a dumb lie!"

The last accents of the terrible renunciation lingered upon the tainted air even after the door had closed, and Cleg Kelly was an outcast. But the awed silence was broken by a whiz and jingle which occurred close to the superintendent's ear, as Cleg Kelly, Iconoclast, punctuated his thesis of defiance by sending a rock of offence clear through the fanlight over the door of Hunker Court mission school.

ADVENTURE II. THE BURNING OF THE WHINNY KNOWES

Cleg Kelly was now outcast and alien from the commonwealth. He had denied the faith, cast aside every known creed, and defied the Deity Himself. Soon he would defy the policeman and break the laws of man – which is the natural course of progression in iniquity, as every one knows.

So leaving Hunker Court he struck across the most unfrequented streets, where only a stray urchin (probably a benighted Episcopalian) was spending the Sabbath chivying cats, to the mountainous regions of Craigside, where the tall "lands" of St. Leonards look out upon the quarried crags and steep hill ridges of Arthur's Seat. For Cleg was fortunate enough to be a town boy who had the country at his command just over the wall – and a wall, too, which he could climb at as many as twenty points. Only bare stubby feet, however, could overpass these perilous clefts. Cleg's great toes, horny as if shod with iron, fitted exactly into the stone crevices from which the mortar had been loosened. His grimy little fingers found a purchase in the slightest nicks. And once on the other side, there was no policeman, park-keeper, or other person in authority, who could make the pace with Cleg's bare brown legs, at least up the loose clatter of the shingle between the lower greensward and the Radical Road.

So, after being expelled from Hunker Court, Cleg made straight for a nook of his own among the crags. Here, like a prudent outlaw, he took account of his possessions with a view to arranging his future career of crime. He turned out his pockets into his hat. This was, indeed, a curious thing to do. For the article which he wore upon his shaggy locks was now little more than the rim of what had once been a covering for the head, proof against wind and water. But though Cleg's treasures rested upon the ground, the fact that they were within his hat-rim focussed them, as it were, and their relative worth was the more easily determined.

The first article which Cleg deposited upon the ground inside his hat was a box of matches, which had been given him to light the gas with in the outlying corners of Hunker Court school, for that dank cellar was gloomy enough even on a summer afternoon. Then came some string, the long-pronged nipping-wires which he had taken from his father's stores, a pair of pincers, a knife with one whole and one broken blade, a pipe, some brown-paper tobacco of a good brand, a half-written exercise-book from the day-school at which Cleg occasionally looked in, five marbles of a variety known as "commonies," one noble knuckler of alabaster which Cleg would not have parted with for his life, a piece of dry bread, and, lastly, half an apple, with encroaching bays and projecting promontories, which indicated in every case but one the gap in Cleg's dental formation on the left side of his upper jaw, which dated from his great fight with Hole in the Wa' in the police yard. The exception was a clean semicircle, bitten right into the apple-core. This was the tidemark of a friendly bite Cleg had given to a friend, in whose double row were no gaps. The perfect crescent had been made by the teeth of a lassie – one Vara Kavannah.

The box of matches was to its owner the most attractive article in all this array of wealth. Cleg looked into his hat-rim with manifest pleasure. He slapped his knee. He felt that he was indeed well adapted to the profession of outlaw. If he had to be a Cain, he could at least make it exceedingly lively in the Land of Nod.

It was a chilly day on the craigs, the wind blowing bask from the East, and everything underfoot as dry as tinder. The wild thought of a yet untried ploy surged up in Cleg's mind. He grasped the matchbox quickly, with thoughts of arson crystallising in his mind. He almost wished that he had set Hunker Court itself on fire. But just in time he remembered Vara Kavannah and her little brother Hugh.

"I'll get them to gang to anither school first," he said.

But in the meantime, with the thought of setting fire to something in his heart and the matchbox in his hand, it was necessary to find the materials for a blaze. He had no powder with him or he would have made a "peeoye" – the simple and inexpensive firework of metropolitan youth.

He looked up at the heather and whin which covered the Nether Hill. His heart bounded within him at the thought. He looked again at his matchbox, which was one of the old oval shape, containing matches so exceedingly and gratuitously sulphurous, that the very smell of one of them was well worth the halfpenny charged for the lot. So, without any further pause for reflection, Cleg stowed away all the possessions, inventoried with such accuracy above, into various outlying nooks and crevices among the seams and pockets of his flapping attire.

Having collected the last one of these, Cleg climbed up a crumbling cliff at the eastern end of the craigs, where the stones lie about in slats. Upon each of them, for all the world like green post-office wax dripped upon grey paper, was some curious mineral, which Cleg, in his hours of decent citizenship, collected and sold at easy rates to the boys of the Pleasance as a charm. This mysterious green stuff had even been made a seal of initiation into one of the most select, aristocratic, and bloody secret societies of which Cleg was a member. Indeed, if the truth must be told, Cleg had formed the association chiefly that he might be able to supply the badges of membership, for he had a corner in green mineral wax – at least so long as the mine at the east corner of the craigs remained undiscovered by the other adventurous loons of the south side.

Cleg soon reached the tawny, thin-pastured, thick-furzed slopes which constitute the haunch of Arthur's lion hill. In the days of Cleg's youth these were still clad thick with whins and broom, among which the birds built in the spring, and lovers sat in long converse on little swarded oases.

"I'll juist set fire to this wee bit knowe," said Cleg, his heart beating within him at the enormity of the offence. "There's no a 'keelie' in the toon that wad dare to do as muckle!"

For the ranger of that particular part of the hill was an old soldier of great size and surprising swiftness in a race. And many had been the Arthur Street urchins who had suffered a sore skin and a night in the cells after being taken in dire offence. So "the Warrior" they called him, for an all-sufficient name.

In a sheltered spot, and with the wind behind him, Cleg opened his matchbox. He struck a match upon the rough oval bottom. It spurted faintly blue, burned briskly, and then flickered out within Cleg's hollowed hands. Cleg grunted.

"A fizz an' a stink," said he, summing up the case in a popular phrase.

The next went somewhat better. The flame reached the wood, dipped as if to expire, took hold again, and finally burned up in a broad-based yellow triangle. Cleg let it drop among the crisp, dry, rustling grasses at the roots of the whin bushes. Instantly a little black line ran forward and crossways, with hardly any flame showing. Cleg was interested, and laid the palm of his hand upon the ground. He lifted it instantly with a cry of pain. What had seemed a black line with an edge of flickering blue was really a considerable fire, which, springing from the dry couch grass and bent, was briskly licking up the tindery prickles of the gorse.

The next moment, with an upward bound and a noise like the flapping of a banner, the flame sprang clear of the whin bushes, and the blue smoke streamed heavenwards. Cleg watched the progress, chained to the spot. He well knew that it was time for him to be off. But with the unhallowed fascination of the murderer for the scene of his crime upon him, he watched bush after bush being swallowed up, and shouted and leaped with glee. But the progress of the flame was further and swifter than he had intended. One little knoll would have satisfied him. But in a minute, driven forward by a level-blowing, following wind, the flame overleaped the little strait of short turf, and grasped the next and far larger continent of whin.

Cleg, surprised, began to shrink from the consequences of his act. He had looked to revenge himself upon society for his expulsion from Hunker Court by making a little private fire, and lo! he had started a world conflagration. He ran round to the edge of the gorse covert. Two hedge-sparrows

were fluttering and dashing hither and thither, peeping and crying beseechingly. Cleg looked at the objective point of their anxiety, and there, between two whin branches, was the edge of a nest, and a little compact yellow bundle of three gaping mouths, without the vestige of a body to be seen.

"Guid life," cried Cleg, who kept kindness to birds and beasts as the softest spot of his heart, "guid life, I never thocht the birds wad be biggin' already!"

And with that he took off his coat, and seizing it in both hands he charged boldly into the front of the flame, disdainful of prickles and scorchings. He dashed the coat down upon a bush which was just beginning to crackle underneath; and by dint of hard fighting and reckless bravery he succeeded in keeping the fire from the little island, on the central bush of which was situated the hedge-sparrow's nest. Here he stood, with his coat threshing every way, keeping the pass with his life – brave as Horatius at the bridge (or any other man) – while the flames crackled and roared past him.

Suddenly there was a great fizzing and spitting from the ragged coat which Cleg wielded as a quenching weapon. The fatal matchbox, cause of all the turmoil, had exploded. The fumes were stifling, but the flames still threatened to spread, and Cleg still laid about him manfully. The tails of the coat disappeared. There was soon little left but the collar. Cleg stood like a warrior whose sword has broken in his hand in the face of the triumphant enemy. But the boy had a resource which is not usually open to the soldier. He cast the useless coat-collar from him, stripped a sleeved waistcoat, which had been given him by the wife of a mason's labourer, and, taking the garment by the two arms, he made an exceedingly efficient beater of the moleskin, which had the dried lime yet crumbly upon it at the cuffs.

When at last "the Warrior" came speeding up the hill, warned out of his Sabbath afternoon sleep by the cry that the whins were on fire, he was in no pleasant temper. He found, however, that the fire had been warded from the greater expanses by a black imp of a boy, burned and smutted, with the remains of a moleskin garment clasped in a pair of badly burned hands.

When the crowd of wanderers had gathered from all parts of the hill, and the fire had been completely trampled out, the ranger began his inquiries. Cleg was the chief suspect, because no one had seen any other person near the fire except himself. On the other hand no one had seen him light the whins, while all had seen him single-handed fighting the flames.

"It's Tim Kelly's loon, the housebreaker, that leeved in the Sooth Back!" said the inevitable officious stranger with the gratuitous local knowledge. At his father's ill-omened name there was an obvious hardening in the faces of the men who stood about.

"At any rate, the loon is better in the lock-up," said the ranger sententiously.

At this Cleg's heart beat faster than ever. Many had been his perilous ploys, but never yet had he seen the inside of the prison. He acknowledged that he deserved it, but it was hard thus to begin his prison experience after having stayed to fight the fire, when he could easily have run away. There was unfairness somewhere, Cleg felt.

So, with the burnt relics of his sleeved waistcoat still in his hands, Cleg was dragged along down the edge of the Hunter's Bog. The ranger grasped him roughly by a handful of dirty shirt collar, and his strides were so long that Cleg's short legs were not more than half the time upon the ground.

But at a certain spring of clear, crystal water, which gushes out of the hillside from beneath a large round stone, the ranger paused.

He too had fought the flames, and he had cause to thirst. For it was Sunday afternoon, and he had arisen from his usual lethargic after-dinner sleep upon the settle opposite the kitchen fire.

So at the well he stooped to drink, one hand still on Cleg's collar, and the palm of the other set flat on the side of the boulder. It was Cleg's opportunity. He quickly twisted himself suddenly round, just after the ranger's lips had touched the water. The rotten cloth of his shirt tore, and Cleg sprang free. The ranger, jerked from the support of the stone, and at the same moment detached

from his prisoner, fell forward with his head in the spring, while Cleg sped downhill like the wind. He was ready stripped for the race. So, leaving the panting chase far behind, he made for a portion of the encompassing wall, which none but he had ever scaled. Having clambered upon the top, he crossed his legs and calmly awaited the approach of the ranger.

"It's a warm day, Warrior," said Cleg; "ye seem to be sweatin'!"

"Ye limb o' Sawtan," panted the ranger, "gin ever I get ye this side o' the dyke, I'll break every bane in your body."

"Faith," answered Cleg, "ye should be braw an' thankfu', Warrior, for ye hae gotten what ye haena had for years, and had muckle need o'!"

"And what was that, ye de'il's buckie?" cried the angry ranger.

"A wash!" said Cleg Kelly, as he dropped down the city side of the wall, and sped home to his fortress.

ADVENTURE III. WHY CLEG KELLY HATED HIS FATHER

This is a bad, black tale; yet, for the sake of what comes after, it must be told.

Cleg Kelly had a father. He was a deeply pockmarked man who hated his son; but not so bitterly as his son hated him. Once on a time Cleg Kelly had also a mother, and it is the story of his mother which remains to tell. The story of most men is the story of their mother. They drank love or hatred, scorn or sympathy, at her breasts.

So it was with Cleg Kelly. So let the story of Isbel Kelly be told. How a woman may be murdered in this land and none swing for it! How a woman may be put to the torture every day and every night for years, and the voice of her crying mount (we must believe it) into the ears of the God of Sabaoth, yet no murmur reach her nearest neighbour upon the earth! Gladlier would I tell a merrier tale, save that it is ever best to get the worst over first, as medicine goes before barley-sugar.

Isbel Kelly had not always been Isbel Kelly. That is to say, she had not always been unhappy. There was a time when Timothy Kelly had not come into her life. Isbel Beattie was once a country girl. She had sung in the morn as she went afield to call the dappled kine, as glad a milkmaid as any in song or story. Her foot was the lightest in the dance at the "kirk," her hand the deftest at the spinning-wheel, her cheerful presence the most desired when the butter would not come. For the butter ever comes fastest for a good-tempered woman. A vixenish disposition only curdles the milk. That is why young men, landward but wise, so eagerly offer to help the maids at the butter-making. And no sweeter maiden than Isbel Beattie ever wore print gowns and lilted "O whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad," in all the parish of Ormiland – that is, till Timothy Kelly came, and Isbel sang no more.

Isbel Beattie was "fey," they said, and would take no advice. Lads tight and trig stood in rows to wait for her as she came out of the kirk, on fine Sabbath days when the lilac blossoms, white and purple, were out, and there was a drooping sprig in every spruce bachelor's coat. But Isbel passed them all by with a toss of her head. She could have married a rather stupid young farmer of the best intentions and unquestioned solvency had she so chosen. But Isbel was "fey," and would take counsel from neither maid nor matron.

Now Timothy Kelly, the weasel-faced Irish harvestman, wormed himself into the girl's affections by ways of his own, as before and after he had undone many a trebly fastened door with his steel picklock.

From that day until the hour of her death Isbel Beattie saw no good day. A week after they were married, Timothy Kelly was drinking Isbel's last half-year's wages in a public-house, and Isbel was crying at home with a bruised cheek. She sang no more late or early; but learned to endure hardness and to pray that the kind Lord of whom she had heard in the kirk, might send a swift and easy death as the best thing to pray for.

Timothy Kelly was not long in Ormiland ere he removed to Edinburgh in the interests of business. He needed the metropolis for the exercise of his talents. So Isbel packed what he had left her, and followed him, faithful and weary-foot, to the city lane, and Timothy Kelly cursed her over his shoulder all the way. But she did not hear him, and his words did not hurt her. God had stopped her ears. For the sound of a dearer voice was in them, and the promise of the Eden joy answered Isbel, as though the Lord Almighty walked with her through the streets of the city in the cool of the day.

A week after an infant lay on the breast of Isbel Kelly, in a garret up Meggat's Close, off the Pleasance. A kindly neighbour looked in now and then when Tim Kelly was out, and comforted the young mother. When Tim came in he cursed them all impartially. His foul words sent the neighbours

forth again, full of pity and indignation; and so he cast himself down to sleep off drink and temper on the couch of rags in the corner.

Towered fair-faced Edinburgh and its seething under-world held no man like Timothy Kelly. A sieve-net might have been drawn through it and no worse rascal caught than he. Cruel only where he dared with impunity to be cruel, plausible and fawning where it was to his interest so to be, Timothy Kelly was a type of the criminal who lives to profit by the strange infatuations of the weakest women. From silly servant girls at kitchen doors who thought him "a most civil-spoken young man," he obtained the professional information which enabled him to make unrecognised but accurate lists of the family silver upon some stormy midnight, when the policemen stood in doorways, or perambulated the city with their helmets down upon their brows.

