THE UNCANNY BAIRN.

David Galbraith owned a compact estate in East Lothian which he farmed at a considerable profit. The land had passed from father to son for a couple of hundred years. It had always yielded a good livelihood to the owner, but never had it been so highly cultivated or produced such abundant crops as under David Galbraith's liberal and skillful management. The oats and potatoes grown on his farm commanded the highest prices in the market, and his root crops were superior to any in the district. The large, solidly built stone house in which so many generations of Galbraiths had lived and died stood in the midst of the property, sheltered by a belt of trees on rising ground from the sweeping east wind, and the laborers' cottages, equally well constructed to resist the gales that blew across the Frith of Forth, were models of decent comfort. The live stock on the farm was well fed and cared for, and the whole property bore evidence to the wealth, thrift and intelligence of its owner.

And David Galbraith's wife was well-to-do and thrifty like himself. She, too, was the child of a Lowland land-owner and farmer, and had brought her husband no inconsiderable tocher, while her industry and housewifely accomplishments might in themselves have served as a marriage portion. She, too, like her husband, came of a douce Presbyterian stock, worthy, upright folk, holding by the faith and practice of their forbears—orthodox and thrifty, worshiping as their fathers had done, and hauding the gear as tightly, nothing doubting but that to them was especially assigned not only the good things of this world, but also of that which is to come.

Galbraith did not marry till he was a middle-aged man, but he had long had the cares of a family on his shoulders without its pleasures to lighten the burden. He was the eldest of six orphan sisters and brothers, to whom he had acted the part of a father, and it was not till Colin, the last and youngest, had left Scotland for a sheep run in Australia, with money lent him by his brother, that he felt himself at liberty to marry. But now that his pious duty towards his family was fulfilled, David Galbraith did not hesitate to take to himself a wife in the person of Miss Alison McGilivray, a lady of some five-and-thirty years of age, with large hands and feet, small gray eyes, high cheek bones, and a complexion betokening exposure to harsh climate. She was well educated and intelligent, and in talking with her servants and poor neighbors, commonly fell into the comfortable Lowland Scotch that her father and mother had taken a pride in speaking.

Only one child was born to David and his wife in the ample home where there was space, maintenance and welcome for a dozen. Yet this one was a son, and the Galbraiths were not doomed to die out. The boy was christened Alexander, after his two grandfathers, both of whom were Alexanders, so that there was no chance of dispute as to which side of the house should have the naming of the child.

And a poor, wee, frail child he was, apparently inheriting nothing of the strength and vigor of the Galbraiths and McGilivrays, nor did he resemble father or mother in feature. He seemed a little foreigner that had come to stay with them for a while, and often in his feeble infancy he bade fair to depart and leave his parents childless. The shrewd, bracing winds, that were life and health to them, nipped and shriveled him. He took every ailment that was to be had, and when there was nothing catching in the neighborhood he would originate some illness of his own, severe enough to have shaken the constitution of any but a seasoned weakling like himself. The Lowland farmer would hang over the cradle of his waxen-faced baby, holding his breath for very fear as he looked at the puny thing, and would say, dropping into broad Scotch, as his wont was when strongly moved, "Wha wad ken this for a bairn o' mine, sae strang and bonny and weel set up as the Galbraiths have aye been!"

But the babe won through the troubles and perils of his sickly infancy, and at 6 years of age had grown into a delicate slip of a child, with an interesting pair of gray eyes in his pale face and a bright spark of intellect in his big head. The family doctor, to whose unceasing care Sandie owed his life almost as much as to his mother's devoted nursing, forbade his parents to attempt anything in the way of systematic education till the boy was 8 or 9 years of age.

"Canna ye be content to let weel alane," he would say, "and bide till the bairn's strang and healthy before ye trouble him to read and write? Gin ye set his brains ableeze wi' letters and figures, ye'll just be burnin' down the house that's meant to be the habitation of a fine soul; gin ye wad hauld your hands off it and leave it alane!"

And little Sandie did very well, though unable to read or write till long after the age at which the children of his father's laborers could spell out a psalm and sign their names in a big round hand. But the child had a memory such as must have been commoner in the world before there were books to refer to at every turn than it is now, and his mind was stored with fairy tales and old Border ballads that his mother and his nurse told or sung to him in the winter evenings. But Mrs. Galbraith and Effie were careful never to tell him stories of a weird or ghostly nature, for the doctor had impressed upon them before all things that Sandie must never be frightened. "For gin the bairn be frighted he will na sleep," said the astute mistress of the maid, "and ye'll just hae to sit the lang mirk evenings by his bed, while ye hear the maids daffin' by candle licht below, or walking wi' their laddies; but gin ye never let him hear o' ghaists and wraiths, he'll just sleep like a bird wi' its head under its wing and whiles ye'll be able to leave him and hae a crack wi' your neebors like ony ither body!"

