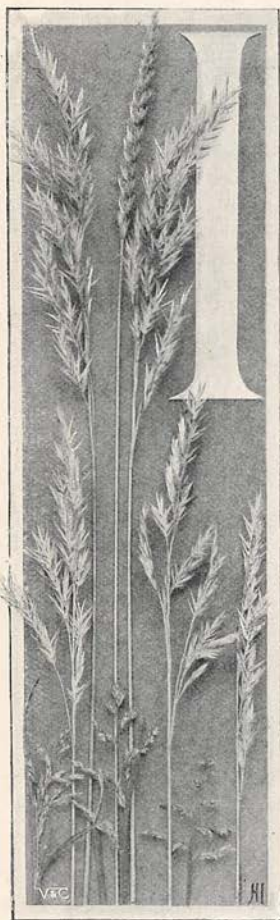


IN THE DAYS OF LONG AGO.

By IAN MACLAREN.*

Photographs by Burrows, Perth.



IT is pleasant, when one has reached middle age and has a busy life behind him, to sit on a winter's evening by the fireside and recall the scenes of past years. Certain events stand out in bright colours and affect the heart, not always because they are important, but often because they touch some human feeling.

I.

ONE of the first things which I remember, and which is not a mere imagination of later years flung back upon one's childhood, is our London house, where, an only child, I lived with my father and mother. A

few months ago I made a journey to the district and walked up the street where I had often gone, a boy of four years old. It was with fear that I turned the corner, lest in the course of nearly half a century the street should have sunk into reduced circumstances and given one that shock of pain with which one sees a friend of schooldays in rags and misery. It was a pleasant surprise to find that the old street, which

had never been fashionable, but always wore a quiet appearance, looked very much the same, as unassuming, as composed, as mother-like as ever. With a little exercise of memory I found our house, occupied now, I should think, by a superior clerk or well-doing tradesman, with a clean doorstep and polished bell, with shining windows and tasteful curtains. My interest was largely in the room in the basement, into which I could look from the street. The fire was burning in the grate, and two children were playing with their toys, and I could not believe that forty-four years had passed since I also played in that room. It was the room where every morning after breakfast I took my horse out of the stable—he was grey and a horse of almost unmanageable spirit. Sometimes he was so frisky I could hardly harness him into his cart, and the joy of strapping him in, for he had all his harness complete, could be prolonged for half an hour. The cart was a brewer's dray, which was selected, I think, for the purpose because it could be laden with barrels, and a barrel could be run down from the back of the cart with the aid of a little inclined plane and a couple of steel chains. Round the room went the cart and horse with his driver till all the barrels were delivered at what was supposed to be a series of taverns, although I had never seen such places and did not know what they were; then the barrels were collected after they were empty and brought back again to the place from which we started. To-day a wagon with sacks of flour would, I fancy, have been the toy, and a better one. Once I remember glancing up and seeing a man look down at me, as I was now looking down at these other children in the same room. He was selling flowers and had a basket, I think, of tulips and Easter lilies, and he made enticing signs to me that I should come up and buy. As it was, I ran from the room in terror, not because I did not admire the white and red of the flowers, but because the sight of him looking in at the window from that height filled me with dismay, and I had an idea that the coster-

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mongers who sold flowers might not be unwilling to catch a little boy and carry him away into the unknown places where they lived.

For a moment I thought of ringing the bell and asking the goodwife of the house if there was still a drawing-room at the back looking out into a conservatory where we used to have our few flowers, and where I was allowed to use a tiny watering-can with doubtful results both as regards the flowers and my own white pinafore. What I wanted to see in the drawing-room was the fire-place, because on Sunday afternoons I used to sit beside my mother there, and she taught me the story of Jesus from the Gospels. She did not use a Bible, but a history of Jesus, by whom written I do not know, and which, I remember, had a picture of Peter drawing out the net till it was ready to break through the multitude of fishes. This story was printed, not on paper, but on some kind of linen, because in those days books were most costly, and linen was not so easy to tear as paper. Nowadays I hunt for books, and buy a rare book when I can afford it, which is not often, but I would give a great deal to lay my hand on the linen book with the picture of Peter. Why do we not preserve, or, rather, why do not other people preserve for us those possessions of our childhood which, like charms, would bring back again to us many a dimly remembered incident and many a loving face?