Isbel Kelly wore thin and white, and the bruises on her face grew chronic, only occasionally changing the side. For in this matter Timothy Kelly had no weak partiality. Yet, in the midst of all, Cleg Kelly gained in years and strength, his mother many a time shielding him from blows with her own frail body. There was a soft light on her face when she looked at him. When her husband was out Isbel watched Cleg all day long as he lay on the bed and kicked with sturdy limbs, or sprawled restlessly about the house. The dwelling was not extensive. It consisted of one room, and Tim Kelly's "hidie holes," where he kept the weapons of his craft – curious utensils, with iron crab fingers set at various angles upon the end of steel stalks.

Now, it is the strangest, yet one of the commonest, things in this world that Isbel Kelly loved her husband, and at the worst times said no word against him. It was a mistake. She ought to have outfaced him, insulted him, defied him, given him blow for blow. Then he might have been a reasonably decent husband, according to the standard of Meggat's Close.

But Cleg Kelly made no such mistake. From the time that he was a toddling little fellow till the parish buried his mother, Cleg Kelly looked at his father with level brows of hate and scorn. No one had taught him; but the perception of youth gauged the matter unerringly.

There are but two beings in the universe whom a really bad-hearted man cannot deceive: his Maker and a young child. Cleg Kelly never quailed before his father. Neither words nor blows daunted him. Whenever his father went out, he said:

"Bad mannie gone away, minnie!"

"Na, Cleg," said his mother, "ye mauna speak that way o' yer faither!"

"Bad mannie, minnie!" Cleg repeated determinedly; "bad mannie gone away."

And from this she could not move him.

Then as soon as his father began to beat the lad, and his mother was not able to protect him, Cleg developed a marvellous litheness and speed. He could climb roofs like a cat at five years of age, and watch his father from the ledge of an outlying wall or the side of a reeking chimney-can, where even the foot of the practised burglar dared not venture.

Then came a year black and bitter. It was the year of the small-pox. That part of Edinburgh where the Kellys lived became a walled city. There was one death in every three or four attacked. And Tim Kelly went to the seaside for his health.

But Isbel and her boy battled it out alone. She had seven shillings a week for cleaning a day-school. But soon the schools were closed, and her pay ceased. Nevertheless, she earned money somehow, and the minister of the McGill-Gillespie church visited her. It would take a whole treatise on Church History, and a professor thereof, to tell why that church was called the McGill-Gillespie. But the unlearned may be assured that these excellent gentlemen were not canonised Scottish saints, nor were their effigies worshipped inside. But at this time the minister of the church came very near to being worshipped outside.

The children knew his step, and ran —*to*, not *from*, him. He was the only man, except the doctor, at whom the urchins of Meggat's did not fling dirt. One of these had even been known to

touch his hat to the minister of McGill-Gillespie. But this was a great risk, and of course he did not do it when any one was looking.

One day Cleg Kelly sickened, and though at the time he was a great boy of six, his mother carried him about in her arms all day, soothing him. And the hot, dry spots burned ever brighter on his cheeks, and his eyes shone like flame. The minister brought the doctor, for they hunted in couples – these two. Some of the ministers had gone to the seaside with Timothy Kelly, and along with them a few great professional men from the West-End. But the Pleasance doctor, a little fair man, and the minister of McGill-Gillespie, a tall dark man, remained with the small-pox. Also God was there – not very evidently, or obtrusively, perhaps; but the minister of McGill-Gillespie knew where to find Him when He was wanted.

And He was needed badly enough in the sick-room of Cleg Kelly. No doubt Cleg ought to have gone to the hospital. But, for one thing, the hospitals were overcrowded. And, for another, if they had taken Cleg, they might have taken his mother also. At all events Cleg was nursed in his home, while his father remained at the seaside for his health.

One night, when the trouble was at its height, Cleg ran deliriously on about "the bad mannie." His mother stilled and tended him. The doctor ordered a little warm wine to be given to Cleg occasionally, and the minister of McGill-Gillespie had brought it. But Cleg wavered between life and death in spite of the wine – and much nearer death than life. Isbel had seen the doctor earlier in the day, and she was to go for him again if a certain anticipated change did not come within six hours. The change did not come, though the mother never took her eyes off her boy. Cleg lay back on his pallet bed, inert and flaccid, his eyes glassy and fixed in his head. His mother softly closed the door, took her shawl over her head, and fled through the midnight streets to the doctor's house.

A sudden summer storm had arisen off the sea. The wind swirled about the old many-gabled closes of Edinburgh. It roared over the broken fortress line of the Salisbury Crags. The streets were deserted. The serried ash-buckets were driven this way and that by the gale. Random cats scudded from doorstep to cellar, dipped, and disappeared. *Clash!* fell a great shutter on the pavement before her. Isbel Kelly was at the doctor's door. He was not in. Would she leave a message? She would, and the message was that a little boy was sinking, and that unless the doctor came quickly a mother's only son would die. She cried out in agony as she said it, but the wind swirled the cry away.

So through the turmoil of the storm she came back, and ran up the evil-smelling dark stairs, where the banister was broken, and only the wind-blown floor of the gas-lamp outside, flickering through the glassless windows of the stairway, lighted her upwards. She had once been a milkmaid, but she had forgotten how the cowslips smelled. And only in her dreams did she recall the scent of beehives over the wall on a still summer night.

She opened the door with a great yearning, but with no presentiment of evil.

"Tim!" she said, her face whitening.

A man, weasel-faced and hateful to look upon, stood by the little cupboard. He had a purse in his hand, and a bottle stood on the mantelshelf beside him.

"Oh, Tim!" she cried, "for the Lord's sake dinna tak' my last shillin' – no frae me an' the boy. He's deen', Tim!"

She ran forward as if to beseech him to give the money back to her; but Tim Kelly, reckless with drink, snatched up the minister's wine-bottle and it met his wife's temple with a dull sound. The woman fell in a heap. She lay loosely on the floor by the wall, and did not even moan. Tim Kelly set the bottle to his lips to drain the last dregs with an empty laugh. But from the bed something small and white flew at his throat.

"Bad mannie, bad mannie, bad mannie!" a shrill voice cried. And before Tim Kelly could set down the bottle, the little figure in flying swathings had dashed itself again and again upon him, biting and gnashing on him like a wolf's cub. For the blood of Tim Kelly was in the lad, as well as the blood of the milkmaid who lay on the floor as one dead.

And this was what the doctor found, when he stumbled up the stair and opened the door. He had seen many strange things in his day, but none so terrible as this. He does not care to speak about it, though he told the minister that either Providence or the excitement had probably saved the child's life. Yet for all that he tended Timothy Kelly, when his turn came, as well as the best of paying patients. For Tim's was an interesting case, with many complications.

So this adventure tells the reason of three things very important to be known in this history – why, six months after, Isbel Kelly was glad to die, why Cleg Kelly hated his father, and why smooth-faced Tim, who had once deceived the servant girls, was ever after a deeply pockmarked man.

What it does not tell is, why God permitted it all.

ADVENTURE IV. HOW ISBEL KELLY HEARD SWEET MUSIC

Cleg Kelly did not die just then, which was in some ways a good thing. But neither did his mother Isbel, which, for herself, was a pity. It was also a mistake for society, for then Tim Kelly might also have died for the want of a nurse, and Providence and the city authorities would have been saved a vast deal of trouble.

But in spite of all boasts to the contrary, this is so little a free country that people cannot always die when they want – some not even when they ought to. And not a few have got themselves into trouble for assisting manifest destiny. But no one, not even the chief constable, would have been sorry had Isbel Beattie forgotten to help Tim Kelly, her husband, at some crisis of his disease, so that he might have gone betimes to his own place, and thus have been compelled to leave alone a great number of other places and things with which he had no proper concern.

But Isbel Kelly did not think of that. Moreover, Tim Kelly behaved himself better as an invalid than he had ever done as a whole man. And as for little Cleg, he got better rapidly in order to get out of his father's way.

But there came a day when both her invalids were out of her hands, and Isbel had time to clean her house and give her attention to dying on her own account. She did not wish to put any one to an inconvenience. But, indeed, there was little else left for her to do. Tim Kelly was again able to attend to his business – which, strictly speaking, consisted in the portorage of other people's goods out of their houses, without previous arrangement with the owners, and in a manner as unobtrusive as possible.

Cleg was too young for this profession, but according to his father's friends his day was coming. In the meantime he spent most of the day in a brickyard at the back. For Tim Kelly, owing to a little difficulty as to rent, had moved his household goods from Meggat's Close to the outskirts of the city. Now they do not use many bricks about Edinburgh; but there are exceptions, especially in the direction of Leith, and this was the place where they made the exceptions.

The brickyard was a paradise to Cleg Kelly in the warm days of summer. The burning bricks made a strange misty fume of smoke in the air, which was said to be healthy. People who could not afford to go to Portobello for convalescence brought their children to the brickyard. They made drain-pipes and other sanitary things there; and on that account also the brickyard was accounted healthy for people in the position of the Kellys.

At any rate Cleg Kelly was well content, and he played there from morn to night. His mother generally watched him from a window. There was but one window in the little "rickle of brick" which their pawnbroking Jew landlord called a "commodious cottage." He might call it what he liked. He never got any rent for it from Tim Kelly.

Yet Isbel was happier here than in the city. At least she could see the trees, and she had neighbours who came in to visit her when her husband was known to be from home.

"Eh, Mistress Kelly, I wonder ye can pit up wi' sic a man," said the wife of Jo Turner, a decent man steadily employed on the brickfields, who only drank half his wages.

Isbel signed frantically towards the bed with her hand. But without noticing her signals of distress, the innocent Mrs. Turner went on with the burden of her tale.

"Gin I had sic a man, I wad tak' him to bits an' pit him up again anew – the black-hearted scoondrel o' a red-headed Irishman!"

Tim Kelly rose from the bed where he had been resting himself. They do not set a bed in a room in that country. They put it down outside a room and build it round on three sides. Then they

cover the remaining side in with as many cloths as possible, for the purpose of keeping out the air. From such a death-trap Tim Kelly rose slowly, and confronted Mistress Turner.

"Get out av me house, Misthress Turner, afore I break the thick skull av yer ill-conditioned face," said Tim, whose abuse was always of the linked and logical kind.

"'Deed an' I'll gang oot o' yer hoose wi' pleasure, Timothy Kelly; gin I had kenned that the likes o' ye was in it, Mary Turner wad never hae crossed yer doorstep."

"Well, now that ye are here, be afther takin' yersilf acrost the durestip, as suddent an' comprehensive-like as ye can – wid yer brazen face afore ye an' yer turned-up nose in the air. When ye are wanted bad in this house, ye'll get an invite wid a queen's pictur' on it an' me kyard!" said Tim Kelly, sarcastically.

Mary Turner betook herself to the door, in a manner as dignified as it is possible to retain when retreating with one's face to the foe. But when she got there, she put her arms akimbo and opened the vials of her wrath on Tim Kelly. The neighbours came to the doors to listen. It was a noble effort, and the wives remembered some of Mistress Turner's phrases long after, and reproduced them every fortnight upon pay-nights, for the benefit of their husbands when they came home with only eleven intact shillings out of twenty-three.

But Tim Kelly hardly troubled to reply. He only said that Mary Turner was a brass-faced old Jezebel, a statement which he repeated several times, because he observed that it provoked on each occasion a fresh burst of the Turnerian vocabulary.

Tim Kelly never wasted animosity. After all, Mistress Turner was not his wife, and there were other means of getting even with her. He could win money at cards from her husband, or he could teach her son, Jamie, who had just left school, a fine new game with the lock of a door and one of his curious pronged hooks. There are more ways of killing a cat than drowning it in cream – also many deaths less agreeable to the cat. So Tim Kelly bided his time.

But for some reason Tim Kelly grew less unkind to his wife than he had ever been, since those terrible days when in Ormland parish bonny Isbel Beattie grew "fey."

It was said that Tim was afraid of his son Cleg. At any rate, certain it is that he beat his wife no more, and very occasionally he even gave her a little money. So in her heart Isbel Kelly counted these good days, and sometimes she could almost have wished to live a little longer.

It was not often that Cleg stayed in the house with her. That she did not expect. But at all times of the day she could see him, rushing about the brickfield, sometimes piling bricks into castles; at other times helping Jo Turner; then again playing at marbles for "keeps" in the red dust of the yard, with the sun pouring down upon his head. It was a constant marvel to Isbel that he was never tired. She was always tired.

Sometimes Cleg Kelly fought, and then his mother called him in. He always came – after the fight was over. He still wore a hat of straw with a hole in it, or rather he wore a hole with a little rim of hat round it. He loved his mother, and, on the whole, attended to what she told him. He did not steal anything of value, nor would he go near Hare's public. He did not tell more lies than were just and necessary. He minded his mother's wants, and was on the whole a fairly good boy, as boys go down by the Easter Beach brickyard. The standard was not an exacting one.

"Mind, now, Cleg, when I gang awa', ye are to bide wi' your faither, an' no cross him ower sair. He is your faither, mind, an' I leave him to you."

Cleg promised – to please his mother, but he loved his other parent none the more. The next time he saw him come home drunk, he clouted him with a paving-stone from behind the yard wall. He excused himself by saying his mother was not gone away yet.

This was the lesson Isbel taught Cleg every day when he came in to his scanty meals, many of which good Mistress Turner slipped into the house under her apron, when the "brute beast and red-headed gorilla" of her anathema was known to be out of the way.

After a while there came an afternoon when Isbel Kelly felt strangely quiet. It was a drowsy day, and the customary sounds of the brickfield were hushed in the doze of the afternoon sun. Outside it was hot with an intense heat, and a kind of pale bluish smother rose off the burning bricks. The reek of the kilns drifted across the fields, too lazy to rise through the slumberous sunshine. The whole yard radiated blistering heat like an oven.

Isbel sat by the window in a chair which Tim had made during his convalescence; for he was exceedingly handy with tools, and during those days he had nothing worse to do.

She made the house as tidy as she could compass during the morning hours, steadying herself with one hand on the walls as she went about. Cleg, of course, was playing outside. He had come racing in for his dinner with a wisp of hair sticking out of the hole in his hat. Isbel smoothed it down, and because her hand touched him like a caress Cleg put it from him, saying, "Dinna, mother; somebody might see ye!"

It was hot, and the boy was a little irritable; but his mother understood.

Then, as he took the plate of broth, he told his mother all that had happened in the brickfield that day. He had carried clay for Jo, and Jo had given him a penny. Then he had been at a rat-hunt with the best terrier in the world. He had also chased Michael Hennessy twice round the yard after a smart bout of fisticuffs. Thereupon, the men had cheered him, and called him a "perfect wull-cat" – which Cleg took to be a term of praise, and cherished as a soldier does the "penn'orth o' bronze" which constitutes the Victoria Cross.

Isbel only sat and rested and listened. Tim was away for the day, she knew not where, and the minutes Cleg remained indoors and talked to her were her sole and sufficient pleasure. She thanked the Lord for each one of them. But she never called the boy in against his will, nor yet held him longer than he cared to stay.

Yet, somehow, on this day Isbel was more eager than usual to detain her son. She clung to him with a strange kind of yearning. But as soon as Cleg had finished his bread and soup he snatched up his white straw hat-brim and raced out, crying, as he ran, "I'm awa', mither – Tam Gillivray has stealed my auld basin without the bottom."