Though mother and nurse, actuated by different but equally strong motives, kept all knowledge of the supernatural from the child, there came a day when his father accused them both of poisoning his mind with stories of witches, warlocks and ghosts, and making an uncanny bairn of the boy.

II.

When Sandie was 7 years of age, a lean and overgrown child without his front teeth, and any comeliness he might possess existed only in his mother's eyes, a strange circumstance happened that greatly perplexed and distressed his parents. One cold afternoon late in October, Mrs. Galbraith told Effie to take a pudding and a can of broth to an old and very poor woman, called Elspeth McFie, who lived in a lone cottage a mile from the farm, and Sandie was to go with her for the sake of the walk. The trees were already stripped by the autumn gales, to which a dead calm succeeded, and a cold fog had crept up from the sea and brooded over the bare fields, settling on the naked boughs in chilly drops of moisture. The careful mother wrapped a plaid round the boy and bade him run as he went to keep himself warm. Away sped Sandie along the high road, driving a ball before him, and running after it to send it flying again with a dexterous blow of his stick, till his pale cheeks glowed with exercise, and he overshot his mark, ran past old Elspeth's cottage and had to be recalled by Effie.

"Ye maun pit the basket in her hand your ain sel'," she said, as she led the reluctant child into the dark, close room, where the old woman sat shivering by the fire, spreading her skinny hands over the dying embers. But Sandie held back, and neither threatening nor coaxing would induce him to move a step nearer to Elspeth, so that, stigmatizing him as "a dour limb," Effie was obliged to set the basket on the table herself.

"It's just a pudding and a few broth that Mistress Galbraith has sent ye, for she's aye mindful o' the puir," she said, as she set out the can and bowl before the old woman. Elspeth looked with a bitter smile at the good things spread before her.

"It's a' verra gude sae far as it gaes, but gin I'd been the rich body, and Mistress Galbraith the puir carline, I wad hae sent her a mutchkin o' something stranger than mutton broth. Does she no warm her ain thrapple wi' a drap whusky hersel'?"

"For shame, Elspeth! Ye maun just tak' what's sent ye and be thankfu'!" said Effie sharply; and turning to Sandie, who stood gazing intently at the old woman, "What ails the bairn that he canna tak' his eyes aff your face? It's no your beauty, I'm thinking, Elspeth, that draws him sae!"

The ill-favored old woman cackled to herself, displaying a few yellow tusks, the last survivors of a set of teeth that had once been as white and strong as Effie's.

"It's lang since man or bairn looked at auld Elspeth wi' sic a gaze. What does the bairn see in an ould wife's face? Ye suld look at the lasses, Sandie, lad," and Elspeth stretched out her lean arm, caught the boy by the wrist and drew him towards her. She was a hideous old woman, and in the gathering twilight, when the red glare of the embers shed a glow on her harsh features, she appeared positively witch-like. Sandie suffered himself to be drawn close to her as one who walks in his sleep, with wide-open eyes void of expression, and then stood opposite her for a moment pale and silent. Before either of the women could speak the child's voice was heard.

"What for hae ye bawbies on your een, Elspeth McFie, and a white claith lappit under your chin?"

Old Elspeth dropped Sandie's hand and sank back with a groan. "Effie, Effie, hark till him! The bairn has the second sight, and he sees me stricket for the grave, aye, and ye'll all see it sune! I feel the mouls upon me a'ready! Tak' him awa', tak' him awa', he's an awesome bairn!" and Sandie quietly put on his cap and went out into the cold mist. Effie followed him, and relieved her fright and agitation by speaking sharply to the child.

"For shame of yoursel', Sandie, to fright an old woman wi' gruesome words that ye never heard from your mither nor me!"

"But what for suld Elspeth be frighted? There were bawbies on her een, and a white claith round her heid, and I just tauld her aboot it; and gin I see the like of it on your face, Effie, I will tell ye!"

"My certie! but ye'll be brent for a warlock gin ye read folks' deaths on their faces, and ye'd best haud your clavers!" And Effie said no more, but thought much on her way back to the farm. She was sure that Sandie did not know the meaning of his own words. He had never seen a dead body, and he did not know how a corpse is prepared for the grave, and he certainly had no information on the subject from books, for he could not read. And the appearance he described on old Elspeth's face did not seem to frighten him. He had gazed at her from the moment in which they entered the cottage till they left it, but with wonder and interest rather than fear. The fright was for Elspeth McFie and herself, and as she watched the child, unconscious of the death wound he had given, bounding along the road, still playing with his ball and stick, Effie shuddered with vague and nameless fears.

