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AUTHORS TAUCHNITZ
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IN TWO VOLUMES, VOL. II**

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by George MacDonald

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GEORGE MACDONALD

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COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1877.

SIR GIBBIE BY GEORGE MAC DONALD, LL.D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

SIR GIBBIE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAINS.

THEY reached at length the valley road. The water that ran in the bottom was the Lorrie. Three days ago it was a lively little stream, winding and changing within its grassy banks—here resting silent in a deep pool, there running and singing over its pebbles. Now it had filled and far overflowed its banks, and was a swift river. It had not yet, so far up the valley, encroached on the road; but the torrents from the mountain had already in places much injured it, and with considerable difficulty they crossed some of the new-made gullies. When they approached the bridge, however, by which they must cross the Lorrie to reach the Mains, their worst trouble lay before them. For the enemy, with whose reinforcements they had all the time been descending, showed himself ever in greater strength the farther they advanced; and here the road was flooded for a long way on both sides of the bridge. There was therefore a good deal of wading to be done; but the road was an embankment, there was little current, and in safety at last they ascended the

rising ground on which the farm-building stood. When they reached the yard, they sent Gibbie to find shelter for Crummie, and themselves went up to the house.

"The Lord preserve 's!" cried Jean Mavor, with uplifted hands, when she saw them enter the kitchen.

"He'll dee that, mem," returned Janet, with a smile.

"But what *can* he dee? Gien ye be droont oot o' the hills, what's to come o' hiz i' the how? I wad ken that!" said Jean.

"The watter's no up to yer door yet," remarked Janet.

"God forbid!" retorted Jean, as if the very mention of such a state of things was too dreadful to be polite. "—But, eh, ye're weet!"

"*Weet*'s no the word," said Robert, trying to laugh, but failing from sheer exhaustion, and the beginnings of an asthmatic attack.

The farmer, hearing their voices, came into the kitchen—a middle-sized and middle-aged, rather coarse-looking man, with keen eyes, who took snuff amazingly. His manner was free, with a touch of satire. He was proud of driving a hard bargain, but was thoroughly hospitable. He had little respect for person or thing, but showed an occasional touch of tenderness.

"Hoot, Rob!" he said roughly as he entered, "I thought ye had mair sense! What's brought ye here at sic a time?"

But as he spoke he held out his snuff-box to the old man.

"Fell needcessity, sir," answered Robert, taking a good pinch.

"Necessity!" retorted the farmer. "Was ye oot o' meal?"

"Oot o' dry meal, I doobt, by this time, sir," replied Robert.

"Hoots! I wuss we war a' in like necessity—weel up upo' the hill i'stead o' doon here upo' the haugh (*river-meadow*). It's jist clean ridic'lous. Ye sud hae kenned better at your age, Rob. Ye sud hae thought twice, man."

"Deed, sir," answered Robert, quietly finishing his pinch of snuff, "there was sma' need, an' less time to think, an' Glashgar bursten, an' the watter comin' ower the tap o' the bit hoosie as gien 'twar a muckle ower-shot wheel, an' no a place for fowk to bide in. Ye dinna think Janet an' me wad be twa sic auld fules as pit on oor Sunday claes to sweem in, gien we thought to see things as we left them when we gaed back! Ye see, sir, though the hoose be fun't upo' a rock, it's maist biggit o' fells, an' the fundation's a' I huik even to see o' 't again. Whan the force o' the watter grows less, it'll come down upo' the riggin' wi' the haill weicht o' 't."

"Ay!" said Janet, in a low voice, "the live stanes maun come to the live rock to bigg the hoose 'at'll stan."

"What think ye, Maister Fergus, you 'at's gauin' to be a minister?" said Robert, referring to his wife's words, as the young man looked in at the door of the kitchen.

"Lat him be," interposed his father, blowing his nose with unnecessary violence; "setna him preachin' afore's time. Fess the whusky, Fergus, an' gie auld Robert a dram. Haith! gien the watter be rinnin' ower the tap o' yer hoose, man, it was time to flit.

Fess' twa or three glaisses, Fergus; we hae a' need o' something 'at's no watter. It's perfectly ridic'ulous!"

Having taken a little of the whisky, the old people went to change their clothes for some Jean had provided, and in the meantime she made up her fire, and prepared some breakfast for them.