This was a serious offence, and Cleg went down in haste to avenge the insult. Soon there was the noise of battle below – chiefly, however, the noise of them that shout for the mastery; and then, in a little, when the bottomless basin had been recovered by its rightful owner, the noise of them that cry for being overcome.

From the window Isbel watched. Her thin hair fell over her wasted temples, and she pressed her hand on her breast, searching as though something were missing there. And so there was. It was about a lung and a half which she missed. Nevertheless there had fallen a peace upon Isbel to which she had been unaccustomed. Faint tremors ran through her body, and though the window was wide open, she often gasped for breath. A blissful, painless weariness stole over her.

Cleg was playing below. He had achieved a victory, complete, yet not quite bloodless, for Tam Gillivray was staunching his nose at the smith's cauldron with a lump of cold iron at the back of his neck. Cleg, prancing in haughty state and followed by a little train of admirers, was now dragging the basin in triumph round the yard. He was pretending that it was a railway train drawn by an engine of extremely refractory disposition, which curvetted and reared in a most unenginely manner.

Isbel watched him from her window.

"He is happy, puir laddie – maybe happier than he'll ever be again. Let him bide a wee. I'll gie him a cry, in time."

Then she looked again. She prayed a little while with her eyes shut. Beneath, Cleg was holding his court. He had crowned himself with the basin, and pulled his hair through it in the shape of a plume. As an appropriate finish for the whole, he had stuck the mop of protruding locks full of feathers, and now he was presiding over a court of justice at which Michael Hennessy was being

tried for his life on the charge of murdering a "yellow yoit." In due course the verdict of justifiable homicide was returned, and the culprit sentenced to kill another, or be belted round the brickyard.

Then, wearying for a fresher ploy, the boys decided to build a fortress, and instantly, as soon as they had thought of it, they set to work with a mountain of refuse bricks, Cleg Kelly putting no hand to the manual labour, but being easily first in the direction of affairs. This "gaffership" suited Cleg so well that he turned three excellent wheels in the greatness of his content, and then immediately knocked over several boys for presuming to imitate him, when they ought to have been fulfilling orders and building bricks into a fortress.

From the window his mother still watched him. She smiled to see his light-heart joy, and said again, as if to herself, "In a while I shall cry to him – I dinna need him yet!"

All about there grew up in her ears a sound of sweet music, as of the many singers at the kirk on still, warm Sabbath days, singing the psalms which she remembered long ago in Ormiland, only they sounded very far away. And at times the brickyard reeled and dazzled, the arid trodden ground and steaming bricks fell back, the cracked walls opened out, and she saw the sun shining upon golden hills, the like of which she had never seen before.

"What is this? Oh, what's this?" she asked herself aloud, and the sound of her own voice was in her ears as the roaring of many waters.

It seemed to her to be almost time now. She leaned forward wearily to call her son to help her. But he was sitting on a throne in the midst of his castle, dressed as Robin Hood, with all his merry men about him. He looked so happy, and he laughed so loud, that Isbel said again to herself —

"I can manage yet for half an hour, and then I shall cry to him."

But her son caught sight of her at the window. He was so elated that he did not mind noticing his mother, as a common boy would have done. He waved his hand to her, calling out loud —

"Mither, mither, I'm biggin' a bonny hoose for ye to leeve in!"

Isbel smiled, and it was as if the sun which shone on the hills of her dream had touched her thin face and made it also beautiful for the last time before sundown.

"My guid boy – my nice boy," she said, "the Lord will look till him! He said he was biggin' a hoose for his mither. Let him big his hoose. In an hour I shall cry to him – my ain laddie!"

Yet in an hour she did not cry, and it was the only time she had ever broken her word to her son.

But that was because Isbel Kelly had journeyed where no crying is. Neither shall there be any more pain.

ADVENTURE V. THE BRIGANDS OF THE CITY

Cleg Kelly's mother lay still in her resting grave, and had no more need of pity. Cleg abode with his father in the tumble-down shanty by the brickfield at Easter Beach, and asked for no pity either. Cleg had promised his mother, Isbel, that he would not forsake his father.

"Na, I'll no rin awa' frae ye," so he told his father, frankly, "for I promised my mither; but gin ye lick me, I'll pit my wee knife intil ye when ye are sleepin'! Mind ye that!"

And his father minded, which was fortunate for both.

Cleg was now twelve, and much respected by his father, who fully believed that he was speaking the truth. Tim Kelly, snow-shoveller, feared his son Cleg with his sudden wild-cat fierceness, much more than he feared God – more, even, than he feared Father Donnelly, to whom he went twice a year to ease his soul of a portion of his more specially heinous sins.

Yet Tim Kelly was a better man, because of the respect in which he held his son. He even boasted of Cleg's cleverness when he was safe among his old cronies in Mother Flannigan's kitchen, or in the bar-parlour at Hare's public.

"Shure, there's not the like av him in this kingdom av ignorant blockheads. My Clig's the natest and the illigantest gossoon that stips in his own boot-leather. Shure, he can lick anything at all near his own weight. Sorra's in him, he can make his ould man stand about. Faith, 'tis him that's goin' to be the great man intoirely, is our little Clig."

These were the opinions of his proud father.

But Jim Carnochan, better known as the "Devil's Lickpot," demurred. If Cleg was so clever a boy, why was he not set to work? A boy so smart ought long ere this to have been learning the profession. To this Mother Flannigan agreed, for she shared in the profits.

"My Peether, rest his sowl for a good lad – him as was hanged be token of false evidence – and the bobbies findin' the gintleman's goold watch in Peether's pocket, was at wurrk whin he was six years av his age. Take my wurrd for it, Timothy Kelly, there never yet was a thruely great man that didn't begin his education young."

"Maybe," said Tim, "and that's the raison, Misthress Flannigan, that so few av them grew up to be ould men."

"Gin he was my boy," said Sandy Telfer, whose occupation was breaking into houses during the summer holidays (one of the safest "lays" in the profession, but looked down upon as mean-spirited), "I wad be haein' him through the windows and openin' the front doors every dark nicht."

"Ah, you wud, wud ye?" replied Tim Kelly contemptuously; "you're the great boy to talk, you that has no more manhud in ye than a draff-sack wid a hole in it. Yuss, ye can do yer dirty way wid your own mane-spirited spalpeens, wid no more spunk than a dure-mat. But I'd have ye know that my Clig cud make hares av you an' ivvery Telfer av the lot o' ye – hear to me now!"

And Tim Kelly shook his fist within an inch of the nose of Sandy Telfer, who, not being a man of war, showed by the curl of his nostril and the whitening of his lip, that he did not find the bouquet of Tim Kelly's bunch-of-fives an agreeable perfume. Tim Kelly waited to see if on any pretext he could bring his fist into closer contact with Sandy Telfer's face, but he found no cause.

"My Clig," he said emphatically, "is goin' to be a great charachter. He is jist the boy that is to climb the top laddher av the profession. It's his father that must be out at night, an' run the risk av the dirty bobby wid his lantern, an' the gintleman av the house in his night-shirt wid a cruel poker. But Clig shall sit safe and aisy in his chair, an' make his thousands a year wid the scrap av his pen. He'll promothe companies, an' be out av the way when they burst. He'll write so illegant

that he cud turn ye off another gintleman's signathure as fast as his own, an' worth a deal more on a bit av paper than anny av our names – "

"Come away hame, faither, sittin' bletherin' there. Ye hae been here lang enough."

It was the face of Cleg Kelly, dirty, sharp, and good-natured, which appeared at the door of the boozing ken.

Mistress Flannigan caught up a pound weight and threw it at Cleg with a woman's aim. It flew wide, and would surely have smashed some of the unclean vessels standing ready for the wash on the dresser, had Cleg not stepped briskly within, and, catching the missile deftly, made a low bow as he laid it on the table, and said, with his rare disarming smile —

"Your obedient servant, Cleg Kelly!"

"Hear to him now, the young bliggard!" cried his delighted and well-intoxicated father. "He has come to arm the ould man home, an' the ould man'll have to be stippin' too when Clig gives the wurrd."

Isbel Kelly had indeed been a happy woman if, ten years ago, she had learned Cleg's method.

"Come on, faither," reiterated Cleg, who had again retreated to the door, for he had no liking for the company or the place.

Tim Kelly got himself on his feet unsteadily, and lurched towards the door. His son caught him deftly on the descending swoop.

"Steady, faither, mind the stair. Gie us yer han'."

And so Cleg got Timothy, his father, who deserved no such care, tenderly up the filthy exit of Mistress Flannigan's cellar.

"Tim's not the man he was," Sandy Telfer said, as the pair went out.

"It's fair undecent doin' as the boy bids him, an' never so much as puttin' the laddie to an honest bit o' wark. Ah, he'll suffer for that, or a' be dune! They'll be raisons annexed to that," continued the summer housebreaker, who had been respectably brought up on the Shorter Catechism, but who, owing to a disappointment in love, had first of all joined another denomination, and, the change not answering its purpose, had finally taken to housebreaking and drink.

"Ye may say so, indeed," said Bridget Flannigan.

So Cleg took his father home to the rickety house by the brickyard. Cleg kept the room clean as well as he could. But the sympathetic neighbour, who remembered his mother, occasionally took a turn round the place with a scrubbing-brush when it was absolutely certain that the "red-headed gorilla" was absent, attending to other people's business.

Whenever Cleg saw his father refrain from Hare's public and the evening sessions of Mistress Flannigan's interesting circle, he knew that Tim had a project on hand. Generally he took no particular heed to these. For it was his custom, as soon as he saw his father off on any of his raids, to go and report himself casually at the nearest police-station, where the sergeant's wife knew him. She often gave him a "piece" with sugar on it, having known his mother before ever she left the parish of Ormiland.

The sergeant's wife remembered her own happy escape from being Mrs. Timothy Kelly, and though her heart had been sore against Isbel at the time, she had long forgotten the feeling in thankfulness that her lines had fallen on the right side of the law. But she had never confided to the sergeant that she had once known Tim Kelly somewhat intimately.

Cleg did not mean to be mixed up in any of his father's ill-doings if he could help it, so upon these occasions he frequented the precincts of the police-station as much as the sergeant's wife would let him.

It was his custom to take his "piece" – an excellent thick slice of bread with brown sugar on it – and seat himself on a luxurious paling opposite to eat it. The fact that a great many message boys passed that way may have had something to do with Cleg's choice of locality. Cleg liked to be envied. And, seeing the "piece," more than one boy was sure to give chase. This introduced

a healthy variety into Cleg's life. He liked to fool with these young men of the message basket. Exercise sharpens the appetite, and when this morning the butcher's boy chivvied him over the parched-up grass field that lay between the station and the brickyard, Cleg fairly whooped in his joy.

At first he ran slowly, and apparently with great alarm, so that the butcher's boy had not the least doubt that he easily could catch him. Cleg held the sergeant's wife's "piece" in his hand as he ran, so that the butcher's boy could see the thick sugar on the top of the yellow butter. This stirred up the pursuer's desires, and he made a spurt to seize Cleg. Had the assailant been the grocer's boy, to whom sugar and butter were vain things, Cleg would have had to try another plan. Now, when the butcher's boy spurted, Cleg almost let himself be caught. He heard close behind him the labouring of the avenger. With a sudden rush he sped thirty yards in front; then he turned and ran backwards, eating the sergeant's wife's "piece" as he ran. This aggravated the butcher's boy to such an extent that he had to stop with his hand on his panting side, and curse Cleg's parentage – which, sad to relate, pleased Cleg more than anything. He said it was prime. By which he meant, not the sergeant's wife's "piece," but the whole situation, and especially the disgust of the butcher's boy.

Then Cleg, being contented, offered honourable terms, for he and the butcher's boy were in reality very good friends. He gave his late pursuer a fair half of the bread and sugar, but reserved the crust for himself. So, munching amicably, Cleg and the butcher's boy returned together to the paling on which Cleg had been sitting.

But, alas! during his temporary absence from his care, Tam Luke, the baker's boy, had come along. And in pursuit of the eternal feud between butcher's boys and baker's boys, he had overturned the basket and rolled the meat on the road. Luke was now sitting on the rail a little way along, smoking a pipe loaded with brown paper, with a kind of ostentatious calmness.

When half across the field the butcher's boy observed the insult to his basket. Yet he said nothing till he came quite near. Then, in the most friendly manner possible, he seized the defiled leg of mutton, destined for the dinner of an eminent Doctor in Divinity, and hit Tam Luke a swinging blow over the head with it, which not only broke that youth's pipe, but for a season spoiled the shape of his mouth, and tumbled him incontinently over the fence.

The baker's boy rose, shedding freely bits of clay pipe and exceedingly evil words. A battle royal seemed imminent to one who did not know the commonplaces of friendly intercourse among these worthies. But the baker's boy contented himself with stating over and over in varied and ornamental language, highly metaphorical in parts, what he would do to the butcher's boy if he hit him again. However, the butcher's boy had too great an advantage in handling Professor Hinderlands' leg of mutton, and the tempest gradually blew itself out.

Whereupon all parties betook themselves to a street pump to wash the various articles which had been strewn in the mire, and to dry them on the butcher's boy's blue-striped apron, which he wore girt about him like a rope. It was a highly instructive sight. And had the cooks of various respectable families seen the process, they would have had a sufficient answer to their frequent indignant question that morning, "What can be keeping Cleaver's young vaigabond?"

Also, had they happened to pass, a number of the good ladies who sat down so comfortably to enjoy their dinners (which they called "lunch" if anybody happened to call) would certainly have gone without the principal course.

But the butcher's boy and the baker's boy were not in the least distressed. Such things happened every day. It was all in the way of business. And as for our hero, he, as we have indicated before, merely remarked, in his vulgar way, that it was prime.

So far he had had a good, interesting day, and was exceedingly pleased with himself.

Presently all three went and calmly smoked on the side of the road, roosting contentedly on the paling, while Tam Luke, who had got a prize for good reading at the school, drew out of his pocket "The Bully Boys' Budget" – an international journal of immense circulation, which described the adventures of associated bands of desperate ruffians (aged, on an average, nine) in

New York, a city which Cleaver's loon looked upon as a boys' Paradise. Boys were discouraged in Edinburgh. They got no chance of distinguishing themselves.

"It's a most mighty queer thing," said Cleg, "that the story says, if Tam Luke reads it richt – "

"I'll smash yer tawtie heid!" remarked that gentleman, mightily offended at the insinuation.

"If Tam Luke reads it richt," continued Cleg, "that in New York the bobbies rin frae the boys; but here the boys rin frae the bobbies like fun."

"*Me?*" said Cleaver's boy. "I wadna rin for ony bobby in the hale toon."

"An' *me*," cried Tam Luke, with mighty contempt, "I lickit a big bobby the nicht afore yestreen. I could fecht a bobby wi' yae hand tied ahint my back."

"Bobbies are nane sic bad folks. The sergeant's wife over there gied me a 'piece,'" said Cleg gratefully.

"Ye are a reid-heided Irish traitor!" said the butcher's boy with emphasis.

"It's my faither that's reid-heided," said Cleg promptly; "but tak' that ony way for speaking ill o' the family!"

And with the back of his hand he knocked the libeller of his forbears over into the field.

"I'm gaun to be captain o' a band o' robbers – will ye baith join?" said Tam Luke.

Cleaver's boy was about to wreak his vengeance on Cleg from the other side of the fence, but he paused with his arm suspended to think over the proposal.