Afterwards I went up the street, and I declare a costermonger was coming down with geraniums in his basket, and as he went he held them in view of the windows both above and below. There was a square close by our street, and into that I now turned, and it was almost unchanged, with its stone church in the centre and its pleasant little garden surrounded by quiet and trim houses. Out of that square a young lady used to come who was a friend of our family, and she took the four-year-old with her into the garden. She was very pretty and very bright, a brunette, with speaking eyes and vivacious manner, and I fell deeply in love with her. It was in the garden, beneath the hawthorn trees, that, being of the age of four, and having no regard to worldly considerations, I proposed to her, and I do not think in after years that she ever did deny that she accepted me. It was understood that marriage should be delayed for a year or two till I could manage my horse and cart with greater success—

he being, as I said, a very spirited animal; and then we had our eye upon a summer-house in the square garden where we might set up house together. She used to come to visit us in Scotland, and it was always understood that we were engaged; and it came as a terrible blow to me, being then about the age of seven, and almost in a position to marry, when I was told that, forgetful of our long engagement and my faithful love, she was to be married to a young London merchant. He had himself that year the audacity to visit us in our Scotch home and even to allude without due seriousness to the past engagement and his victory. It was, I am sorry to say, a subject of humour in the household, and I do not think that anyone could have the slightest idea how deeply I was attached to my faithless *fiancée*, or how long I carried about a broken heart. What the grown-ups consider absurd sorrows are real to the children. Years afterwards I stayed in her home, which she had filled with brightness, and now that she is gone I still visit what was her home; and sometimes, when the others have gone to bed, I talk with her husband of the wife to whom he was so devoted and for whose memory he still lives, and the recollection of our common love, the love of the child and the love of the man, attracted to the same beauty and the same goodness, are a secret tie between myself and my friend.

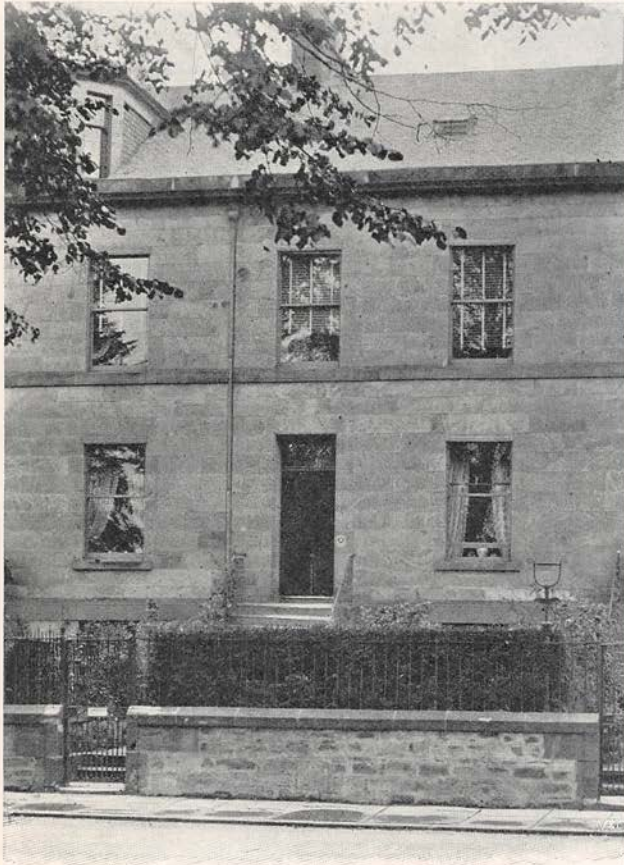
II.