That night at supper Effie told her fellow-servants of Sandie's weird words, and they took counsel together whether his mother should be told about it or not, and they decided only to speak to her if anything untoward happened to old Elspeth. It was on Thursday that Effie had been sent to Elspeth McFie's cottage, and she resolved to go there again on her own account on the following Sunday afternoon. Her native superstitions were strong upon her, though she had never imparted them to her young charge, and she drew near to Elspeth cottage with a boding heart. It scarcely surprised her when she entered to find old Elspeth lying dead on the bed, with coins on her eyes and a white cloth bound round her head, precisely as Sandie had seen her on Thursday.

Two women were in the room with the dead, eager to tell how Elspeth had taken to her bed on Thursday evening, refused bit or sup, and had died early that morning. Effie trembled, but merely asked of what old Elspeth died, for three days before she seemed in no likelihood of death. But the only account the women could give of her sudden death was that she appeared to have no illness at all, and that she had said, "I'm no a sick woman, but a dying, and I maun gae!"

Effie hastened home to tell her mistress everything, repeating faithfully every word that old Elspeth and Sandie had said on the previous Thursday, and Mrs. Galbraith listened with a white and awe-struck face.

"Ye'll just say naething about it, Effie; it'll be a sair prejudice against the poor bairn, and stand in his way, gin folks think Sandie has the second sight," and Effie did not think it necessary to mention that every servant in the house was acquainted with the result of her visit to old Elspeth's cottage. But she hinted that if she continued to wait on such an awesome bairn, that might see the death tokens on her face any day, and fright her into an early grave, her wages should be raised in proportion to the danger of her service.

When Mrs. Galbraith told her husband of Sandie's ghastly remark, its tragic result, and the child's unconsciousness in the matter, he disguised his fears that possessed him beneath a bluster of wrath, and rated her and Effie soundly. "It stands to reason that the bairn canna speak o' what he does na ken, and you and Effie, but mair likely Effie than you—for I was used to think you a woman o' sense—hae been telling Sandie auld wives' tales about the second sight, till he thinks it a fine thing to practice what ye've taught him, and the auld doitered fule Elspeth dies out o' sheer fright in consequence, and ye maun see for your ain sel' what your ain folly has brought about!"

But Mrs. Galbraith protested that neither she nor Effie had ever uttered a word about the second sight in the boy's hearing, and David, who in his heart believed his wife, though he did not deem it consistent with his dignity to own as much, abruptly ended the unpleasant affair by saying peremptorily, "I'll no permit the bairn to be tauld any mair ungodly superstitions and auld wives' tales. Effie may gang to the deil, and Sandie sall be wi' me in his walks and rides, and I'se warrant ye'll hear naething from him but what he learns fra' me, guid sense and sound doctrine!"

And Effie was dismissed, to her own great relief, and from that day forth Sandie became his father's outdoor companion, to the visible benefit of his health and spirits.

But no one was so really alarmed at Sandie's uncanny remark and its consequences as David Galbraith himself. His grandmother, a Highland woman, had had the second sight, and his father had told him how she lived to become the terror of her family. Her premonitions of death and calamity were unfailingly true, and the spirit within her never enlightened her as to how the impending evil might be averted. She was simply the medium of announcing approaching doom. What if her ghostly gift had descended to her grandson, a barren heritage, that would make him shunned by his kind!

Poor Alison Galbraith, finding her husband irritable and unreasonable on the subject of Sandie's weird speech, sought comfort in pouring out her fears to their minister, the Rev. Ewan McFarlane, who gave ear to her with as much patience as could be expected from a man whose chief business it was in life to speak and not to listen.

He drew the very worst inference from what he heard. "It's a clear case o' the second sight, and I canna but fear that there may be waur to come. When the uncanny spirit lights on a body there is na predicting what its manifestation may be, and for aught that we ken, it may be to you or me that Sandie 'll see the death tokens on neist. And if ye continue to bring him to the kirk, I wad request that ye'll no let him sit glowering at me, for though sudden death wad doubtless be sudden glory to me it wad no be consistent wi' the dignity of a minister o' the Free Kirk that he suld be harried untimely into his grave by any uncanny bairn, that wad hae been burnt for a warlock in times gane by. And if I was spared such a sair visitation, the bairn might yet be permitted to wark a certain perturbation of spirit in me, that wad cause me to curtail the word of God, and bring my discourse to a premature end, to the grievous loss of them that hear. And, Mistress Galbraith, let me tell ye, ye'll fa' into disrepute wi' your neighbors gin Sandie sees bawbies on your minister's honored een, and aught came of it to his prejudice!"

III.