"I'm gaun to be captain o' a band mysel'! Will ye join?" said the butcher's boy to Cleg, instead of assaulting him as he had first intended.

"What to do?" asked practical Cleg.

"To fecht the poliss, of course!" cried the butcher's boy and the baker's boy together. Their unanimity was wonderful.

"*There's the sergeant the noo!*" said Cleg quietly, pointing across the road.

And it was indeed the sergeant, who, having been on night duty, had just risen and strolled out to see what kind of weather it was.

The valiant captains of the decimating bands which were to terrorise the police of the city, descended from their several roosts as with one mind, seized their baskets, and sped round opposite corners with amazing speed.

Cleg Kelly was left alone, sitting on the paling. He pulled out what remained of his crust, and as he ate it with relish, he laughed aloud and kicked his heels with glee, so that the sergeant, stretching himself after his day-sleep, called across to the boy —

"What's up wi' ye, Cleg? Ye seem to be enjoyin' yoursel'!"

But all the answer he could get out of Cleg was just, "O man, sergeant, it's prime!"

But as to whether he meant the crust or only things in general, the sergeant was none the wiser.

ADVENTURE VI. CLEG TURNS BURGLAR

Cleg had watched his father furtively all day. Little conversation passed between these two. Cleg devoted much of his time to a consideration of the best means of legitimate gain in his new profession of capitalist. He possessed the large sum of one shilling and a penny. It was banked upon sound old principles in the hollow end of a brick, which was buried under a flag in the backyard of a brewery. Cleg had hidden it with mystic incantations, and now carried a red worsted thread twisted round his finger to remind him of its whereabouts.

But there was another reason besides his large capital, why Cleg was unusually watchful of his father that day. First of all, Tim Kelly had come home sober from Hare's public the night before. That was a suspicious circumstance in itself. It showed not only that his ready cash had all been liquefied, but that Mistress Hare had drawn a line under the big chalk score behind her door. This line was the intimation that the single file of figures must be wiped off before another dram was served.

"Ye've had Larry on your back long enough, sure, Tim!" said Mistress Hare, who regulated these matters in person. "Idleness is a most deadly sin, Father Malony sez!" continued the landlady devoutly.

"Shure, an' it's not the divil's sin, thin, Mistress Hare," said Tim acutely, "for he's busy enough!"

Tim was the only burglar with a brogue in the city, and as such was dear to the heart of Mistress Hare. For the Scot, when he takes to the investigation of other people's houses, does so grimly and without romance. But Tim had always a hint of Celtic imagination and even of poetry in his creations.

For instance, all that day on which Cleg kept his eye on his father, Tim was meditating a raid on the house of Mr. Robert Grey Tennant, a comfortable burgess of the burgh, who for the ease of his later life had built himself – not a lordly pleasure house indeed, but a comfortable mansion of Craigleith stone, exactly like three hundred and sixty-five other mansions on the south side of the city.

There was at the back of Aurelia Villa a little bordering of flowers and strawberries. These, however, never came to much, for the cats broke the flowers and extraneous boys stole the strawberries. There was also a little green plot, big enough for parlour croquet, but not big enough for lawn tennis. Yet this did not prevent the serious-minded and inventive young woman of the house, Miss Cecilia Tennant, from frequently playing what she called "pocket-handkerchief tennis" on this scraplet of lawn. And it was indeed a lively game, when two or three of her admirers arrived with racquets and rubber shoes to engage in silk-striped summer strife.

When a couple of champions of the Blackhouse Club met on the same side of the net, they winked at each other, and amusement struggled with politeness within them. But when each one of their services came near to annihilating an opponent's nose, and as they sent their returns out of court and over boundary walls with monotonous regularity, they changed their minds. Especially was this so when Miss Cecilia Tennant and a certain Junior Partner in a mercantile concern in the town, put in with equal certainty neat services and returns, dropping the balls unexpectedly into odd corners as if playing with egg spoons. They asked the Junior Partner how he did it. The Junior Partner said it was native genius. But perhaps the undisclosed fact that Cecilia Tennant and he played together three nights out of six on that lawn had rather more to do with it. Pocket-handkerchief tennis is certainly convenient for some things. It keeps the players very close to one another, except when they fall out – an advantage which it shares with ballooning.

But Tim Kelly was not interested in this house because of the desirable young men who played tennis there, nor yet because of any love of the young woman for whose sweet sake they bought new scarves and frequented the neighbourhood on the chance of a casual meeting. On the contrary, Timothy was after the spoons. Hall-marked silver was his favourite form of sport. And for this he had all the connoisseur's eagerness and appreciation.

His son was, on the contrary, exceedingly interested in the house itself. He was the most fervent of Miss Cecilia Tennant's admirers, though he had never told her so. This peculiarity he shared with a great many other young gentlemen, including every male teacher except two (already attached) in Hunker Court school.

Yet in spite of all this affection, before midnight of that autumn night, Cleg Kelly, future Christian, became a burglar – and that upon the premises of his benefactress, Miss Cecilia Tennant. It happened in this wise.

Tim sat all day on the floor of his house at home. He did so from necessity, not from choice. For his apartment was airily furnished in the Japanese fashion, with little except a couple of old mattresses and as many rugs. There were no chairs. They had been removed during Tim's last absence in the "Calton" by the landlord in lieu of rent. So Tim sat on the floor and worked with a file among a bundle of keys and curiously constructed tools. There was, for instance, a great lever with a fine thin edge set sideways to slip beneath windows on stormy nights, when the wrench of the hasp from its fastening would not be heard.

There were delicate little keys with spidery legs which Tim looked at with great admiration, and loved more than he had ever loved his wife and all his relations. There were also complicated wrenching implements, with horror latent about them, as though they had come from some big arm-chaired, red-glassed dental surgery. Tim Kelly was putting his tools to rights, and Cleg watched him intently, for he also was a conspirator.

At midday the boy vanished and reported himself at the police-sergeant's. He asked for a "piece," and the sergeant's wife told him to be off. She was busy and he might come back when the weans came in for their dinners. She had not time to be always giving the likes of him "pieces" in the middle of the day.

Cleg did not care. He was not particularly hungry. But he hung about all afternoon in the neighbourhood of the police-station, and so pestered the good-natured policemen off duty, that one of them threatened him with "a rare belting" if he did not quit.

Whereupon Cleg buttoned up his jacket, made to himself a paper helmet, and with a truncheon in his hand stalked about in front of the station, taking up stray dogs in the name of the law. One of these he had previously taught to walk upon its hind legs. This animal he arrested, handcuffed with a twist of wire, and paraded over against the station in a manner killingly comic – much to the amusement of the passers-by, as well as detrimental to the sobriety and discipline of the younger officers themselves. But Cleg was seldom meddled with by the police. He was under the protection of the sergeant's wife, who so often gave him a "piece." She also gave "pieces" sometimes to the officers at the station-house. For according as a policeman is fed, so is he. And it was the sergeant's wife who stirred the porridge pot. Therefore Cleg was left alone.

In this manner Cleg amused himself till dark, when he stole home. His father was already coming down the stairs. Cleg rapidly withdrew. His father passed out and took the narrowest lanes southward till he entered the Queen's Park under the immanent gloom of the Salisbury Crags. Cleg followed like his shadow. Tim Kelly often looked behind. He boasted that he could hear the tramp of the regulation police boot at least half a mile, and tell it from the tread of a circus elephant, and even from the one o'clock gun at the Castle. But he saw no silent boy tracking him noiselessly after the fashion of the Indian scout, so vividly described in the "Bully Boys' Journal."

Tim Kelly bored his way into the eye of a rousing south wind that "reesled" among the bare bones of Samson's Ribs, and hurled itself upon Edinburgh as if to drive the city off its long, irregular

ridge into the North Sea. Bending sharply to the right, the burglar came among buildings again. He crossed the marshy end of Duddingstone Loch. It was tinder-dry with the drought. At the end of a long avenue was to be seen the loom of houses, and the gleam of lights, as burgess's wife and burgess moved in this order to their bedrooms and disarrayed themselves for the night.

Tim Kelly hid behind a wall. Cleg crouched behind his father, but sufficiently far behind not to attract his attention. Cleg was taking his first lessons in the great craft of speculation – which is the obtaining of your neighbour's goods without providing him with an equivalent in exchange. The trifling matter of your neighbour's connivance, requisite in betting and stock transactions, escaped the notice of the Kellys. But perhaps after all that did not matter.

Aurelia Villa, the home of Miss Cecilia Tennant (incidentally also of her father, Mr. Robert Grey Tennant), darkened down early; for Mr. Robert Tennant was an early riser, and early rising means early bedding (and a very good thing too).

Tim Kelly knew all that, for his local knowledge was as astonishing as his methods of obtaining it were mysterious. It was not twelve of the clock when Tim drew himself over the wall out of the avenue, and dropped lightly as a cat upon the pocket-handkerchief lawn, which all the summer had been worn at the corners by the egg-spoon tennis of Cecilia and the Junior Partner.

Tim Kelly was at the back door in a minute. It was down three steps. He laid a bag of tools, which clinked a little as he took them out of his pocket, on the stone ledge of the step. It might be safer, he thought, to take a look round the house and listen for the hippopotamus tread of the regulation bull-hide. In a moment after Tim was round at the gable end flat among the strawberries. There it came! Clear and solemnising fell the tread of the law in all its majesty – a bull's-eye lantern swinging midships a sturdy girth, which could hardly, even by courtesy, be called a waist. Flash! Like a search-light ran the ray of the lantern over the front of the property of Mr. Robert Grey Tennant.

But the regulation boots were upon the feet of a man of probity. The wearer opened the front gate, tramped up the steps, conscientiously tried the front door and dining-room window of the end house in the row. They were fast. All was well. Duty done. The owners might sleep sound. They paid heavy police rates to a beneficent local authority. Why should they not sleep well? But, alas! the regulation boots did not take any cognisance of Tim Kelly with his nose among the strawberries, or of a small boy who was speeding over the waste fields and back yards into the Park. The small boy carried a parcel. He was a thief. This small boy was Cleg Kelly, the hero of this tale.

Timothy Kelly rose from among the strawberries with laughter and scorn in his heart. If the bobby had only gone to the back door instead of the front, there was a parcel there, which it would have made him a proud policeman to take to the head office. Tim Kelly stooped at the steps to take up his precious satchel of tools. His hand met the bare stone. His bag was gone! His heart dinned suddenly in his ears. This was not less than witchcraft. He had never been ten yards from them all the time. Yet the tools were gone without sound or sight of human being. Then there was an interval.

During this interval Tim Kelly expressed his opinions upon things in general. The details are quite unfit for publication.

But at that very moment, over at the end of Duddingstone Loch, a small boy was whirling a small but heavy bag round his head.

"Once! Twice! Thrice – and away!" he cried with glee. Something hurtled through the air, and fell with a splash far in the black depths of the loch. Years after this the antiquary of the thirtieth century may find this bundle, and on the strength of it he will take away the honest character of our ancestors of the Iron Age, proving that burglary was commonly and scientifically practised among them. But the memory of Cleg Kelly will be clear.

Indeed, he was sound asleep when his father came in, breathing out threatenings and slaughter. Tim listened intently with his ear at his son's mouth, for it is well to be suspicious of every one. But Cleg's breathing was as natural and regular as that of an infant.

Yet there is no doubt whatever, that Cleg and not his father had been guilty of both burglary and theft that night; and that Duddingstone Loch was indictable for the reset of the stolen property.

Then Cleg Kelly, burglar, winked an eye at his father's back, and settled himself to sleep the genuine sleep of the just.

ADVENTURE VII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE COCKROACHES

One day Cleg Kelly became paper-boy at the shop of Mistress Roy, at the top corner of Meggat's Close. And he wanted you to know this. He was no longer as the paper-boys who lag about the Waverley, waiting for stray luggage left on the platforms, nor even as this match-boy. He was in a situation.

His hours were from half-past six in the morning to half-past six in the morning, when he began again. His wages were three shillings a week – and his chance. But he was quite contented, for he could contrive his own amenities by the way. His father had been in a bad temper ever since he lost his tools, and so Cleg did not go home often.

This was the way in which he got his situation and became a member of the established order of things, indeed, the next thing to a voter. There had been a cheap prepaid advertisement in the "Evening Scrapbook," which ran as follows: —

"Wanted, an active and intelligent message-boy, able to read and write. Must be well recommended as a Christian boy of good and willing disposition. Wages not large, but will be treated as one of the family. – Apply No. 2,301, 'Scrapbook' Office."

Now Miss Cecilia Tennant thought this a most interesting and encouraging advertisement. She had been for a long time on the look-out for a situation to suit Cleg. The Junior Partner indeed could have been induced to find a place for Cleg in "The Works," but it was judged better that the transition from the freedom of the streets to the lettered ease of an office desk should be made gradually. So Celie Tennant went after this situation for Cleg in person.

The arrangement with Mistress Roy in the Pleasance was a little difficult to make, but Celie made it. She went down one clammy evening, when the streets were covered with a greasy slime, and the pavements reflected the gloomy sky. In the grey lamp-sprinkled twilight she reached the paper-shop. There were sheafs of papers and journals hung up on the cheeks of the door. Coarsely coloured valentines hung in the window, chiefly rude portraiture of enormously fat women with frying-pans, and of red-nosed policemen with batons to correspond.

Celie Tennant entered. There was a heavy smell of moist tobacco all about. The floor of the little shop was strewn with newspapers, apparently of ancient date, certainly of ancient dirt. These rustled and moved of themselves in a curious way, as though they had untimely come alive. As indeed they had done, for the stir was caused by the cockroaches arranging their domestic affairs underneath. Celie lifted her nose a little and her skirts a good deal. It took more courage to stand still and hear that faint rustling than to face the worst bully of Brannigan's gang in the Sooth Back. She rapped briskly on the counter.

A man came shuffling out of the room in the rear. He was clad in rusty black, and had a short clay pipe in his mouth. His eyes were narrow and foxy, and he looked unwholesomely scaly – as if he had been soaked in strong brine for half a year, but had forgotten either to finish the process, or to remove the traces of the incomplete pickling.

"Servant, m'am!" said he, putting his pipe behind him as he came into the shop.

"I was referred here – to this address – from the office of the 'Evening Scrapbook,'" said Celie, with great dignity, standing on her tiptoes among the papers. "I called about the situation of message-boy you advertised for."

"Ye wasna thinkin' o' applyin' yersel'!" said the man, with a weak jocularity. "For my ain part I hae nae objections to a snod bit lass, but the mistress michtna like it."

Miss Cecilia Tennant looked at him in a way that would have frozen a younger man, but the frowsy object from the back shop only smirked and laughed. With care, the jest would serve him a week. He made up his mind to whom he would tell it when the lady was gone.

"I wish to recommend one of the boys from my class for the position. His name is Charles Kelly. He is a smart boy of thirteen, and he is anxious to get good and steady work. What are the wages you offer?"

The man looked cunningly all about the shop. He craned his neck over the counter and looked up the street. He had a long-jointed body, and a neck that shut up and pulled out like a three-draw telescope. Celie Tennant shrank instinctively when the man protruded his head past her in this curious manner, as she might have shrunk from some loathly animal.

Then, having resumed his normal slouch behind the counter, he looked at his visitant and said, "The wage is half a croon a week, and his chance o' the drawer – the same as mysel'."

"His chance of the drawer!" said Celie, not understanding.