FROM London we removed to a Scotch county town, and there one night a curious incident took place which is engraved like an etching upon my memory. I was then about six years of age, and for some reason—delicacy, I think, and being an only child—I slept in a crib in the corner of my father and mother's bedroom. There was one door from this room opening upon the landing of the first floor, and opposite this door was the drawing-room; another door of the bedroom opened into my father's dressing-room, and that dressing-room had in its turn a door to the landing. I had said my prayers under the supervision of my good old nurse, who was in the custom of suggesting forgotten petitions and even inventing special confessions of sin, which I was not anxious to offer because they recalled too plainly the shortcomings of the day. This exercise over, she had tucked me in and told me to go to sleep, and I was drowsily watching her as she folded my clothes and laid them in their appointed place, when I heard my

mother's voice crying "Mary!" in a loud and excited note. Mary went out to the landing, and something passed between my mother and her, my mother standing in the lobby beneath. By this time I was wide awake, for anything unusual always excites a child, and then I was much impressed by Mary coming in with haste and locking the door to the landing, and, after attempting in vain to lock the dressing-room door, which seemed to have no key, placing her back

bell rang with great violence, and when the housemaid opened the door someone drove it back upon her so that she was pressed between the door and the wall, and then rushed along the lobby and, turning the corner, disappeared. All she could say was that it was a man who had passed, tall and, she thought, bearded. He had said nothing, and she knew not whether he had gone downstairs, where there happened to be at that time no servant, or into a bedroom at

the back of the house, or upstairs to either of the floors above. He had come in and he had disappeared, and he was hidden somewhere in the house. Who he was, and for what purpose he had come, none could tell, and as my father would not allow my mother to go upstairs she had besought Mary to lock herself and me into the bedroom, so that, whatever he might do, he should not injure her only child. After my father had placed my mother in the dining-room and quieted the housemaid, who was certain that we would all be murdered, and thought upon the whole she would be murdered first herself, for, as she said, he was a "fear-some-looking man," my father, a quiet and determined Scotsman, took a stick out of the stand in the lobby and proposed to go upon a search expedition. My mother, assured of her son's safety, was now concerned about her husband's, and would neither allow him to go into the darkness beneath nor to mount into the darkness above, considering that he might be attacked at any moment by this unscrupulous invader. In those circumstances, and feeling very foolish, my father went into a neighbour's



THE HOUSE IN MARSHALL PLACE, PERTH—THE SCOTTISH RESIDENCE ALLUDED TO.

against it as one determined it should not be opened. When I asked her what was wrong she told me to lie down and ask God to take care of me, and then I felt that there was danger somewhere, but from her I could get no information.

What had happened, as I heard afterwards, was certainly very alarming and enough to throw a quiet household into confusion. As my father and mother were taking some slight supper in the dining-room, the door-

house in order to obtain assistance, while during his absence my mother and the housemaid were locked securely into the dining-room. Next door my father was received with acclamation, for the Volunteer movement had just commenced in Scotland, and the son of the house and two friends were busy cleaning their rifles, and they felt that this was the first call to active service. They hastened to assure my father of their support unto death, and it was with great



"IAN MACLAREN" (REV. JOHN WATSON, D.D.)