In the following spring David Galbraith's youngest brother Colin returned, after an absence of ten years, to spend a few months with his relations in Scotland. His industry had been prospered in Australia, and he was in a better position than he could have attained by any exertions of his own in the old country. He and his nephew struck up a warm friendship together, and it was a pretty sight to see them golfing on the links at North Berwick, the strong man accommodating his play to that of the puny boy by his side, and restraining his speech so that not a word fell from his lips but what was fit for a child to hear.

One day when they had played till Sandie was tired they sauntered down to the beach, Uncle Colin to sit on the rocks smoking his morning pipe, his nephew to perch beside him and amuse himself with the shells and seaweed that abound there. Presently Sandie grew weary of sitting still, threw away the handful of shells he had picked up, and proposed that they should go further along the sands to where the children were bathing. "And gie me your hand, Uncle Colin, and I'll tell ye something while we walk that I canna just understand mysel'. I've seen an unco' strange thing; I've seen your house in Australia!"

"Hoot, mon! what havers are ye talking? Ye've been dreaming!" said Uncle Colin cheerily.

"Na, I saw it. It was no dream; I ken weel the difference between dreaming and seeing. Your house has na slates on the roof, like our house; it was theckit like a hayrick, and it had a wide place round it covered with another little theckit roof, and windows like big glass doors opened on it. And there was fire all about, and tall grass all ableeze, and sheep rinning hither and thither frighted, and a man with a black beard and a gun in his hand ran out o' the house and shouted, 'O'Grady, save the mare and foal! if they're lost the master will never forgive ye!' What ails ye, Uncle Colin, that ye look sae white?" and the boy looked up in his uncle's face with wonder.

"It's no canny to see such a sight, Sandie! What do you ken o' brush fires? and ye've never seen a picture of my house; and who tauld ye that my groom is an Irishman named O'Grady? for I've tauld naebody here, and the man with the black beard is my Scotch shepherd."

"There was nae need to tell me anything about it, Uncle Colin, for I saw it a'; but if the man at the door had na shouted O'Grady, then I suld na hae kenned his name."

Colin made a poor attempt at laughter, that he might hide from the child how shocked and startled he was; but as soon as they reached home he told his brother about his son's vision, and heard from him in return the story of Sandie and old Elspeth. A few days later Colin Galbraith received a telegram from his head shepherd informing him of the heavy loss he had just sustained from a very serious bush fire, and both he and David were convinced that Sandie was an uncanny bairn.

Colin returned to Australia immediately afterwards, and as he parted from his brother and sister-in-law he said, with a melancholy smile: "If ony mischance befa's me, ye'll ken as sune as I do mysel'. Your awesome bairn will see it a', and ye may tak' for gospel aught tauld ye by ane that hae the second night."

One fine afternoon, some three weeks after Colin had sailed, David having just then no particular work to keep him on the farm all day, proposed for a great treat to row Sandie to the Bass Rock. Oat cutting would shortly begin, and then he would not have a spare hour from morning to night. But to-day he and his son would enjoy a holiday together, and Sandie was to take with him the small gun that his father gave him on his last birthday, for he was now 9 years of age and high time that he set about learning to kill something or other. All the latent boy seemed developed in the delicate child by the possession of the small fowling piece, and he blazed away at the rats under the hayricks, and at the sparrows on the roof, to the peril alike of the poultry and of the bedroom windows. "Mother, mother, I'll shoot ye a gannet and mak' ye a cushion o' the down!" he shouted in wild excitement as he set forth on the expedition.

Mrs. Galbraith stood on the doorstep watching her husband and son leave the house together. David a stout, tall man in the prime of late middle life, red-faced and gray-haired, and Sandie a lanky lad, with pale freckled face, but with more vigor in his step than the fond mother had ever expected to see. He carried his gun over his shoulder and strode along by his father's side, glancing up at him frequently to try to imitate his every look and gesture. David Galbraith was fond of rowing, and as it was a very calm day he dismissed the man in charge of the boat, and taking the oars himself said it would do him good to row as far as the Bass Rock and back again. The sea was like a millpond, a glassy stretch of water with here and there a wind flaw wrinkling in its smooth surface. There was not a wave that could have misplaced a pebble on the beach, and great masses of olive green seaweed floated motionless in its clear depths. To the left, high above them, stood the ruins of Tantallon Castle, bathed in August sunshine, its gray walls taking warmth and color from the glow of light that softened and beautified its rugged outline. Before them the sullen mass of the Bass Rock towered above the blue water, circled by countless thousands of seabirds, the glitter of whose white wings was seen as silvery flashes of light, from a distance too great to distinguish the birds themselves.