"When *she's* oot," the man continued, laying his finger against the side of his nose and winking with meaning and expression at his visitor. The expression of disgust at the corner of Miss Tennant's nose threatened to result in a permanent tilt, which might have been unbecoming, and which certainly must have frightened the Junior Partner.

"When *she's* oot," repeated the frowsy one, confidentially, "your friend is welcome to his chance o' the drawer – if," he added, with infinite caution, "she was to leave it unlocked, which she seldom does. It's lock'd the noo! See!" And he shook a greasy knob under the counter till the drawer rattled against the bolt of the lock. "Oh, it's just like her! She aye does that when she gangs oot. She's an awsome near woman! She has nae confidence, nae open-hearted leebearity, sic' as a wife ought to hae wi' the husband of her bosom."

"Do you want a message-boy, or do you not?" said Celie, who felt that in the interests of Cleg she would face a battery of artillery, but who really could not stand the rustling among the papers on the floor very much longer.

"Certain she do that!" said the man, "an active boy, an intelligent boy, a Christian boy – half a croon a week – and his chance o' the drawer."

Once more he protruded his head in that monstrously serpentine manner round the corner of the low shop-door. But this time he retracted it quick as lightning, and shuffled back into the room behind. Celie heard him throw himself on a chair, which groaned under him.

"I'm sleepin' noo," he said, "sleepin' soond. Dinna say that I ever spoke till ye, for I'll deny it if ye do!" he said.

Cecilia Tennant stood her ground bravely, though the newspapers on the floor rustled continuously. She wondered why the path of duty was such a cockroachy one. A moment afterward a grim-looking, hard-faced woman entered. She was a tall woman, with a hooked nose and broad masculine face. The eyes were at once fierce and suspicious. She marched straight round the counter, lifting the little flap at the back and letting it fall with a bang. The cat was sitting on the end of the counter nearest the door of the inner room. The woman took her hand and swept it from the counter, as though she had merely knocked off a little dust. The cat went into the inner room like a projectile.

Then, having entrenched herself at the back of the counter, the fierce-eyed woman turned sharp round and faced Celie Tennant.

"Well?" she said, with a certain defiance in her tone such as women only use to one another, which was at once depreciatory and pitiful. The Junior Partner would have turned and fled, but Celie Tennant was afraid of no woman that walked.

"I came," she said, clearly and coldly, "to ask about the situation of message-boy for one of my Mission lads. I was sent here from the office of the newspaper. Has the situation been filled?"

"What is the boy's name?" asked the woman, twitching the level single line of her black brows at her visitor.

"His name is Charles Kelly."

"Son o' Tim Kelly that leeves in the Brickfield?" asked the woman quickly.

"I believe that is his father's name," said Celie, giving glance for glance.

"Then we dinna want the likes o' him here!" said the woman, half turning on her heel with a certain dark contempt.

"But my name is Cecilia Tennant of Glenleven Road, and I am quite willing to give security for the boy – to a reasonable amount, that is – " continued Celie, who had a practical mind and much miniature dignity.

"Will ye leave the money?" asked the woman, as if a thought struck her.

"Certainly not," replied Celie, "but I will write you a line stating that I hold myself responsible for anything he is proved guilty of stealing, to the extent of ten pounds."

It was thus that Cleg Kelly became newsboy and general assistant to Mistress Roy and her husband at Roy's corner.

As Celie went out, she heard Mr. Roy stretching himself and yawning, as though awakening out of a deep sleep.

"Wha's that ye hae had in?" he inquired pleasantly.

"What business is that o' yours, ye muckle slabber?" returned his wife with instant aggression.

And the cockroaches continue to rustle all the time beneath the carpet of old newspapers.

ADVENTURE VIII. THE FLIGHT OF SHEEMUS

Next morning Cleg Kelly entered upon his duties. He carried orders to the various publishing offices for about two hundred papers in all. He had often been there before upon his own account, so that the crowd and the rough jocularities were not new to him. But now he practised a kind of austere, aristocratic hauteur. He was not any longer a prowler on the streets, with only a stance for which he might have to fight. He was a news-vendor's assistant. He would not even accept wages of battle upon provocation offered. He could, however, still kick; and as he had an admirable pair of boots with tackety soles an inch thick to do it with, he soon made himself the most respected boy in the crowd.

On returning to the Pleasance, he was admitted through the chink of the door by Mistress Roy, who was comprehensively dressed in a vast yellow flannel bed-gown, which grew murkier and murkier towards her feet. Her hair was tumbling about her eyes. That, too, was of a yellow grey, as though part of the bed-gown had been unravelled out and attached loosely to her head. Feathers and woolly dust were stuck impartially over hair and bed-gown.

"Write the names on the papers as I cry them," she said to Cleg, "and look slippy."

Cleg was quick to obey. He had, in fact, his pencil ready.

"Cready, number seventeen – three stairs back. Dinna write a' that. Write the name, an' mind the rest," said Mistress Roy.

"MacVane, twenty-wan, shop," and so on went the list interminably.

Mistress Roy kept no books, but in her memory she had the various counts and reckonings of all grades of her customers. She retained there, for instance, the exact amounts of the intricate scores of the boys who took in the "Boys of the City." She knew who had not paid for the last chapter of "Ned Kelly; or, the Iron-clad Australian Bushranger." She had a mental gauge on the great roll of black twist tobacco which lay on the counter among old "Evening Scraps." She knew exactly how much there was in the casks of strong waters under the stairs, from which, every Sunday, her numerous friends and callers were largely entertained.

When Cleg went out to deliver his papers he had nearly a hundred calls to make. But such was his sense of locality and his knowledge of the district that, with the help of a butcher's boy of his acquaintance (to whom he promised a reading of the "Desperadoes of New Orleans; or, the Good Ku Klux"), he managed to deliver all – except a single "Scotsman" to one Mackimmon, who lived in a big land at the corner of Rankeillor Street. Him he was utterly unable to discover.

Upon his return Mistress Roy was waiting for him.

"Did ye deliver them a'?" she asked, bending forward her head in a threatening manner as if expecting a negative reply.

"A' but yin!" said Cleg, who was in good spirits, and pleased with himself.

His mistress took up a brush. Cleg's hand dropped lightly upon a pound weight. He did not mean to play the abused little message-boy if he knew it.

"And what yin might that be?" said Mistress Roy.

"Mackimmon," said the boy briefly, "he's no in Rankeillor Street ava'."

The hand that held the brush went back in act to throw. Now this was, from the point of view of psychological dynamics, a mistake in tactics. A woman should never attempt to throw anything in controversy, least of all a brush. Her stronghold is to advance to the charge with all her natural weapons and vigour. But to throw a brush is to abdicate her providential advantages. And so Mistress Roy found.

A straight line is the shortest distance between two points, and that was the course described by the pound weight on which Cleg Kelly dropped his hand. It sped fair and level from his hand, flung low as he had many a time skimmed stones on Saint Margaret's Loch in the hollow under the Crag.

"*Ouch!*" suddenly said Mistress Roy, taken, as she herself said, "in the short of the wind." The hearth-brush with which she had been wont to correct her former message boys fell helplessly to the ground.

"Fetch me a toothfu' frae the back o' the door. Oh, ye villain, Cleg Kelly! I'm a' overcome like!" she said.

Cleg went to the back of the door where there was a keg with a spigot. He brought his mistress a drink in a little tinnikin.

She seemed to have forgotten to be angry, and bent her brows upon him more pleasantly than she had yet done.

"I thocht that ye were a religious boy," she said.

Cleg stood back a little with Mackimmon's paper still in his hand.

"Pund wecht for besom shank is good religion," said the imperfect Christian but excellent message-boy.

"Gang and deliver that paper!" Mistress Roy commanded, again looking up.

"I want my breakfast," said Cleg, with an air of sullen determination.

His mistress looked at him a moment, still sitting with the tinnikin of undutied whisky in her hand, and occasionally taking a sip. Cleg eyed her level-fronted.

She gave in all at once.

"Tak' the knife and help yoursel'," she said, pointing to a loaf and a piece of yellow cheese.

She went into a back room.

"Get up, Jock," she said, giving the clothes a jerk over the foot of the bed, and seizing a water can. Her husband rose to his feet on the floor without a word. Thus was business begun in Mistress Roy's paper-shop on the Pleasance.

And so that day went on, the first of many. When Celie Tennant asked Cleg how he was getting on, he said, as the manner of his kind is, "Fine!" And no word more could she get out of him. For Cleg was not a boy to complain. His father, Timothy Kelly, was safely in gaol, and that was enough to give Cleg an interest in life. Moreover, he could save some of his three shillings a week to give to Vara Kavannah to help her with the children.

He had not as yet taken advantage of the "chance of the drawer" offered by Mr. Roy. But, on the other hand, he had stuck out for three shillings and his keep.

Also, as the advertisements which he read every day in the papers said, he meant to see that he got it.

Vara Kavannah was a friend of Cleg's. She lived with her mother in a poor room in the Tinklers' Lands, and tried to do her duty by her little baby brother Gavin and her younger brother Hugh. Her mother was a friend of Mr. Timothy Kelly's, and there is no more to be said. The only happy time for all of them was when both Mr. Kelly, senior, and Sal Kavannah were provided for in the gaol on the Calton. But this did not happen often at one time. When it did, Cleg went up the long stairs and told Vara. Then they started and took the baby and Hugh for a long walk in the Queen's Park. Cleg carried the baby. The boys of his own age did not mock him to his face for doing this. The Drabble had done it once, and severely regretted it for several days, during which time his face conveyed a moral lesson to all beholders.

It was also a happy time for Vara Kavannah when her mother was safely locked up on a long sentence, or when for some weeks she disappeared from the city. Her father, a kindly, weak man, stood the dog's life his wife led him as long as possible.

Sheemus Kavannah was a poet. The heart was in him which tells men that the world is wide and fair. He had endured his wife in the bitterness of his heart, till late one evening he rose, and with his wife lying on the floor, a log, he awaked his little lass. There were tears streaming down his cheeks. His daughter started from her bed with her hair all about her. She was used to sudden and painful wakenings.

"Vara," he said, speaking in Irish, "daughter of Sheemus, Vara Kavannah, hark to me. Mavourneen, my heart is broke with your mother. It's no good at all to stay. I am going to Liverpool for work, and when I get it I shall come back and take you away – you, Vara, and Hugh and little Gavin. Lonely shall my road be and far. But I shall return, I shall return!"

Now Vara, being bred where they spoke not the tongue of the old country, understood nothing but the last words, "I shall return, I shall return!"

So it was in this way that Cleg Kelly became father and mother to the little company of three in the Tinklers' Lands.

As he went on the way of his duty, he found out some things about the business capacity of Mistress Roy that would have astonished the police. He had, in the impetuous ardour of youth, cleared away the accumulated papers on the floor, and raided the swarming cockroaches.

"Hullo, mother, what's the matter here?" cried one of the customers of the place, coming to Mistress Roy, who sat in the little den at the back.

"Naething," said that lady. "It's only that daft laddie. He disna think I gie him aneuch to do, so he's ta'en to finding wark for himsel'."

The customer, a burly, clean-shaven man, took a long look at Cleg.

"Tim Kelly's kid," said the woman, by way of explanation.

The man whistled – a long, mellow whistle – with an odd turn at the end.

"No," said Mistress Roy, shaking her head, "the lad's square. And what's mair, I'm no gaun to hae him meddled. He's the first boy that ever took oot the papers without cheatin'." A good character is a valuable asset, even in a shebeen.

ADVENTURE IX. THE WARMING OF THE DRABBLE

The Kavannahs lived in the Tinklers' Lands at the foot of Davie Dean's Street. That was where Sheemus Kavannah left them when he went to Liverpool to seek work. Originally they had lived on the second floor of this great rabbit-warren of a land, but now they had sunk till they occupied one room of the cellar. Their sole light came from an iron grating let into the pavement.

The Kavannahs had no furniture. It was just possible for Vara to get some little things together during the periods when her mother was under the care of the authorities. But as soon as Sal Kavannah came out, everything that would sell or pawn was instantly dissolved into whisky.

At all times it was a sore battle in the Tinklers' Lands, for these were the days before city improvements. In his wildest days Cleg Kelly had always befriended the Kavannahs, and he had been as much Vara's friend on the sly as a boy could be who valued the good opinion of his companions. But when Cleg grew stronger in his muscles and less amenable to public opinion, he publicly announced that he would "warm" any boy who said a word to him about the Kavannahs.

One day he heard that Archie Drabble had kicked over the Kavannahs' family bed, and left it lying, when Vara was out getting some things for the children. Cleg started out to look up the Drabble. He had formerly had an interview with that gentleman, which has been chronicled elsewhere.¹ Cleg Kelly was on the way to reformation now, so would not kick him. But as a faithful friend he would "warm" him for his soul's good. Cleg did not mind doing this. It was a congenial sphere of Christian work.

The Drabble was found trying to steal collars off a clothes-line at the back of Arthur Street. Cleg Kelly had no objections to this feat. He was not a policeman, and if the Drabble wished to get into the lock-up, it was not his business. But first of all he must settle the matter of the Kavannahs' bed. After that the Drabble, an it liked him, might steal all the collars in the Pleasance.

"Drabble," cried Cleg, "come here, I want ye!"

"Want away," cried the Drabble, "gang and say yer prayers!"

This was intended for an insult, and so Cleg took it.

"Ye had better say yours!" he retorted. "When I catch you it'll no be ordinar' prayers that will help you!"

Cleg had a disbelief in the efficacy of the prayers of the wicked which was thoroughly orthodox. The Drabble was of the wicked. Once he had thrown mud at a Sunday school teacher. Cleg only threw snow, as soft as he could get it.

There was a wall between Cleg and the Drabble, a wall with a place for your toes. With his boots off Cleg could have shinned up like a cat. But three-shilling boots with toe caps are tender things and need to be treated with respect. Whereupon Cleg had resort to guile.

"Hae ye seen the last number o' 'Gory Dick, the Desprader of the Prairies,' Drabble?" cried Cleg over the wall.

"Gae 'way, man, an' eat sawdust, you paper boy!" cried the Drabble over the wall.

The Drabble was of the more noble caste of the sneak thief. He had still his eye on the collars. Cleg raged impotently. All his Irishry boiled within him.

"Be the powers, Archie Drabble, wait till I catch ye. I'll not leave a leevin' creature on ye from head to fut!"

The completeness of this threat might have intimidated the Drabble, but he was on the safe side of the wall, and only laughed. He had a vast contempt for Cleg, inasmuch as he had forsaken

¹ *The Stickit Minister*, 10th edition, p. 153.

the good and distinguished ways of Timothy Kelly, his father, and taken to missions and Sunday schools. Cleg foamed in helpless fury at the foot of the wall. He grew to hate his boots and his mended clothes, in his great desire to get at the Drabble. To the original sin with regard to the bed of the Kavannahs, the Drabble had now added many actual transgressions. Cleg was the vindicator of justice, and he mentally arranged to a nicety where and how he would punch the Drabble.

But just then the Drabble came over the wall at a run. He had been spotted from a distance by an active young officer, Constable Gilchrist, who was noted for his zeal in providing for the youth of the south side. The Drabble dropped to the ground like a cat, with the drawn pale face and furtive eyes which told Cleg that the "poliss" were after him.

Without doubt Cleg ought to have given the offender up to justice, as a matter of private duty. He might thus have settled his own private matters with the pursued. But the traditional instincts of the outlaw held. And, seeing the double look which the Drabble turned up and down the street, he said softly —

"Here, Drabble; help me to deliver thae papers."