Photo by Rockwood, New York.

difficulty that he, a prudent man, could induce them to leave their rifles and bayonets at home. As it was, they armed themselves with murderous bludgeons such as young men carry, and came in a body to arrest the burglar. First of all they searched the lower floor, which, as I knew well through playing hide-and-seek, had endless places of concealment, and then they ascended the stairs to the drawing-room floor. As my father passed the bedroom door he inquired if all was well within, and I can still see Mary, with her back at the dressing-room door, assuring him that we were safe, and looking as if the burglars would have to pass over her body to get at the crib. Nothing but the strongest injunctions of my respected nurse kept me in the crib, for by this time I was assured that circumstances were happening in the house, and I was anxious to be in the thick thereof. The drawing-room was a large room extending across the front of the house, and that night was lit up with the light of the moon. My father went first and, as soon as he had opened the door, he saw the mysterious man standing upon the hearthrug. The light was on his face, and my father at once

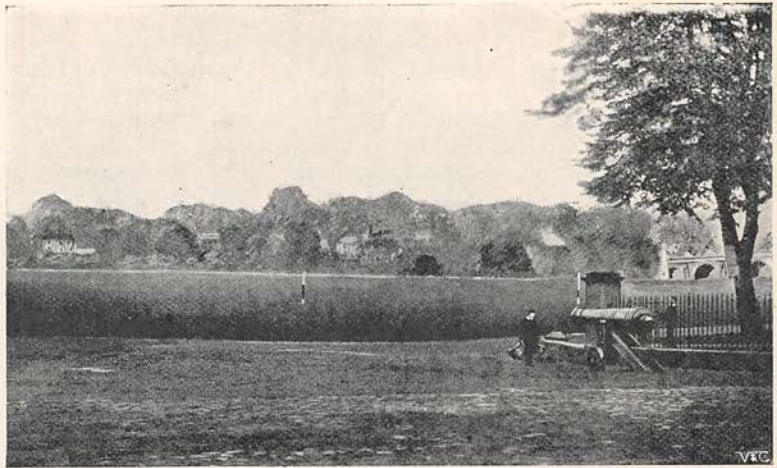
recognised him, and with what seems to me extraordinary presence of mind turned round and arrested the army of Volunteers upon the threshold. He explained to them outside the door that there had been a mistake, and that the unexpected visitor was a friend. The Volunteers returned downstairs, and after my mother had thanked them for their friendly and courageous help, they left, deeply disappointed that they had not been able to prove their valour, and the more anxious to put their rifles in good order for the French. My father then went upstairs and spoke to the man on the hearthrug by name, as if it were the most usual thing in the world for a visitor to make his way to the drawing-room after this fashion. He was a retired officer who had done gallant service in India, and had suffered from sunstroke, so that at certain times he hardly knew what he was doing. As he was accustomed to come to our house—not only in our time, but much more in the time of the previous owner—the idea suddenly seized him as he was out walking that he would go to the old house, and, the sun warming his brain overmuch, he made this hasty entrance. He came to himself when my father spoke to him, and then, much puzzled as to how he had been standing alone in the dark room, he quietly went downstairs and bade my father good-night. My father, under pretence of taking a turn, walked with him to his home, and next day the old man, with a confused recollection of what had happened, came to apologise. My mother made as though nothing had happened, and I was glad that he had called, for he told me two stories of the Indian Mutiny which I had never heard before, and promised to show me his Victoria Cross.

III.

DURING those days the Indian Mutiny took place, and English homes were filled with horror. Whether there were war correspondents in our modern sense in India or not I am not sure—of course, Dr. W. H. Russell had distinguished himself in the Crimean war, and his correspondence, bound in a red volume, was one of the delights of my boyhood—but I have a vivid recollection of pictures in the *Illustrated London News*, giving some of the scenes in the Mutiny. One represented a street, I suppose, in Lucknow, along which the English soldiers were fighting their way, while the enemy fired upon them from strange-looking houses. Standing by my father's side and looking

out on a green, peaceful meadow, where the children were playing and their nurses sitting by, he explained to me that women and children were that day in danger of death, and that our soldiers were fighting their way to the rescue. One of our Highland regiments greatly distinguished itself in the Mutiny, and all Scotland rang with the exploits of the 78th Ross-shire Highlanders.

who had followed Sir Colin Campbell to the relief of Lucknow. When that regiment returned home, it was ordered to Edinburgh and was publicly reviewed in the Queen's Park by some distinguished general. My father had the excellent idea that a boy ought to be taught patriotism, and that his memory should be stored with a recollection of mighty deeds. For weeks before this



NORTH INCH, PERTH.

review he told me the history of the Highland regiments, from the days after the rebellion of 1745 on to the Crimean war, and especially he aroused my enthusiasm with the description of the long marches and gallant deeds of the 78th as they went to save the women and children from death.