They were near enough to the shore to hear voices and laughter borne over the water from the grassy inclosure before Tantallon Castle, and lowing of kine in the pastures, and as they neared the Bass Rock these sounds were exchanged for the squealing of wild fowl and the clang of their wings. To Sandie's delight he was allowed to shoot from the boat, which he did with as little danger to the birds as to the fishes, and the only condition his father imposed was that he should fire with his back towards him, "till your aim is mair preceese, man." Though it soon became evident even to the sanguine Sandie that he would bring home neither gannet nor kittiwake, it was a rapturous delight to be rowed about the island by his father, who told him the name of every bird he saw, and pointed out their nests on the precipitous face of the rock. Then David rested on his oars, and the boat scarcely moved on the still water while Sandie ate the oat cake and drank the milk provided for him by his mother, and his father took a deep draft from his flask till his face grew crimson.

"Father, gie me a drink, too," said Sandie, stretching out his hand.

"Na, na; ye'll stick to your milk-drinking till ye hae built up a strong frame, and then ye may tak'as much whusky as ye wull to keep it in guid repair."

And now the boat was turned landward once more, and they soon lost sound of the clang of the seabird's wings, and the lowing of the kine was again heard, and David rowed slowly past the rock of Tantallon. After chattering for hours Sandie had fallen silent, and sat leaning his arm on the gunwale of the boat looking into the limpid water, dipping his hand into a soft swelling wave, and scattering a shower of glittering drops from his fingers. Suddenly he ceased his idle play, and, kneeling in the bottom of the boat, clung firmly to the side with both hands, leaned over and gazed intently in the water. His father, who was always on the alert where his son was concerned, at once noticed the change that had come over him, rowed quicker, and said cheerily, "What are ye glowering at, man? Did ye never see a herring in the sea before?"

Sandie neither spoke nor stirred, and David took comfort in thinking that after all the lad could see nothing uncanny in the water; it was just some daft folly or other he was after, best unnoticed. But when Sandie did speak it was to utter words for which he was unprepared.

"Father, I see Uncle Colin in the water wi' his face turned up to me, and his een wide open, but he canna see wi' them." The boy did not raise his head, but continued to gaze into the water. Drops of sweat broke out on Galbraith's brow, and he lifted the dripping oars high in the rowlocks and leaned towards Sandie, his red face now as white as the boy's.

"Whether it's God or the deil speaks in ye I dinna ken, but ye'll drive me mad wi' your gruesome clavers! Haud up, man! and fling yoursel' back in the boat where ye'll see naething waur than yoursel'."

But Sandie did not stir. "It's Uncle Colin that I see floating in the water, lapping in sea weed, and he's nae sleeping, for his een stare sae wide," and Galbraith, who would not have looked over the gunwale of the boat for his life, with an oath plunged the oars deep into the water, and rowed with furious strokes.

"Ye've struck the oar on his white face!" shrieked the boy and fell back crying in the boat.

A heavy gloom settled on the Galbraiths, and this last hideous vision of Sandie's they kept strictly to themselves; they did not seek counsel of their minister or any one. They were certain that Colin was drowned. It was a mere question of time when they could hear how it had happened, but hear it they assuredly would. And Sandie, too, was gloomy and depressed. "The bairn has frighted himself this time as weel as ithers," said his father, "and sma' blame to him; but I wad rather follow him to the kirk-yard than that he suld grow up wi' the second sight! It may hae been a' varra weel in a breeckless, starving Hielander a hundred years ago, but it's no consistent for a well-fed Lowlander in these days o' trousers and high farming. How is Sandie to do justice to the land and mind the rotation of crops if he goes daft wi' the second sight?"

The oat harvest was plentiful and got together in fine condition, but neither David nor his wife had any heart to enjoy it. They simply lived through each day waiting for the tidings that must come; nor had they long to wait. Nearly a month after Sandie's vision David read in the newspaper of the safe arrival of his brother's ship at its destination. It reported a prosperous voyage with but one casuality during its course, which occurred on the twenty-fourth day after sailing, when a passenger booked for Sydney had mysteriously fallen overboard in perfectly calm weather and was drowned. The gentleman's name was Colin Galbraith, and his sudden, untimely end had cast a gloom over the ship's company. So far the newspaper report, which, brief as it was, was all that David and Alison could ever learn of their poor brother's fate. They carefully compared the dates, and found that Colin had been drowned three days after Sandie had seen the vision of the body in the sea.

"I winna tell the bairn that puir Colin is dead," said David gloomily.

"Ye'll just tell the bairn he's dead, but you'll say naething of drowning."

'Ye maun do as ye think best, but I canna mention puir Colin's name to him."

And it was from his mother that Sandie heard of his Uncle Colin's death. He listened gravely and thoughtfully to the tidings. "Yes, it was him that I saw in the water," and that was all that he had to say about the death of his favorite uncle; he asked no question and made no further remarks.

IV.