The Drabble glanced at Cleg to make out if he meant to sell him to justice. That was indeed almost an impossibility. But the Drabble did not know how far the evil communications of Sunday schools might have corrupted the original good manners of the Captain of the Sooth-Back Gang.

However, there was that in Cleg's face which gave him confidence. The Drabble grabbed the papers and was found busily delivering them up one side of the street while Cleg Kelly took the other, when Constable Gilchrist, reinforced by a friend, came in sight over the wall by the aid of a clothes-prop and the nicks in the stones.

Now the peaceful occupation of delivering evening newspapers is not a breach of the peace nor yet a contravention of the city bylaws. Constable Gilchrist was disappointed. He was certain that he had seen that boy "loitering with intent"; but here he was peacefully pursuing a lawful avocation. The Drabble had a reason, or at least an excuse, for being on the spot. So the chase was in vain, and Constable Gilchrist knew it. But his companion was not so easily put off the scent.

"Cleg Kelly," he cried, "I see you; hae you a care, my son, or you'll end up alongside of your father."

"Thank ye, sir," said Cleg Kelly. "Buy a News, sir?"

"Be off, you impudent young shaver!" cried the sergeant, laughing.

And Cleg went off.

"That's a smart boy, and doing well," said Constable Gilchrist.

"Decent enough," returned the sergeant, "but he's in a bad shop at Roy's, and he'll get no good from that Drabble loon!"

And this was a truth. But at that moment, at the back of the Tinklers' Lands, the Drabble was getting much good from Cleg Kelly. Cleg had off his coat and the Drabble was being "warmed."

"That'll learn ye to touch the Kavannahs' bed!" cried Cleg.

And the Drabble sat down.

"That's for miscaain' my faither!"

The Drabble sat down again at full length.

"That's for tellin' me to say my prayers! I learn you to meddle wi' my prayers!"

Thus Cleg upheld the Conscience Clause.

But the Drabble soon had enough. He warded Cleg off with a knee and elbow, and stated what he would do when he met him again on a future unnamed occasion.

He would tell his big brother, so he would, and his big brother would smash the face of all the Kellys that ever breathed.

Cleg was not to be outdone.

"I'll tell *my* big brother o' you, Drabble. He can fecht ten polissmen, and he could dicht the street wi' your brither, and throw him ower a lamp-post to dry."

Cleg and the Drabble felt that they must do something for the honour of their respective houses, for this sort of family pride is a noble thing and much practised in genealogies.

So, pausing every ten yards to state what their several big brothers would do, and with the fellest intentions as to future breaches of the peace, the combatants parted. The afternoon air bore to the Drabble from the next street —

"You – let – the Kavannahs – alane frae this oot – or it'll be the waur for you!"

The Drabble rubbed his nose on his sleeve, and thought that on the whole it might be so.

Then he took out three papers which he had secreted up his sleeve, and went joyfully and sold them. The Drabble was a boy of resource. Cleg had to come good for these papers to Mistress Roy, and also bear her tongue for having lost them. She stopped them out of his wages. Then Cleg's language became as bad as that of an angry Sunday school superintendent. The wise men say that the Scots dialect is only Early English. Cleg's was that kind, but debased by an admixture of Later Decorated.

He merely stated what he meant to do to the Drabble when he met him again. But the statement entered so much into unnecessary detail that there is no need to record it fully.

ADVENTURE X. THE SQUARING OF THE POLICE

Cleg was free and barefoot. His father was "in" for twelve months. Also it was the summer season, and soft was the sun. The schools were shut – not that it mattered much as to that, for secular education was not much in Cleg's way, compulsory attendance being not as yet great in the land. Cleg had been spending the morning roosting on railings and "laying for softies" – by which he meant conversing with boys in nice clean jackets, with nice clean manners, whose methods of war and whose habit of speech were not Cleg's.

Cleg had recently entered upon a new contract with the mistress of Roy's paper shop. He was now "outdoor boy" instead of "indoor boy," and he was glad of it. He had also taken new lodgings. For when the police took his father to prison, to the son's great relief and delight, the landlord of the little room by the brickfield had cast the few sticks of furniture and the mattress into the street, and, as he said, "made a complete clearance of the rubbish." He included Cleg.

But it was not so easy to get rid of Cleg, for the boy had his private hoards in every crevice and behind every rafter. So that very night, with the root of a candle which he borrowed from a cellar window to which he had access (owing to his size and agility), he went back and ransacked his late home. He prised up the boards of the floor. He tore aside the laths where the plaster had given way. He removed the plaster itself with a tenpenny nail where it had been recently mended. He tore down the entire series of accumulated papers from the ceiling, disturbing myriads of insects both active and sluggish which do not need to be further particularised.

"I'll learn auld Skinflint to turn my faither's property oot on the street," said Cleg, his national instinct against eviction coming strongly upon him. "I'll wager I can make this place so that the man what built it winna ken it the morn's morning!"

And he kept his word. When Nathan, the Jew pawnbroker and cheap jeweller, came with his men to do a little cleaning up, the scene which struck them on entering, as a stone strikes the face, was, as the reporters say, simply appalling. The first step Mr. Nathan took brought down the ceiling-dust and its inhabitants in showers. The next took him, so far as his legs were concerned, into the floor beneath, for he had stepped through a hole, in which Cleg had discovered a rich deposit of silver spoons marked with an entire alphabet of initials.

The police inspector was summoned, and he, in his turn, stood in amaze at the destruction.

"It's that gaol-bird, young Kelly!" cried Nathan, dancing and chirruping in his inarticulate wrath. "I'll have him lagged for it – sure as I live."

"Aye?" said the inspector, gravely. He had his own reasons for believing that Mr. Nathan would do nothing of the sort. "Meantime, I have a friend who will be interested in this place."

And straightway he went down and brought him. The friend was the Chief Sanitary Inspector, a medical man of much emphasis of manner and abruptness of utterance.

"What's this? What's this? Clear out the whole damnable pig-hole! What d'ye mean, Jackson, by having such a sty as this in your district? Clean it out! Tear it down! It's like having seven bulls of Bashan in one stable. Never saw such a hog's mess in my life. Clear it out! Clear it out!"

The miserable Nathan wrung his hands, and hopped about like a hen.

"Oh, Doctor Christopher, I shall have it put in beautiful order – beautiful order. Everything shall be done in the besht style, I do assure you –"

"Best style, stuff and nonsense! Tear it down – gut it out – take it all away and bury it. I'll send men to-morrow morning!" cried the doctor, decidedly.

And Dr. Christopher departed at a dog-trot to investigate a misbehaving trap in a drain at Coltbridge.

The police inspector laughed.

"Are you still in a mind to prosecute young Kelly, Mr. Nathan?" he said.

But the grief and terror of the pawnbroker were beyond words. He sat down on the narrow stair, and laid his head between his hands.

"I shall be ruined – ruined! I took the place for a debt. I never got a penny of rent for it, and now to be made to spend money upon it – "

The police inspector touched him on the shoulder.

"If I were you, Nathan," he said, "I should get this put in order. If it is true that you got no rent for this place, the melting-pot in your back cellar got plenty."

"It's a lie – a lie!" cried the little man, getting up as if stung. "It was never proved. I got off!"

"Aye," said the inspector, "ye got off? But though 'Not proven' clears a man o' the Calton gaol, it keeps him on our books."

"Yes, yes," said the little Jew, clapping his hands as if he were summoning slaves in the Arabian Nights, "it shall be done. I shall attend to it at once."

And the inspector went out into the street, laughing so heartily within him that more than once something like the shadow of a grin crossed the stern official face which covered so much kindness from the ken of the world.

The truth of the matter was that Cleg Kelly had squared the police. It is a strange thing to say, for the force of the city is composed of men staunchly incorruptible. I have tried it myself and know. The Edinburgh police has been honourably distinguished first by an ambition to prevent crime, to catch the criminal next, and, lastly, to care for the miserable women and children whom nearly every criminal drags to infamy in his wake.

Yet with all these honourable titles to distinction, upon this occasion the police had certainly been squared, and that by Cleg Kelly. And in this wise.

When Cleg had finished his search through the receptacles of his father and his own hidie-holes, he found himself in possession of as curious a collection of miscellaneous curiosities as might stock a country museum or set a dealer in old junk up in business. There were many spoons of silver, and a few of Britannia metal which his father had brought away in mistake, or because he was pressed for time and hated to give trouble. There were forks whole, and forks broken at the handle where the initials ought to have come, teapots with the leaves still within them, the toddy bowl of a city magnate – with an inscription setting forth that it had been presented to Bailie Porter for twenty years of efficient service in the department of cleaning and lighting, and also in recognition of his uniform courtesy and abundant hospitality. There were also delicate ormolu clocks, and nearly a score of watches, portly verge, slim Geneva, and bluff serviceable English lever.

Cleg brought one of his mother's wicker clothes-baskets which had been tossed out on the street by Mr. Nathan's men the day before, and, putting a rich Indian shawl in the bottom to stop the crevices, he put into it all the spoil, except such items as belonged strictly to himself, and with which the nimble fingers of his father had had no connection.

Such were the top half of a brass candlestick, which he had himself found in an ash-bucket on the street. He remembered the exact "bucket." It was in front of old Kermack, the baker's, and he had had to fight a big dog to get possession, because the brass at the top being covered with the grease, the dog considered the candlestick a desirable article of *vertu*. There was a soap-box, for which he had once fought a battle; the basin he used for dragging about by a string on the pavement, with hideous outcries, whenever the devil within made it necessary for him to produce the most penetrating and objectionable noise he could think of. There was (his most valuable possession) a bright brass harness rein-holder, for which the keeper of a livery stable had offered him five shillings if he would bring the pair, or sixpence for the single one – an offer which Cleg had declined, but which had made him ever after cherish the rein-holder as worth more than all the jewellers' shops on Princes Street.

These and other possessions to which his title was incontrovertible he laid aside for conveyance to his new home, an old construction hut which now lay neglected in a builder's yard near the St. Leonards Station.

All the other things Cleg took straight over to the police-office near the brickfield, where his friend, the sergeant's wife, held up her hands at sight of them. Nor did she call her husband till she had been assured that Cleg had had personally nothing to do with the collection of them.

When the sergeant came in his face changed and his eyes glittered, for here was stolen property in abundance, of which the Chief – that admirable gentleman of the quiet manners and the limitless memory – had long ago given up all hope.

"Ah! if only the young rascal had brought us these things before Tim's trial, I would have got him twenty years!" said the Chief.

But though Cleg Kelly hated and despised his father, his hatred did not quite go that length. He did not love the police for their own sake, though he was friendly enough with many of the individual officers, and, in especial, with the sergeant's wife, who gave him "pieces" in memory of his mother, and, being a woman, also perhaps a little in memory of what his father had once seemed to her.

Cleg did not stay to be asked many questions as to how he came into possession of so many valuables. He had found them, he said; but he could not be induced to condescend upon the particulars of the discovery.

So the sergeant was forced to be content. But ever after this affair it was quite evident that Cleg was a privileged person, and did not come within Mr. Nathan's power of accusation. So it was manifest that Cleg Kelly had corrupted the incorruptible, and crowned his exploits by squaring the metropolitan police.

ADVENTURE XI. THE BOY IN THE WOODEN HUT

The wooden hut where Cleg had taken up his abode was on the property of a former landlord, who in his time had tired of Tim Kelly as a tenant, and had insisted upon his removal, getting his office safe broken into in consequence. But Mr. Callendar had never been unkind to Isbel and Cleg. So the boy had kindly memories of the builder, and especially he remembered the smell of the pine shavings as Callendar's men planed deal boards to grain for mahogany. The scent struck Cleg as the cleanest thing he had ever smelled in his life.

So, with the help of an apprentice joiner, he set up the old construction hut, which, having been used many years ago in the making of the new coal sidings at the St. Leonards Station, had been thrown aside at the end of the job, and never broken up.

The builder saw Cleg flitting hither and thither about the yard, but, being accustomed to such visitors, he took no great notice of the boy, till one day, poking about among some loose rubbish and boards at the back of his yard, he happened to glance at the old hut. Great was his astonishment to see it set on its end, a window frame too large for the aperture secured on the outside with large nails driven in at the corners, a little fringe of soil scraped roughly about it as if a brood of chickens had worked their way round the hut, and a few solitary daisies dibbled into the loose earth, lying over on their sides, in spite of the small ration of water which had been carefully served out to each.

Thomas Callendar stood a moment gathering his senses. He had a callant of his own who might conceivably have been at the pains to establish a summer-house in his yard. But then James was at present at the seaside with his mother. The builder went round the little hut, and at the further side he came upon Cleg Kelly dribbling water upon the wilting daisies from a broken brown teapot, and holding on the lid with his other hand.

"Mercy on us! what are ye doing here, callant?" cried the astonished builder.

Cleg Kelly stood up with the teapot in his hand, taking care to keep the lid on as he did so. His life was so constant a succession of surprises provided against by watchfulness that hardly even an earthquake would have taken him unprepared.

He balanced the teapot in one hand, and with the other he pulled at his hat-brim to make his manners.

"If ye please, sir," he said, "they turned me oot at the brickyard, and I brocht the bits o' things here. I kened ye wadna send me away, Maister Callendar."

"How kened ye that I wadna turn ye away, boy?" said the builder.

"Oh, I juist preferred to come back here, at ony rate," said Cleg.

"But why?" persisted Mr. Callendar.

Cleg scratched the turned-up earth of his garden thoughtfully with his toe.

"Weel," he said, "if ye maun ken, it was because I had raither lippen² to the deil I ken than to the deil I dinna ken!"

The builder laughed good-naturedly.

"So ye think me a deil?" he asked, making believe to cut at the boy with the bit of planed moulding he was carrying in his hand with black pencil-marks at intervals upon it as a measuring-rod.

"Ow, it's juist a mainner o' speaking!" said Cleg, glancing up at Mr. Callendar with twinkling eyes. He knew that permission to bide was as good as granted. The builder came and looked within.

² Trust.

The hut was whitewashed inside, and the black edges of the boards made transverse lines across the staring white.

Cleg explained.

"I didna steal the whitewash," he said; "I got it frae Andrew Heslop for helpin' him wi' his lime-mixing.

"It's a fine healthsome, heartsome smell," the boy went on, noticing that the builder was sniffing. "Oh, man, it's the tar that ye smell," he again broke in. "I'm gaun to tar it on the ootside. It keeps the weather off famous. I gat the tar frae a watchman at the end o' the Lothian Road, where they are laying a new kind o' pavement wi' an awsome smell."

The interior of the hut was shelved, and upon a pair of old trestles was a good new mattress. The builder looked curiously at it.

"It was the Pleasance student missionary got it in for my mither to lie on afore she died," said Cleg in explanation.

"Aye, and your mither is awa," said the builder; "it's a release."

"Aye, it is that," said Cleg, from whose young heart sorrow of his mother's death had wholly passed away. He was not callous, but he was old-fashioned and world-experienced enough to recognise facts frankly. It was a release indeed for Isbel Kelly.

"Weel," said the builder, "mind ye behave yoursel'. Bring nae wild gilravage o' loons here, or oot ye gang."

"Hearken ye, Maister," said Cleg. "There's no a boy atween Henry Place an' the Sooth Back that wull daur to show the ill-favoured face o' him within your muckle yett. I'll be the best watch that ever ye had, Maister Callendar. See if I'm no!"

The builder smiled as he went away. He took the measuring-rod of white moulding in his hand, and looked at the marks to recall what particular business he had been employed upon. But even as he did so a thought struck him. He turned back.