The night before the review we went to Edinburgh, and early next morning we were



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE INCH.

astir, in order to obtain a good position. We were so fortunate through influence or good luck as to have our conveyance placed not far from the position of the reviewing general, so that we could see the regiment pass and salute. It was hours before the regiment appeared on the ground, but one boy at least did not weary, for there was always something happening. The ground was kept by men of a Hussar regiment who had distinguished themselves in the Crimean war, and from my place on the box of our conveyance I could see the medals on the breast of a Hussar who moved up and down in front of us. Now and again an officer would pass across the field at a gallop, and then there were distinguished people constantly arriving, and my father was careful to tell me their names and what they had done. Once an officer on horseback whom my father knew came up to the carriage and actually spoke to me. Imagine a boy some eight to nine years old, a mere nonentity like that, and this man in his gorgeous uniform—I think he must have been a Hussar, I do not know—mounted on a beautiful bay horse with glittering trappings which pawed the ground as it stood and flung the foam off its muzzle on the side of our conveyance, and with ever so many medals upon his breast; and he said something to this nonentity! These are the things a boy never forgets, and I imagined in a moment this man and horse in the centre of a charge, the horse leaping over the slain, and the officer waving his sword in the air and leading his men. What he said to me was treasured every word. “Well, my lad, you’ve come to see the Ross-shire Buffs; they are gallant fellows and they’ll soon be here.” That was all, to the last syllable, but they filled the heart of a boy with pride that the officer should have spoken to him at all. When he galloped off I followed him across the review-ground till he disappeared in the distance. By that time the sound of the bagpipes could be heard, and my father told me that the 78th had left the ancient castle of Edinburgh and come down the old High Street, and along the Cannongate, places where so many things have happened, and now were passing Holyrood, the palace where Queen Mary lived, and in a minute we would see them entering upon the ground. It may be the prejudice of one’s blood, but there seems to me no music so stirring and warlike as the full band of a Highland regiment, bagpipes and drums together. In remembrance of Sir Colin Campbell and their

