

**SCOTCH STORIES;
OR, THE CHRONICLES
OF KECKLETON**

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Scotch Stories; Or, the Chronicles of Keckleton by David Grant

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DAVID GRANT

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SCOTCH STORIES

OR

The Chronicles of Beckettton

BY

DAVID GRANT,

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"Metrical Tales," etc.*



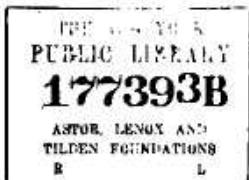
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UNCLE PETER'S LEGACY.

The Artist's Story.

Y mother had a half-brother about thirty years her senior, who was called, by those who honoured him with his baptismal name and inherited surname, Peter Penicuick; by most of his fellow-townfolk, and others who estimated him by his penurious disposition and the limited nature of his commercial transactions, Peter Pennyworths; and by a somewhat numerous and needy brood of nephews and nieces, who looked expectantly forward to the time when their relative would "shuffle off this mortal coil" and leave his wealth behind, Uncle Peter.

It is needless to say that I belong to this latter class. Uncle Peter had been cast early on his own resources, and had somehow drifted into commerce—first as an itinerant vendor of small wares, and subsequently as a general merchant in his native borough of Keckleton. From the day on which he first sold for a penny the packet of needles which originally cost himself a halfpenny, Uncle Peter had never been content with less than a cent. per cent. profit; but being as keen in buying as he was in selling, he generally realised his prices, previous to the introduction of railroads into our part of Scotland—an innovation which he never ceased to lament till the day of his death.

When a customer grudged the price of any article, and asserted that it could be purchased at a lower figure

elsewhere, Uncle Peter, who possessed a certain rugged independence, would say—

“Weel, weel, just gang whaur ye think ye’ll be cheaper ser’d, but tak’ my word for’t, ye’ll pay dearer i’ th’ end;” and as the general excellence of his goods rendered this a frequent experience, he sold more at large profits than could have been expected, seeing he was very chary of giving credit. If, however, his profits were large, his overturns were comparatively small, so that his business never extended beyond his own personal management, and he was accustomed to say—

“Folk think that I’m rich; hoo cud I be rich? It tak’s a lang time for ae man selling pennyworths to lay past a poun’ note.”

There was no doubt truth in the observation; but as Uncle Peter had remained a bachelor, and had been noted all his life for economy merging on miserliness, it was generally believed, and not without good grounds, that he was a “warm man.” And the final disposal of his wealth was necessarily a matter of no small speculation in Keckleton, but more particularly among us who fondly hoped to become legatees.

In our family this hope was naturally strong by reason of my mother having been the most favoured by Uncle Peter of any of his relatives.

She had been his housekeeper previous to her marriage, and although he had looked upon that event with much disaffection, in course of time he relented so far as to pay and receive occasional visits from her, and these more frequently after the death of my father. Towards myself Uncle Peter displayed a partiality which led my mother to indulge in the brightest anticipations, for he would extend his great, gaunt, bony fingers, and pat me on the head, as often as he came to our house; and if I happened to go with my mother, or be sent on an errand to his shop, in

addition to the already-mentioned indication of affection, he would wipe the said bony fingers on his coarse sacking apron, insert them into a wide-mouthed bottle of sweets, and extract as many as half-a-dozen lozenges or sugar drops for my delectation.

When I was about twelve years of age, Uncle Peter let fall some hints which led my mother to think that he would not be unwilling to receive me into his own shop as an apprentice; but as she well knew that my tastes and inclinations drew me in a different direction, she wished, as far as lay in her power, to give me a chance to follow their bent, and so she contrived to put uncle off with some sort of temporising answer.

In consequence of all those indications of favour, I began to be regarded as Uncle Peter's heir, both at home, and also among my cousins in Keckleton and elsewhere. I am bound, however, to say, in all fairness to the old man himself, that, beyond what has been mentioned, he neither said nor did anything to encourage this assumption.

Moreover, as time wore on, and my mother reported the favourable progress I was making in my studies, especially in drawing, she observed, with no little uneasiness, that Uncle Peter received her intelligence with a grunt, which did not seem indicative of much satisfaction. But when I had the good fortune to gain the first prizes at our local School of Art in both the drawing and colouring departments, and my work, on being sent up to Edinburgh, had procured for me the privilege of free tuition at the Royal Scottish Academy, my mother thought it impossible but that her brother would catch some part of her own enthusiasm in respect to my talents. However, the old man received the information with the usual grunt, and the repetition of a well-worn proverb, "He that will to Cupar maun to Cupar."