From this time forward a great change came over David Galbraith. From being wholly matter-of-fact and little inclined to believe more than his senses could attest, he became credulous and superstitious. He trembled at omens, and was unnerved for his day's work if his dreams over night were unpropitious. He disliked being out on dark nights, and cast uneasy glances over his shoulder as though he heard steps behind him. At times when he was riding he thought that he heard some one following hard on his heels and he would gallop for miles and reach home, horse and rider both in a sweat of fear. And Sandie, the unconscious cause of the evil change in his father, mutely wondered what had come over him. David scarcely let the boy out of his sight, though his society was a torment to him, and he was always wondering what would be the next shock he would receive. Unhappily he tried to restore tone to his shaken nerves by drinking, and the habit grew quickly on him, to his good wife's great distress; and times were now so changed that Sandie was more frightened of his father than his father was of him. Mrs. Galbraith proposed sending Sandie to stay with some relations of her own at Linlithgow, thinking that it would do her husband good to have the strain of the boy's constant society removed for awhile. But he would not hear of it, and merely said, "The bairn sall bide at hame. It's my ain weird, and I maun dree it."

Some two years passed by in which Sandie had no visions, and grew steadily healthier and stronger, and more like other boys of his age, so that his mother began to think they should make a man of him yet. But though his father noticed the physical improvement in his son with pride, nothing could persuade him that the dreaded gift had departed from him. In vain his wife tried to convince him that there was no further cause for anxiety. He shook his head and said, "Ye'll no get rid of an ill gift sae lightly. It's a fire that burns low, but it'll burst out into flame for a' that."

V.

In the third summer after Colin Galbraith was lost at sea, on a lovely summer evening, Mrs. Galbraith sat at the open window, knitting and smiling placidly, as she watched her son at work in his little plot of garden, watering the tufts of pinks and pansies. She laid her work in her lap, and her eyes followed his every movement with quiet pleasure. Sandie would make a good gardener. There was not a straggling growth in his plot nor any weeds; all was neat and trim, and the flower beds were prettily bordered with shells that he had collected on the beach at North Berwick.

He was gathering a posy with fastidious care, and his mother knew that it was for her, and thought to herself that if he had been uncanny in time past, he was a good boy, his heart was in the right place. But something disturbed him in his work. He rose from stooping over the bed, dropped his flowers to the ground, and Alison thought he was listening to some far-away sound, till a change that passed over his face showed her that she was mistaken. Sandie was not listening, he was seeing. His face grew pale, and his features pinched, his gray eyes were fixed while the color faded out of them till they were almost white, and he shuddered as though a cold wind blew over him.

Mrs. Galbraith rose silently, and assured by the deep breathing of her husband, who was sitting in an arm-chair by the hearth, that he was asleep, opened the door softly, left the room and hurried into the garden. There in the sunshine, surrounded by summer sights and summer scents, stood Sandie, a very image of midnight terror. His mother laid her large warm hands on his shoulders and gently shook him.

"Sandie, Sandie, if you are seeing again, for God's sake say nothing to your father! He canna bear it; ye'll tell me," she said in a frightened whisper.

The boy gave a sigh, passed his hands over his eyes and staggered as though he were dizzy. Alison grasped her son firmly by the arm. "Come awa'! if your father wakes and goes to the window he'll see us; come awa'!" and she hurried the boy through the warm evening sunshine that had suddenly grown cold and dim to her, and led him to a retired part of the garden.

"And now what was it that ye saw?" And, looking at her with a strange expression of fear and compassion, Sandie said: "I saw my father lying on the road at the foot of the steep brae by Sir Ewen Campell's gates, and his een were shut, but for a' that he was the same as Uncle Colin!"

The self-controlled, unemotional Alison Galbraith gave a smothered scream as she listened to her son, and, seizing his arm in a passion of fear, with a grip like a vice, said: "Elspeth McFie was right when she called you an awesome bairn! What for has God in his wrath given me such a child?" and she shook him off and left him alone in his confused misery.

If David Galbraith had not been overcome with drink that night, he would have seen that something terrible had occurred to agitate his wife, but when the drunken fit was spent he noticed that she looked white and ill.

"Alison, woman, ye keep too close in the house," he said; "ye should walk to the sea and breathe the cailer air, to bring the color back to your cheeks."

The following Friday was the corn market at Haddington, and David Galbraith sober, shrewd and business-like, set out to attend it, bent on driving a hard bargain. Alison stood at the gate as he mounted his horse, to wish him wifely admonition as to the advisability of not drinking too much whisky before the return journey, and "Ye'll no be late coming home the night, Davie?"

"There is no night at this time o' year, Alison."

"And ye'll mind to come by the level road. There's the steep brae beyond the Campbells' gate, and I'd rather ye gave it a wide berth, and came by the long road."