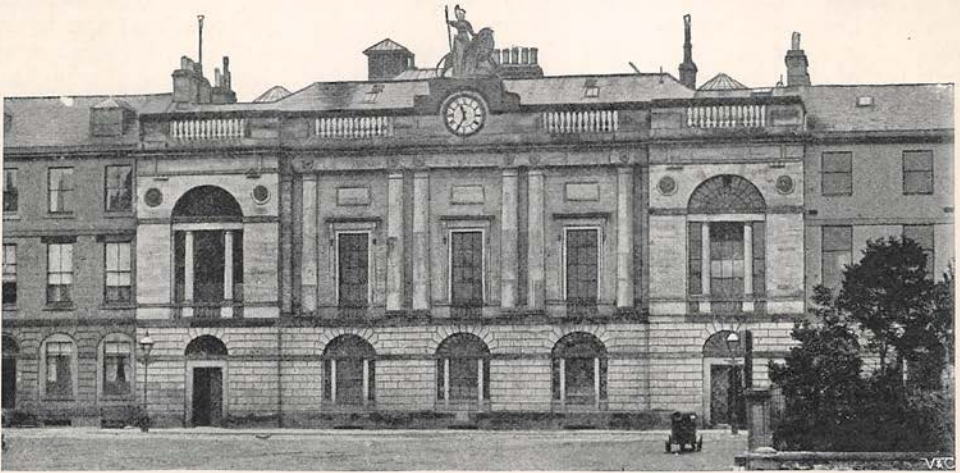
famous entry into Lucknow, the bagpipers of the 78th were playing “The Campbell’s are Coming, Hurrah! Hurrah!” and then they swept round a curve and marched down the centre of the ground, the pipers and drummers first and then the colonel at the head of his men, and the regiment in marching order, with the major and adjutant on their horses bringing up the rear. They formed in long line and waited for the reviewing officer, who a few minutes later galloped on the ground with his staff. Then I stood upon the box leaning against my father, the band played “God Save the Queen,” and the 78th saluted as the general went down the line, while even at that distance one could see the bronzed faces that told of the long Indian marches, and the medals upon their breasts glittering in the sunshine. When that salute was over, the general crossed the ground and took up his position close to where we were standing, and here again was something for an eight-year-old to see, for this man’s name had been famous through the Crimean war, and my father told me that there was not a battle of the whole war in which the general had not fought. The 78th then formed into companies to march past the general. Leaning forward, one saw them far to the left, a solid mass in formation of eight companies. Clear and strong through the air I heard their colonel, who was now in front of them, cry, “78th, forward.” The band in the centre of the ground struck up a quick-march, but I know not which it was, and then, company by company, each company like a single man in perfect step, with heads erect, the 78th passed the general, the officers saluting as they passed. As the colonel passed first the general returned his salute and said, “Welcome home, 78th!” After they had left the ground they marched before the hotel in Princes Street, where the Empress of the French was then staying, and she, who had seen many soldiers, declared that she had never looked upon a stronger or more martial body of men. As they passed that day in company, and as soon as the general had returned their salute, the people up and down the line burst into cheers, amid which one still hears voices crying, “Well done, 78th!” “You saved the women and children!” “The Highlanders for ever!” and such-like cries. Then it was that a boy’s heart gave way and he wept. Of course he was fearfully ashamed, and thought that every person had seen him; but, indeed, the people were thinking of other things, and older folk than

he were weeping also. One thing is certain—that a boy can never forget such a gallant sight, and its remembrance after many years helps to make him a stronger man.

IV.

As my father and mother went to a Scotch church at some distance from our home in London, and as it is desirable that experiments with a beginner in church-going should be made in a strange place, I believe that I was taken to some kind of chapel in our district of London, where my mother did her best to break me in, and where I earnestly besought her at intervals to remove me from before the preacher's face. My first real recollections of public worship go back to a Free Kirk in a Scots town, and the situation of our pew and all its

solitary and awful, sat a distinguished local lawyer, who had the hospitality of our pew and conferred an honour by accepting it. An elbow-rest had been introduced at the top of the pew, on which he rested his left arm, and from beginning to end of the sermon he kept his eye upon the preacher. It was always explained to me that if I made any noise or did not sit perfectly quiet, this eminent person would be disturbed, and if he looked down the pew I understood that my life would be in danger. From time to time I glanced round the warm shelter of my mother's sealskin and was much relieved to find him still gazing at the preacher, and it sometimes occurs to me now—but these must be one's worst moments—that this revered and pious personage may occasionally have been asleep. What greatly



THE ACADEMY, PERTH.

circumstances are quite vivid. It was covered with green cloth, cushioned and hassocked, as were several other pews in the church—some being in red instead of green—in order to mark out the leading people in the church, which seems to me to have been a most hideous and unchristian custom, and one which a more spiritual idea of religion would never tolerate. Very comfortable, however, was this pew, and I sat next my mother, being allowed to rub my cheek in winter time against her sealskin jacket, and being supported at intervals of fifteen minutes with a peppermint drop of mild flavour, and not to be confounded at all with the peppermint drop of a bailie of Muirtown who sat seats behind us, but whose spice-laden breath blew like a gale over our pew. At the top of the pew,