"Mind you," he said to Cleg, "the first time that ye bring the faither o' ye aboot my yaird, to the curb-stane ye gang wi' a' your traps and trantlums!"

Cleg peeped elvishly out of his citadel.

"My faither," he said, "is snug in a far grander hoose than yours or mine, Maister Callendar. He has ta'en the accommodation for a year, and gotten close wark frae the Gowvernment a' the time!"

"What mean ye?" said the builder; "your faither never reformed?"

"Na, no that," answered Cleg; "but he got a year for ganging intil anither man's hoose without speering his leave. And I was there and saw the judge gie him a tongue-dressing afore he spoke oot the sentence. 'One year!' says he. 'Make it three, my Lord!' says I frae the back of the coort. So they ran me oot; but my faither kenned wha it was, for he cried, 'May hunger, sickness, and trouble suck the life from ye, ye bloodsucking son of my sorrow! Wait till I get hoults o' ye! I'll make ye melt off the earth like the snow off a dyke, son o' mine though ye are!'"

The respectable builder stood aghast.

"And your ain faither said the like o' that till ye?" he asked, with a look of awe in his face as if he had been listening to blasphemy. "And what did you say to him?"

"Faith! I only said, 'I hope ye'll like the oakum, faither!'"

ADVENTURE XII.

VARA KAVANNAH OF THE TINKLERS' LANDS

Cleg having finished his dispositions, shut to his door, and barred it with a cunning bolt, shot with string, which he had constructed till he should be able to find an old lock to manipulate with the craft inherited from his father. Then he set forth for the Tinklers' Lands, to visit his friends the Kavannahs. He had delivered his papers in the early morning, and now he was free till the evening. For since a threatened descent of the police, Mistress Roy, that honest merchant, had discouraged Cleg from "hanging round" after his work was finished. She attempted to do the discouraging with a broomstick or anything else that came handy. But Cleg was far too active to be struck by a woman. And, turning upon his mistress with a sudden flash of teeth like the grin of a wild cat, he sent that lady back upon the second line of her defences – into the little back shop where that peculiar company assembled which gave to Roy's paper-shop its other quality of shebeen.

Cleg had just reached the arched gateway which led into the builder's yard, when he saw, pottering along the sidewalk twenty yards before him the squat, bandy-legged figure of his late landlord, Mr. Nathan. He had been going the round of the builders, endeavouring to discover which of them would effect the repairs of Tim Kelly's mansion at the least expense, and at the same time be prepared to satisfy the fiery Inspector of Sanitation.

Without a moment's hesitation, and as a mere matter of duty, Cleg bent his head, and, running full-tilt between his late landlord's legs, he overset him on the pavement and shot ahead on his way to make his morning call on the Kavannahs. The fulfilment of healthy natural function required that a well-conducted boy of good principles should cheek a policeman and overset a Jew landlord whenever met with. In such a war there could be no truce or parley.

Tinklers' Lands was in one of the worst parts of the city. Davie Dean's Street goes steeply down hill, and has apparently carried all its inhabitants with it. Tinklers' Lands is quite at the foot, and the inhabitants have come so low that they can fear no further fall. The Kavannahs, as has been said, dwelt in the cellar of the worst house in Tinklers' Lands.

Cleg ran down into the area and bent over the grating.

"Vara!" he cried, making a trumpet of the bars and his hands.

"Aye, Cleg, is that you?" said Vara. "She's oot; ye can come in."

So Cleg trotted briskly down the slimy black steps, from which the top hand-rail had long since vanished. The stumpy palings themselves would also have disappeared if they had been anything else than cast metal, a material which can neither be burned nor profitably disposed of to the old junk man.

Vara met him at the foot. She was a pleasant, round-faced, merry-eyed girl of ten – or, rather, she would have been round-faced but for the pitiful drawing about the mouth and the frightened look with which she seemed to shrink back at any sudden movement near her. As Cleg arrived at the door of the cellar a foul, dank smell rose from the depths to meet him; and he, fresh from the air and cleanliness of his own new abode among the shavings and the chips, noticed it as he would not have done had he come directly from the house by the brickfield.

"She gaed awa' last nicht wi' an ill man," said Vara, "and I hae seen nocht o' her since."

Vara Kavannah spoke of Sheemus Kavannah as "faither," but always of her mother as "she." To-day the girl had her fair hair done up in a womanly net and stowed away on the top of her head. When one has the cares of a house and family, it is necessary to dress in a grown-up fashion. Indeed, in some of her moods, when the trouble of Hugh and the baby lay heavy on her, Vara looked like a little old woman, as if she had been her own fairy godmother fallen upon evil times.

But to-day she had her head also tied in a napkin, rolled white and smooth about her brows. Cleg glanced at it with the quick comprehension which comes from a kindred bitterness.

"Her?" he queried, as much with his thumb and eyebrow as with his voice.

"Aye," said Vara, looking down at the floor, for in the Lands such occurrences were not spoken of outside the family; "yestreen."

Hearing the voices at the door, little Hugh, Vara's brother of four, came toddling unevenly upon legs which ought to have been chubby, but which were only feeble and uncertain. He had one hand wrapped in a piece of white rag; and, whenever he remembered, he carried it in his other hand and wept over it with a sad, wearying whimper.

Cleg again looked his query at Vara.

"Aye," said the girl, her eyes lighting this time with a glint of anger; "the bairn toddled to her when she cam' hame, and he asked for a bit piece. And wi' that she took him and gied him a fling across the floor, and he hurt his airm on the corner of the bed."

And Cleg, though he had given up swearing, swore.

"The wean's asleep!" said Vara; "speak quietly."

And upon tiptoe she led the way. The dusk of the cellar was so dense and the oppression of the foul air so terrible that had not Cleg been to the manner born, he could hardly have reached the little crib where the baby lay huddled among swathings of old petticoats and bits of flannel, while underneath was a layer of hay.

Vara stood gazing with inexpressible rapture at the babe.

"Isna he bonny – bonny?"

She clasped her hands as she spoke, and looked for the answering admiration in Cleg's face.

"Aye," said Cleg, who knew what was demanded of him if he expected to remain Vara Kavannah's friend; "he's juist terrible bonny – elegant as a pictur!"

He had heard his father say that of a new "jemmy."

In truth, the babe was but skin and bone, with the drawn face of a mummy of five thousand years – and tiny hands, prehensile like those of a monkey.

"Vara," said Cleg, "ye canna bide here. I maun get ye awa'. This is no to be tholed. What hae ye had to eat the day?"

"We had some broth that a neighbour brocht in yesterday, and some fish. But the fish was bad," said Vara, flushing and hesitating even to say these things to Cleg.

The badness of the fish, indeed, sufficiently advertised itself.

At the mention of something to eat little Hugh sharpened his croon of pain into a yell.

"Hugh's awsome hungry! Hugh boy wants his dinner!"

Vara went to him and knelt beside him.

"Hush thee, Hugh boy!" she said, speaking with a fragrance of motherliness which must have come to her from some ancestor, for certainly never in her life had she experienced anything like it. "Hush! Hugh boy shall have his dinner if he is a good boy! Poor handie! Poor, poor handie!"

And the girl took the swollen wrist and torn hand into hers and rocked to and fro with the boy on her knee.

"Hugh is gaun to be a man," she said. "He wadna greet. Na, he will wait till faither comes hame. And then he will get ham, nice ham, singing in the pan; aye, and red herring brandering on the fire, and salmon in tins, an' aipples, an' oranges, an' cancellaries."

"Losh, aye, but that wull be guid!" said Hugh, stopping his crying to listen to the enthralling catalogue.

"Aye," said Vara, "and when faither comes hame, he will tak' us away to a bonny hoose to leeve where the ships sail by. For dadda has gane to the seaside to look for wark. It will be a bonny hoose wi' swings at every door, and blacky men that dance in braw, striped claes, and shows. And

Hugh boy shall gang to them a'. We'll howk holes in the sand, and fill the dirt into buckets, and row our girds, Hughie. And we shall paidle in the tide, and splash the bonny water aboon oor heids!"

"Oh, oh," cried the child, "Hugh boy wants to gang noo. He wants to paidle in the bonny water and eat the oranges!"

"Bide ye, bonny man," said Vara, fondling him, "that's a' to be when dadda comes hame."

"Hugh boy is gangin' to the door to look for dadda!" said the boy as he moved off with his bandaged hand clutched to his side.

The baby in the bunk among the old clouts set up a crying, and Cleg went to it, for he was touched to the heart by the voice of dumb things in pain, whether babes or beasts.

But little Gavin (called for a comrade of Sheemus Kavannah's who had been kind to him) was wrinkling all his face into a myriad crinkles. Then, lifting up the tiniest shrill pipe, he cried with the cry of underfed and ill-used childhood – a cry that breaks off sharp in the middle and never attains to the lusty roar of the healthy and well-grown malcontent.

Vara flew to Gavin and, taking the babe in her arms, she hushed him back again to sleep, making a swift gesture of command for silence. She kept her eyes fondly upon the peaked little face, till the wailing ceased, the tiny clenched hand fell back from the puckered face, and the infant dropped again to sleep, clasping the frill of Vara's pinafore with fingers like bird claws.

"I was feared he wad waken an' I had nocht to gie him," she explained, simply.

"God!" said Cleg; "I canna stand this."

And without a word he skimmed up the cellar steps and out. He went straight to his mistress of the paper-shop, and with her he had a loud-voiced and maledictory interview, in which he endeavoured to uplift his week's wage before it was due. There were threats and recriminations on both sides before a compromise was effected. It ended in the half, which had already been worked for, being paid over in view of instant necessities – which, it is to be regretted, Cleg did not quite truthfully represent to Mistress Roy.

Then, with two silver shillings in his hand, Cleg went and bought twopence worth of meat from the neck and a penny bone for boiling, a penny worth of carrots, a halfpenny cabbage, a large four-pound loaf, and twopence worth of the best milk. To this he added two apples and an orange for Hugh, so that he might have a foretaste of the golden time when dadda should come home.

It was as good as a circus procession when Cleg went back laden like a bee, and no humble bee either, to the cellar in Tinklers' Lands. He had his head in the air, and his chest out, just as he used to march when he heard the regiments coming down the High Street from the Castle, and caught a glimpse of their swinging tartans and towering plumes.

Vara met him at the door. She raised her hands in amaze, but mechanically checked the cry of gladness and admiration on her lips as Cleg came scrambling down, without ever minding his feet on the slippery stairs.

"Cleg Kelly!" said she, speaking under her breath, "what are ye doin' wi' a' that meat?"

"Oh, it's nocht ava," said Cleg lightly; "it's juist some things that I had nae use for this week. Ye ken I'm watchman noo at Callendar's as weel as working at the paper-shop!"

"Save us!" said Vara, "this is never a' for us. I canna tak' it. I canna!"

"Aye, is it!" said Cleg, "an' you tak' it for the bairns' sake. Sheemus will pay me when he comes back, gin ye like!"

Vara's heart broke out in a cry, "O Cleg, I canna thank ye!" And her tears fairly rained down while she sobbed quickly and freely.

"Dinna, Vara, dinna, lassie!" said Cleg, edging for the door; "ye maun stop that or I declare I'll hae to rin!"

From within came the babe's cry. But it had no terrors for Vara now.

"Greet, Gavin, greet," she cried; "aye, that is richt. Let us hear something like a noise, for I hae gotten something to gie ye at last."

So she hasted and ran for the baby's bottle – which, as in all poor houses, was one of Maw's best. She mixed rapidly the due proportions of milk and water, and tested the drawing of the tube with her mouth as she ran to the cot. At first the babe could not be brought to believe in the genuineness of the nourishment offered, so often had the cold comfort of the empty tube been offered. It was a moment or two before he tasted the milk; but, as soon as he did so, his outcry ceased as if by magic, the puckers smoothed out, and the big solemn baby eyes fixed themselves on the ceiling of the cellar with a stare of grave rapture.

Then Cleg took himself off, with a hop and a skip up the steps, having seen Hugh settled to his bread and butter, eating eagerly and jealously, but never for a moment letting the orange, earnest of the Promised Land of his father's return, out of his other hand. Vara was putting away the great store of provision in the empty cupboard when Cleg looked his last down the grating which admitted the scanty light to the Kavannahs' home.

There had been few happier days in Cleg Kelly's life than this on which he spent the half of his week's wage for the benefit of the Kavannahs.

So altogether happy did he feel that he went and cuffed the ears of two well-dressed boys for looking at him. Then he threw their new bonnets into the gutter and departed in a perfect glow of happiness and philanthropy.

ADVENTURE XIII.

CLEG'S SECOND BURGLARY

Cleg slept soundly on his bed within the whitewashed hut. The last thing he did the night before was to go to the bench where the men had been working, and bring an armful of the fragrant pine shavings for a bouquet to scent his chamber. And never did boy sleep better. It must be confessed, however, that the position of night-watchman at Callendar's, of which he had boasted to Vara Kavannah, was entirely a sinecure. For it was not until he heard the gruff voices of the men clicking their tools and answering one another in pre-breakfast monosyllables that he realized he had changed his abode. Then he stirred so sharply that the mattress fell off the trestles, and Cleg was brought up all standing against the side of the hut.

All that day he went about his duties as usual. He trotted to the newspaper office and distributed his roll of papers mechanically; but his mind was with the Kavannahs, and he longed for the time to come when he could, with some self-respect, go and gloat over the effects of his generosity. Doubtless there was a touch of self-glorification in this, which, however, he kept strictly to himself. But who will grudge it to a boy, who for the sake of a lassie has spent nearly half of his week's wage, and who knows that he will have to live on bread and water for ten days in consequence?

Cleg judged that it would not be advisable for him to go to Tinklers' Lands before noon. So in the meanwhile he betook himself to Simon Square to "lag for" Humpy Joe, who had called him "Irishman" the previous evening, at a time when, with his papers under his arm, Cleg was incapacitated for warfare, being, like Martha, much cumbered with serving.

But Humpy Joe proved unattainable. For he had seen his enemy's approach, and as soon as Cleg set foot within the square, he saluted him with a rotten egg, carefully selected and laid aside for such an emergency. And had it not been for the habitual watchfulness of Cleg, Joe's missile would have "got him." But as it was, a sudden leap into the air like that of a jack-in-the-box just cleared the danger, and the egg, passing between Cleg's bare feet, made a long yolky mark of exclamation on the ground.

Being defeated in this, Humpy Joe looked forth from an end window, and entertained the neighbourhood with a gratuitous and wholly untrustworthy account of Cleg's ancestors. And Cleg, in reply, devised ingenious tortures, which he declared would be the portion of Humpy Joe, when next he caught him "out."

Thus, after tiring of this, the embattled belligerents separated in high delight and with mutual respect and good feeling, vowing sanguinary vengeance when next they should meet at Sunday school.

At last the time came for Cleg to feast his happy eyes upon the table which had been spread by his means for his friends the Kavannahs. But first he lingered awhile about the end of Davie Dean's Street, ostentatiously looking for a boy to lick, and throwing stones over the wall at the baker's fat watch-dog to make it bark. In reality he was making sure that none of his companions were in the neighbourhood, lest, with some colour of truth, they should cast up at him the capital offence of "speaking to a lassie."

At last the coast was clear. The only boy within half a mile had been chased under the protection of the great guns of his own fortress, being the vicinity of his mother's wash-tubs. Then Cleg dived quickly down to the cellar beneath Tinklers' Lands.