"Not I, woman! Do ye expect me to mak' a midnight ride a mile longer just to avoid a brae that I ken as well as my ain doorstep? Kelpie 'll be sober, douce beast, if his master's not, and he kens every stane on the hill. Ye'll go to bed and leave the house door unlocked for me," and David gave his horse a touch with the whip and away he trotted.

Alison stood till the sound of the hoofs had died away, and then went back to the house with a boding heart. Sandie returned from school at noon in high spirits, and asked his mother's leave to bring home a school-fellow to play with him in the afternoon. It was wonderful how his spirits had rallied since his vision of a few days before. It seemed as though his body had now grown strong enough to shake off the ghastly influence entirely, but his mother was shattered both by memory and apprehension.

A dreadful restlessness possessed her as night drew on, and after the shouts of the boys at play were over, and silence fell on the house and garden, she slipped out unnoticed and walked in the twilight to the beach. It was nigh midsummer, when in those latitudes the sunset lingers on the western horizon till in the east the vigorous dawn breaks to quench its lesser light. The crescent moon hung low in the sky over the gently murmuring sea that glimmered mysteriously in the diffused twilight, and the brown rocks loomed dark above the water. A time and a place to suggest eerie feelings to the most unimpressionable; but Alison's whole mind was so filled with the apprehensions of approaching doom that the scene had no effect on her—she scarcely noticed where she was. The fear that possessed her was inward and neither suggested, nor could it be increased, by aspect of familiar things. She did not meet a soul in her restless wanderings. As she opened the house door on her return the clock struck 12. Oh, when would David be home? He was seldom later than midnight. Alison needed no light, and, creeping softly up stairs, she entered Sandie's room, and drawing aside the curtain, by the solemn twilight of the northern night, she saw his sleeping face calm and peaceful as an infant's. Did she grudge him his untroubled slumber, that she would rather have found him awake and oppressed with terror as herself?

While she stood listening to the beating of her own heart, that sounded louder than the breathing of her child, she heard the first distant sound of approaching hoofs, and as they rapidly drew nearer she recognized Kelpie's familiar steps.

"Thank God he is safe home!" she said, and lest her husband should be displeased to find her sitting up for him she hastened to her room and lighted a candle. The horse had stopped opposite the house and David had had time to dismount, but he had not opened the gate. Some one might be detaining him there; yet there was no sound of voices to be heard, only Kelpie impatiently striking the ground with one of his fore feet.

Alison looked out of the window, but could see nothing for the high wall, and as several minutes passed and still her husband did not come, and the horse stamped with increasing impatience, she slipped down stairs, out of doors, and across the garden to the gate. So deadly a fear lay upon her spirit that when she flung the gate open and saw Kelpie standing riderless on the dusky highway she felt no surprise, only an assurance that Sandie's vision was about to come true.

"Oh, Kelpie, lad, your master's no far to seek!" she said as she led the trembling, sweating beast towards the stableyard. Then, without calling up any of the men, just as she was, with uncovered head, Alison Galbraith sped through the dusk and silence of the summer night.

"The steep brae by Sir Ewen Campbell's gates!" she said to herself as she ran, and when the dark firs and high wall bounding the park came in sight her limbs almost gave way beneath her. Then she reached the great iron gates between the granite pillars, and in the twilight she caught sight through their bars of the black avenue within, and heard the wind sigh in the boughs. Alison pressed her hands to her heart, and urged herself on. Now a bat cut its zigzag flight through the air and startled her, the white scut of a frightened rabbit shone out in the dusk as it flashed across her path in search of a friendly burrow, and her echoing steps woke many a sleeping bird and set it fluttering with fear.

The next turn in the road would bring her to the foot of the hill, and to something that she dared not name that she knew was waiting for her there. She closed her eyes for an instant as she rounded the curve of the road and clenched her hands; then the soft silence of the summer night was broken by a wailing cry, and Alison Galbraith fell senseless on the dead body of her husband.

David was sober that night, but as he rode through the mirk lanes the old horror had overtaken him. He thought that he heard a horseman following hard upon him and clapped spurs to his beast and galloped down the hill, at the foot of which Kelpie slipped on a rolling stone, threw his rider heavily to the ground, and he neither spoke nor moved again.

Alison Galbraith did not long survive her husband, and her death took place without Sandie having any intimation of its approach. He never had vision or prophetic foresight again after his father died. The weird gift departed from him with his weakly childhood, and he grew up robust and stout, thriving and commonplace as his forebears. Sandie is even a better farmer than his father before him, and is in a fair way to solve the problem how to make two blades of wheat grow where only one had grown before. He has married a wife practical and matter-of-fact as himself, and their sons and daughters are as guiltless of imagination as they are of any touch of the uncanny. The burly Lowland farmer can never be induced to speak of the second sight, even to his most intimate friends. In the early days of their married life his young wife ventured to ask him about the visions of his childhood, of which she had heard, but he silenced her with such severity that she did not again dare to approach the subject, and she will never know whether the stories of her husband's uncanny childhood are wild legends or plain truth.—Cornhill Magazine.