cheered me and helped me through many a long, wearisome sermon was a pewful of Highland soldiers who sat before us. No sermon of that time has left the slightest trace upon my memory, nor do I think that I understood a single word that was preached; but I knew every one of the six soldiers by sight, and can still remember the order of their sitting. There was one sergeant who sat on the outside and had five medals. Five privates came with him, and each of them had medals, few or many. They were, I think, soldiers of the Black Watch, and I knew then everything which the Black Watch had done for a quarter of a century. There were times when the warriors also became sleepy, and then the sergeant used to look up the pew, and even, if necessary, cough aloud, when the men

instantly awoke and gave earnest heed to the preacher. It was a great consolation to the laddie in the pew behind to find that both he and the Highlanders were under the same rule and obliged to give the same painful attention.

One day I was taken to church against all rule and order, for it was a week-day, and it was explained to me on the way that a new minister was to be ordained, who would come and see us and whom I was to consider as my minister. That day is like yesterday in my memory, not so much on account of the solemn service and the impressive rite of ordination according to the Scots Church, but on account of the enormous length of the whole proceedings. It seemed to me as if they would never come to an end, and as one minister after another mounted the pulpit, and each began a new sermon, despair seized my heart and the terror of the lawyer passed from before my eyes. The soldiers were not present, and the peppermints had long failed, and still the procession and the preaching continued; and in these circumstances, overcoming all sense of terror and, indeed, of decency, I demanded to be taken out, and my mother, ever weaker than my father, conducted me to the door of the church and set my nose in the direction of home. She reproached me, but I do not think she was angry, with my conduct, unworthy of my Kirk and nation; but the air was very sweet on the Meadow that day, and, crowning delight, the soldiers were drilling there, and I saw my friend the sergeant licking a dozen recruits into soldier-like form. I did not hunger for an interview with my father that afternoon, but there were so many ceremonies, with a dinner afterwards and something else in the evening, that I was asleep when he returned home, and he contented himself next morning by expressing his assurance that, whatever I might be fit for in after life, he had no hope whatever that I should become a minister of the Kirk, which shows that the unexpected happens.

What, however, left a deep impression upon my mind was the administration of the Lord's Supper according to the order of the Scots Church, for it is the custom of our Kirk to allow children to remain and to see the Sacrament. After my mother had herself communicated she sat with me in the pew,

and I watched my father, who was an elder, carrying the Holy Cup down the aisle of the church in the procession of the elders, and, after him, I was specially interested in an old man with very white hair and a meek, reverent face. Children have a keen understanding of character, and I was much taken with his gentleness, who always handed the bread which he carried with such a kindly look to the communicants, and who seemed to be engaged in a labour of love. One evening he called at our house, and my father, who was somewhat cold in his manner and was supposed, erroneously, to be proud, received the old elder with much respect, listening to what he said about religious things as one who was learning, and afterwards asking him to take prayers before I went to bed. The old man prayed for my soul, and asked that if it were God's will I might be spared to be a man and to be a minister of Jesus Christ. He afterwards placed his hand upon my head and blessed me, and I noticed again the sweetness of his face, and I also noticed that his hand was hard and worn as with daily toil. Some days afterwards I was walking on the main road that led to the north, and I passed a man breaking stones. Something about his white hair caught my attention, and I looked back and recognised the elder who had carried the bread and who had prayed that evening in our house. Full of wonder and curiosity, I told my father the strange tale, and I asked him whether it could be true. It seemed to me incredible that a stonebreaker should be an elder and a friend of my father. My father then explained to me that the reason why this old man held so high a place in the Church, and the reason why he respected him so much, was this: that although he was one of the poorest men in all the town, he was one of the holiest. "Remember," said my father to me—and this I have never forgotten, though the sermons have passed away—"the best man that ever lived upon this earth was the poorest, for our Lord had not where to lay His head"; and he added, "James breaks stones for his living, but he knows more about God than any person I have ever met." And I learned that evening, and I never have departed from this faith, that the greatest thing in all the world is character, and the crown of character is holiness.