"An' whaur's yer dummie?" she asked, as they re-entered the kitchen.

"He had puir Crummie to luik efter," answered Janet; "but he micht hae been in or this time."

"He'll be wi' Donal i' the byre, nae doobt," said Jean: "he's aye some shy o' comin' in wantin' an in-veet." She went to the door, and called with a loud voice across the yard, through the wind and the clashing torrents, "Donal, sen' Dummie in till's brakfast."

"He's awa' till's sheep," cried Donal in reply.

"Preserve 's!—the cratur 'll be lost!" said Jean.

"Less likly nor ony man about the place," bawled Donal, half angry with his mistress for calling his friend *dummie*. "Gibbie kens better what he's about nor ony twa 'at thinks him a fule 'cause he canna lat oot sic stuff an' nonsense as they canna haud in."

Jean went back to the kitchen, only half reassured concerning her brownie, and far from contented with his absence. But she was glad to find that neither Janet nor Robert appeared alarmed at the news.

"I wuss the cratur had had some brakfast," she said.

"He has a picce in 's pooch," answered Janet. "He's no oomprovidit wi' what can be made mair o'."

"I dinna richtly un'erstan' ye there," said Jean.

"Ye canna hae failt to remark, mem," answered

Janet, "at whan the Maister set himsel' to feed the hungerin' thoosan's, he teuk intil's han' what there was, an' vroucht upo' that to mak mair o' 't. I hae wussed sometimes 'at the laddie wi' the five barley loaves an' the twa sma' fishes, hadna been there that day. I wad fain ken hoo the Maister wad hae managed wantin' onything to begin upo'. As it was, he aye hang what he did upo' something his Father had dunc afore him."

"Hoots!" returned Jean, who looked upon Janet as a lover of conundrums, "ye're aye warstlin' wi' run k-nots an' teuch moo'fu's."

"Ow na, no aye," answered Janet; "—only whiles, whan the speerit o' speirin' gets the upper han' o' me for a sizon."

"I doobt that same speerit 'ill lead ye far frae the still watters some day, Janet," said Jean, stirring the porridge vehemently.

"Ow, I think not," answered Janet very calmly. "Whan the Maister says—*what's that to thee?*—I tak care he hasna to say't twise, but jist get up an' follow him."

This was beyond Jean, but she held her peace, for, though she feared for Janet's orthodoxy, and had a strong opinion of the superiority of her own common sense—in which, as in the case of all who pride themselves in the same, there was a good deal more of the *common* than of the *sense*—she had the deepest conviction of Janet's goodness, and regarded her as a sort of heaven-favoured idiot, whose utterances were somewhat privileged. Janet, for her part, looked upon Jean as "an honest wuman, wha 'il get a heap o' licht some day."

When they had eaten their breakfast, Robert took his pipe to the barn, saying there was not much danger of fire that day; Janet washed up the dishes, and sat down to her Book; and Jean went out and in, attending to many things.

Meantime the rain fell, the wind blew, the water rose. Little could be done beyond feeding the animals, threshing a little corn in the barn, and twisting straw ropes for the thatch of the ricks of the coming harvest—if indeed there was a harvest on the road, for, as the day went on, it seemed almost to grow doubtful whether any ropes would be wanted; while already not a few of last year's ricks, from farther up the country, were floating past the Mains, down the Daur to the sea. The sight was a dreadful one—had an air of the day of judgment about it to farmers' eyes. From the Mains, to right and left beyond the rising ground on which the farm buildings stood, everywhere as far as the bases of the hills, instead of fields was water, yellow brown, here in still expanse or slow progress, there sweeping along in fierce current. The quieter parts of it were dotted with trees, divided by hedges, shaded with ears of corn; upon the swifter parts floated objects of all kinds.

Mr. Duff went wandering restlessly from one spot to another, finding nothing to do. In the gloaming, which fell the sooner that a rain-blanket miles thick wrapt the earth up from the sun, he came across from the barn, and entering the kitchen, dropped, weary with hopelessness, on a chair.

"I can weel un'erstan'," he said, "what for the Lord sud set doon Bony an' set up Louy, but what for he sud gar corn grow, an' syne sen' a spate to sweem