THE LAST KISS.

I put by the half-written poem,
While the pen, idly trailed in my hand,
Writes on. "Had I words to complete it,
Who'd read it, or who'd understand?"
But the little bare feet on the stairway,
And the faint smothered laugh in the hall,
And the eerie-low lisp on the silence,
Cry up to me over it all.

So, I gather it up—where was broken
The tear-faced thread of my theme,
Telling how, as one night I was writing,
A fairy broke in on my dream—
A little, inquisitive fairy—
My own little girl, with the gold
Of the sun in her hair, and the dewy
Blue eyes of the fairies of old.

'Twas the dear little girl that I scolded—
"For it was a moment like this,"
I said, "when she knew I was busy
To come romping in for a kiss?—
Come rowdying up from her mother
And clamoring there at my knee
For one little kiss for my dolly,
And one 'ittle uzzer for me!"

God pity the heart that repelled her,
And the cold hand that turned her away;
And take from the lips that denied her
This answerless prayer of to-day!
Take, Lord, from my mem'ry forever
That pitiful sob of despair,
And the patter and trip of the little bare feet,
And the one piercing cry on the stair!

I put by the half-written poem,
While the pen, idly trailed in my hand,
Writes on. "Had I words to complete it
Who'd read it, or who'd understand?"
But the little bare feet on the stairway,
And the faint, smothered laugh in the hall,
And the eerie-low lisp on the silence,
Cry up to me over it all.

—James Whitcomb Riley.

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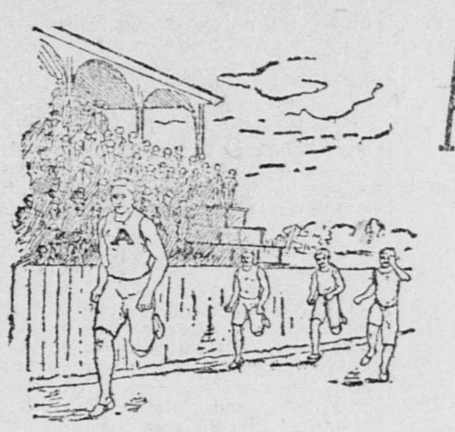

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Pronounced Ath-lo-fó-ros, means

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By direct, simple and scientific action it operates on the blood, muscles and joints by taking the poison out of the blood and out of the system; it invigorates the action of the muscles and limbers the stiffness of the joints. It reaches the Liver and Kidneys, cleansing them from irritating substances, and if followed up after the rheumatic conditions cease, it will restore the organs to regularity and health, and will stop the manufacture of the poisonous acid. Inasmuch as it is primarily the great Blood Purifier, it becomes invaluable for all diseases of a scrofulous character as well.

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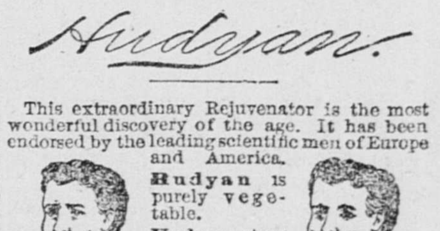
SPECIFICS.

THE GREAT



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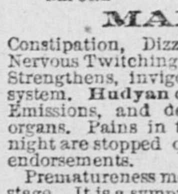

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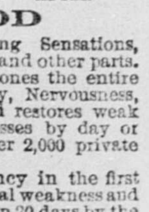

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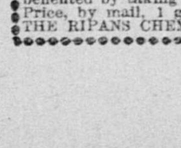

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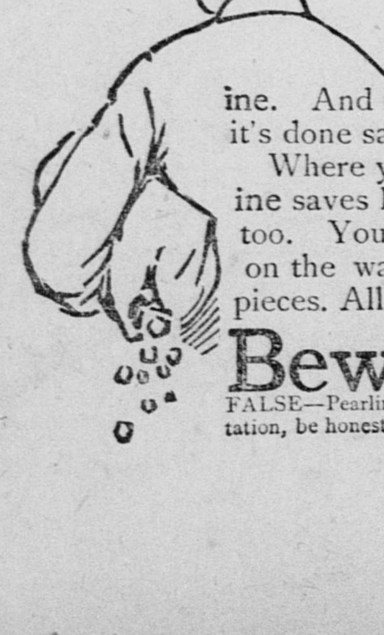

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