For the first time in his experience, the door was shut. Cleg had set his ear to the keyhole and listened. Then he put his eye there. But neither sense told him anything.

"Vara!" he cried softly, and set his ear against the floor. Cleg knew that the place to hear behind a door (if there is no danger of its being hastily opened) is not at the keyhole, but close to the floor. He listened, holding his breath. At first he could hear nothing; but in a little, a low sob at stated intervals detached itself from the cursory noises made by the other tenants of Tinklers' Lands and from the steady growl of the streets above.

"Vara!" he cried a little louder; "Vara Kavannah, are ye in? What's wrang?"

Still nothing came back to him but the mechanical sob, which wore his patience suddenly to the breaking point.

"They're a' killed," said Cleg, who had once been at the opening of a door, and had seen that which was within. "I'll break open the door." And with that he dashed himself against it. But the strength of the bolt resisted his utmost strength.

"Cleg," said a voice from within, very weak and feeble, "gang awa' like a guid lad. Dinna come here ony mair – "

It was Vara's voice, speaking through pain and tears.

"Vara," said Cleg, "what's wrang? What for wull ye no open the door?"

"I canna, Cleg; she's here, lyin' on the floor in the corner. I canna turn the key, for she has tied me to the bed-foot."

Cleg instantly understood the circumstances. They were none so unprecedented in the neighbourhood of Tinklers' Lands. Sal Kavannah had come home drunk, singly or in company. She had abused the children, and ended by tying up Vara, lest she should go out while she lay in her drunken sleep. Such things had been done within Cleg's knowledge – aye, things infinitely worse than these. And with his unchildish wisdom Cleg feared the worst.

But he was not Tim Kelly's son for nothing. And it did not cost him a moment to search in his pocket for a fine strong piece of twine, such as all shoemakers use. He always carried at least ten sorts of cord about with him. This cobbler's string was a special brand, so wonderful that Cleg had made friends with the shoemaker's boy (whom he loathed) solely in order to obtain it.

Cleg knew that the key was in the lock, but that the wards were turned clear, for his eyes, growing accustomed to the gloom, could now look into the cellar. He also knew that nine door-keys out of ten have a little groove at the end of the shank just below the wards. So he made a noose of the fine, hard cobbler's twine, and slipped it into the keyhole just as if he had been "girning" sticklebacks and "bairdies" in the shallow burns about the Loch of Lochend.

After a failure or two the loop caught and tightened. Then Cleg shook the string about with a cunning see-sawing motion, learned from his father, till he felt the wards of the key drop down perpendicularly. Then he took a long piece of stick, and, thrusting it into the keyhole, he had the satisfaction of feeling the key drop inside the door, and hang by the cobbler's twine. He eased it down to the floor, and found that, as is the case with most doors, the bottom of that of the cellar of Tinklers' Lands did not come quite close to the floor. It was, therefore, easy for Cleg to dangle the key a little till he could bring the end of it to the place where the arch was worn widest. Then he took his hooked wire and pulled the key towards him. It was in itself a pretty trick, and was executed by Cleg in far less time than it takes to tell about it.

With the key in his hand, and in the other an open clasp-knife, Cleg turned the bolt back and stepped within. A terrible enough sight met his eyes, though not that which he dreaded. In the corner lay Sal Kavannah, with a pair of empty bottles tossed at her side, her black hair over her face, lying drawn together in a heap. Tied to the bed was Vara, bleeding from a cut on the head, and trying to cover her arms and hands from his sight. But Hugh and the baby lay in the bunk together, sleeping peacefully. It was upon poor Vara that the brunt of the woman's maniac fury had fallen.

Cleg stood stricken; but the sight of Vara bound with cords aroused him. He had the knife in his hand, and it did not take a moment to free her. But she was so stiff and exhausted that she fell forward on her face as soon as the straps were removed. Then, after Cleg had lifted her, he turned

upon the sodden heap in the corner, and, with his knife glittering in his hand and the wild-cat grin on his face, he said, with a deep indrawing of his breath, "Oh, if ye had only been my ain faither!"

And it was as well that it was Sal Kavannah and not Tim Kelly that had done this thing.

Now, in an emergency Cleg always acted first and asked leave afterwards.

"Come awa' oot o' this, Vara, and I'll bring the bairn and Hugh," said he to the girl, when she was somewhat recovered.

"But, Cleg, where are we to gang?" said Vara, starting back.

"Never you heed, Vara; there maun be nae mair o' this frae this time oot."

His manner was so positive that the girl gave way. Anything rather than abide with the thing which lay in the corner.

"Hae ye ocht that ye wad like to bring wi' ye?" Cleg asked of Vara, as he shouldered Hugh, and took up the baby on his other arm.

"Aye," said Vara, "wee Gavin's feedin' bottle."

And she had to step over the sodden face of her mother to get it.

So the four went out into the noonday streets, and Cleg marched forth like the pipe-major of the Black Watch – than whom no king on earth walks with more dignity and pomp, when there is a big parade and the full band of pipers leads the regiment.

Cleg almost wished that Humpy Joe might see him and taunt him, so that on Sunday he might beat him to a jelly. But, as it chanced, the streets were deserted, for it was the very middle of the workmen's dinner-hour. So that the streams that went and came a quarter of an hour sooner and a quarter of an hour later were for the moment all safely housed; while those who had brought their dinners with them sat on benches in the shade, and took no notice of the small forlorn company passing along the causeway.

There was another way to the old construction hut at the back of Callendar's yard which did not lead through the main gateway, but entered from some waste ground, where only broken bottles and old tin cans dwelt.

The children passed safely and unobserved by this way, and in a little while Cleg had them safely housed in his own city of refuge. But Vara was in great fear lest some of the men should see them and turn them out upon the street. So Cleg shut the door upon them with the lock of his own devising, and started at a run to find Mr. Callendar.

ADVENTURE XIV. CLEG TURNS DIPLOMATIST

James Callendar, honest man and pillar of the Seceder Kirk, was sitting down to his dinner when Cleg came to his door. The one servant lass whom the Callendars kept was "tidying" herself for the afternoon, and very much resented having to answer the door for a ragged boy with bare legs.

"Gae 'way, we hae nocht for the likes o' you here!" said she, and would have shut the door upon him.

"No even ceevil mainners," said Cleg, stepping lightly past her into the little side room, where he knew that Mr. Callendar ordinarily took his meals. The builder was just putting a potato into his mouth. He was so surprised to see Cleg enter unannounced, that the fork with the round, well-buttered, new potato remained poised in mid-air.

Cleg plunged into his affairs without preamble, lest he should be captured from behind and ignominiously expelled. But the trim servant merely listened for a moment at the back of the door, to make sure that the intruder had some genuine business with her master, and then returned to the graver duties of her own toilet. It was her evening out, and her "young man" had hinted at a sail to Aberdour on the pleasure-boat, if they could get to the West Pier in time.

"Oh, Maister Callendar," Cleg began, eager and breathless, "ye hae been a kind man to me, and I want ye to help me noo – "

"What's this, Cleg?" said the builder; "surely the police are not after you?"

Cleg shook his head.

"Nor your faither gotten off?"

Again and more vigorously Cleg shook his head, smiling a little as he did so.

"Oh, then," said the builder, much relieved, carrying the suspended potato to his mouth, "it can be naething very dreadfu'. But when ye came in like that on me, I declare that I thocht the wood-yaird was on fire!"

Then Cleg proceeded with his tale. He told how the Kavannahs had been deserted by their father, who had gone to look for work in Liverpool. He sketched with the inevitable realism of the street-boy the career of Sal Kavannah. He stated in plain language the fate that threatened Vara. He described Sal's treatment of Hugh.

"And she battered her ain bairn till the blood ran on the floor. She tossed the bairn against the wall till its arm was near broke. She never hears her wee bit wean greetin' for the milk without cursing it. Will ye turn them away to gang back to a' that?"

This was Cleg's climax, and very artfully he had worked up to it. The builder, good man, was troubled. The tale spoiled the relish of his new potatoes, and it was the first time he had had them that year. He turned with some little asperity upon Cleg.

"But I dinna see what I can do," he said; "I canna tak' them here into my house. The mistress wadna alloo it."

It was the first time he had referred to the ruler of his fortunes, who at that moment was declaring to an acquaintance that she paid two shillings a week less for her rooms than her friend in the next pew at church. "And how she can afford it is mair than I can tell." It was no wonder that honest Mr. Callendar said that his wife would not allow him to bring the Kavannahs within his door.

"But," said Cleg, "if you will let them bide in the auld hut at the back o' the yaird, where naebody gangs, I can easy get ither lodgings. They'll meddle wi' naething, and I ken whaur to get wark for the lassie, when she's fit for it."

Mr. Callendar considered. It was a good deal to ask, and he had no guarantee for the honesty of his new tenants but the good word of the son of a thief who had squatted on his property.

"Weel, Cleg," he said at last, with his quiet humorsome smile coming back to his lips, "they can bide, gin ye are willing to come surety for them."

Cleg jumped up with a shout and a wave of his bonnet, which brought the trim servant to the back of the door in consternation.

"I kenned ye wadna turn them awa' – I kenned it, man!" he cried.

Then Cleg realised where he was, and his enthusiasm subsided as suddenly as it rose.

"I shouldna behave like this on a carpet," he said, looking apologetically at the dusty pads his bare feet had left on the good Kidderminster.

He was on the eve of departing when the builder called him back. He had been turning things over in his mind.

"I hae anither wood-yard doon by Echo Bank," he said. "There's a cubby-hole there you could bide in, gin ye had a blanket."

"That's nocht," answered Cleg, "in this weather. And thank ye kindly. I can do brawly without a blanket."

And he sped out as he came, without troubling the maid, who was wearying for her master to be done with his dinner and take himself away to his office.

The good news was conveyed directly to Vara, and then she set Cleg's hut in order with a quieter heart. Cleg showed them where to get water, and it was not long before the bairns were established in a safety and comfort they had been strangers to all their lives.

But Cleg was not done with his day's work for the Kavannahs. He went down to the Hillside Works and saw the watchman, after he had delivered his tale of evening papers.

"D'ye think," he said diplomatically, "that there's ony chance for a lassie to get wark here?"

The watchman shook his head.

"There's nae room for ony but the relations o' them that's workin' here already."

The watchman could be as diplomatic as Cleg. He had daughters of his own growing up, and, though he was willing to be a friend to Cleg, it was against his principles to encourage the introduction into "our works" of alien blood. There was a tradition at Hillside that every old servant got his daughters "in" as a matter of course. Indeed, matrimonial alliances were often arranged on that basis, and the blessing of children was looked upon as equivalent to the supreme blessing of money in the bank.

"But I dare say ye might see Maister Donald," said the watchman, relenting. He remembered that he had no daughters that could be ready for a few years yet; and besides, Cleg was a good friend of his. "But what ken ye about lassies? My sang, but ye are early begun, my lad. Ye'll rue it some day."

Cleg smiled, but disdained an answer. He was not argie-bargiein' at present, as he would have said. He was waiting to get a job for Vara Kavannah. In another minute he found himself in the presence of Mr. Donald Iverach, junior partner in the firm of Iverach & Company, whose position in the paper trade and special eminence in the production of the higher grades of foreign correspondence were acknowledged even by rivals – as the senior partner wrote when he was preparing the advertisement for the firm's yearly almanack.

Mr. Donald Iverach was not in the best of humours. He had hoped to be playing "pocket-handkerchief tennis," of which he had grown inordinately fond, upon the lawn of Aurelia Villa. But it so happened that he had been required to supply his father upon the morrow with important data concerning the half-yearly balance. For this reason he had to remain in the dreary office in the South Back. This jumped ill with the desires of the junior partner, who was at present so very junior a partner that his share of the profits was only a full and undivided fiftieth – "amply sufficient, however," as his father said many times over, "and much more than ever I had at your age, with a wife and family to keep."

"I wish I had!" said the reckless Donald, when he had heard this for the twentieth time, not knowing what he said.

"Donald, you are a young fool!" said his father. Which, of course, materially helped things.

Now the temper of Mr. Donald Iverach was specially tried on this occasion, for he had good reason to believe that a picturesque cousin of Cecilia's from London, who had been invalided home from some ridiculous little war or other, was playing pocket-handkerchief tennis at Aurelia Villa that evening in place of himself.

So his greeting to Cleg was curt indeed, as he looked up with his pen in his fingers from the last estimate of "goods returned damaged" – an item which always specially annoyed his father.

"What do you want, boy?" he said, with a glance at the tattered trousers with one "gallus" showing across the blue shirt, which represented Cleg's entire summer wear.

"Hae ye ony licht job ye could gie a clever and wullin' lassie the morn?" said Cleg, who knew that the way to get a thing is to ask for it.

"What lassie?" said the junior partner indifferently.

"A lassie that has nae faither or mither," said Cleg – "worth speakin' aboot," he added as an afterthought.

"We are full up," said Donald Iverach, balancing himself upon one leg of his stool. For his father was old-fashioned, and despised the luxury of stuffed chairs as not in keeping with a sound, old-fashioned conservative business.

Cleg looked disappointed.

"It wad be an awsome graund thing for the lassie if she could get a job here," said Cleg sadly.

"Another time," replied the junior partner, turning to his desk. To him the case and application were as fifty more. He only wished the manager had been at hand to refer the case to. Donald was like most of his kindly fellow-creatures. He liked to have his nasty jobs done by deputy. Which is one reason why the law is a lucrative profession.

Cleg was at the door, his head sunk so low that it was nearly between his feet. But at the very out-going, with the great brass handle in his fingers, he tried once more.

"Aweel," he said, without taking his eyes off the brown matting on the floor, "I'll e'en hae to gang and tell Miss Tennant aboot it. She wull be desperate vexed!"

The junior partner swung round on his stool and called, "Hey! boy, stop!"

But Cleg was already outside.

"Call that boy back!" he shouted to the watchman, leaping to the door with sudden agility and astonishing interest.

Cleg returned with the same dejected mien and abased eyes. He stood, the image of sorrow and disappointment, upon the cocoa-nut matting.

"Whom did you say you would tell?" said Donald Iverach, in a tone in his voice quite different from his business one.

"Only Miss Tennant – a freend o' mine," said Cleg, with incomparable meekness and deference.

"Miss Tennant of Aurelia Villa?" broke in the eager youth.

"Aye, juist her," said Cleg dispassionately. "She learns us aboot Jacob and Esau – and aboot Noah," he added as if upon consideration. He would have mentioned more of the patriarchs if he could have remembered them at the time. His choice of names did not spring from either preference or favouritism. So he added Noah to show that there was no ill-feeling in the matter.

"And Miss Tennant is your friend?" queried the young man.

Cleg nodded. He might have added that sometimes, as in one great ploy yet to be described, he had been both teacher and friend to Miss Celie Tennant.

"Tell your lassie to be here at breakfast-time to-morrow morning, and to be sure and ask for Mr. Donald Iverach," was all the junior partner remarked.

And Cleg said demurely, "Thank you, sir."

But as Cleg went out he thought a great deal of additional matter, and when he said his adieus to the watchman he could hardly contain himself. Before he was fairly down the steps, he yelled three times as loud as he could, and turned Catherine-wheel after Catherine-wheel, till at the last turn he came down with his bare feet in the waist-belt of a policeman. The good-natured officer solemnly smacked the convenient end of Cleg with a vast plantigrade palm, and restored him to the stature and progression of ordinary humanity, with a reminder to behave – and to mind where he was coming if he did not want to get run in.

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