

He stood there, utterly unhinged, shaking and whimpering.

It was some minutes before he pulled himself together; then he walked to the wall, took down a pair of shears, and seated himself at the table, still trembling. Near him lay the miniature, all torn and crumpled, and beside it the deep-buried axe-head.

He picked up the strap and began cutting it into little pieces.

"There! and there! and there!" he said with each snip. "An' ye hit me agin there may be no mither to save ye."

M'Adam stood huddling in the corner. He shook like an aspen leaf; his eyes blazed in his white face; and he still nursed one arm with the other.

"Honor yer father," he quoted in small low voice.

PART IV

THE BLACK KILLER

CHAPTER XIV

A MAD MAN

TAMMAS is on his feet in the tap-room of the Arms, brandishing a pewter mug.

"Gen'lemen!" he cries, his old face flushed; "I gie you a toast. Stan' oop!"

The knot of Dalesmen round the fire rises like one. The old man waves his mug before him, reckless of the good ale that drips on to the floor.

"The best sheep-dog i' th' North—Owd Bob o' Kenmuir!" he cries. In an instant there is uproar: the merry applause of clinking pewters; the stamping of feet; the rattle of sticks. Rob Saunderson and old Jonas are cheering with the best; Tupper and Ned Hoppin are bellowing in one another's ears; Long Kirby and Jem Burton are thumping each other on the back; even Sam'l Todd and Sexton Ross are roused from their habitual melancholy.

"Here's to Th' Owd Un! Here's to oor Bob!" yell stentorian voices; while Rob Saunderson has jumped on to a chair.

"Wi' the best sheep-dog i' th' North I gie yo' the Shepherd's Trophy!—won outreet as

will be!" he cries. Instantly the clamor redoubles.

"The Dale Cup and Th' Owd Un! The Trophy and oor Bob! 'Ip, 'ip, for the gray dogs! 'Ip, 'ip, for the best sheep-dog as ever was or will be! 'Ooray, 'ooray!"

It is some minutes before the noise subsides; and slowly the enthusiasts resume their seats with hoarse throats and red faces.

"Gentlemen a'!"

A little unconsidered man is standing up at the back of the room. His face is aflame, and his hands twitch spasmodically; and, in front, with hackles up and eyes gleaming, is a huge, bull-like dog.

"Noo," cries the little man, "I daur ye to repeat that lie!"

"Lie!" screams Tammas; "lie! I'll gie 'im lie! Lemme at im', I say!"

The old man in his fury is half over the surrounding ring of chairs before Jim Mason on the one hand and Jonas Maddox on the other can pull him back.

"Coom, Mr. Thornton," soothes the octogenarian, "let un be. Yo' surely bain't angered by the likes o' 'im!"—and he jerks contemptuously toward the solitary figure at his back.

Tammas resumes his seat unwillingly.

The little man in the far corner of the room remains silent, waiting for his challenge to be taken up. It is in vain. And as he looks at

the range of broad, impassive backs turned on him, he smiles bitterly.

"They dursen't Wullie, not a man of them a'!" he cries. "They're one—two—three—four—eleven to one, Wullie, and yet they dursen't. Eleven of them, and every man a coward! Long Kirby—Thornton—Tupper—Todd—Hoppin—Ross—Burton—and the rest, and not one but's a bigger man nor me, and yet—Weel, we might ha' kent it. We should ha' kent Englishmen by noo. They're aye the same and aye have bin. They tell lies, black lies——"

Tammas is again half out his chair and, only forcibly restrained by the men on either hand.

"——and then they ha' na the courage to stan' by 'em. Ye're English, ivery man o' ye, to yer marrow."

The little man's voice rises as he speaks. He seizes the tankard from the table at his side.

"Englishmen!" he cries, waving it before him. "Here's a health! The best sheep-dog as iver penned a flock—Adam M'Adam's Red Wull!"

He pauses, the pewter at his lips, and looks at his audience with flashing eyes. There is no response from them.

"Wullie, here's to you!" he cries. "Luck and life to ye, ma trusty fier! Death and defeat to yer enemies!"

"The world's wrack we share o't,
The warstle and the care o't;"

He raises the tankard and drains it to its uttermost dreg.

Then drawing himself up, he addresses his audience once more:

"An' noo I'll warn ye aince and for a', and ye may tell James Moore I said it: He may plot agin us, Wullie and me; he may threaten us; he may win the Cup outright for his muckle favorite; but there was niver a man or dog yet as did Adam M'Adam and his Red Wull a hurt but in the end he wush't his mither hadna borne him."

A little later, and he walks out of the inn, the Tailless Tyke at his heels.

After he is gone it is Rob Saunderson who says: "The little mon's mad; he'll stop at nothin'"; and Tammas who answers:

"Nay; not even murder."

The little man had aged much of late. His hair was quite white, his eyes unnaturally bright, and his hands were never still, as though he were in everlasting pain. He looked the picture of disease.

After Owd Bob's second victory he had become morose and untalkative. At home he often sat silent for hours together, drinking and glaring at the place where the Cup had been. Sometimes he talked in low, eerie voice to Red Wull; and on two occasions, David, turning, suddenly, had caught his father glowering stealthily at him with such an expression

on his face as chilled the boy's blood. The two never spoke now; and David held this silent, deadly enmity far worse than the old-time perpetual warfare.

It was the same at the Sylvester Arms. The little man sat alone with Red Wull, exchanging words with no man, drinking steadily, brooding over his wrongs, only now and again galvanized into sudden action.

Other people than Tammas Thornton came to the conclusion that M'Adam would stop at nothing in the undoing of James Moore or the gray dog. They said drink and disappointment had turned his head; that he was mad and dangerous. And on New Year's day matters seemed coming to a crisis; for it was reported that in the gloom of a snowy evening he had drawn a knife on the Master in the High Street, but slipped before he could accomplish his fell purpose.

Most of them all, David was haunted with an ever-present anxiety as to the little man's intentions. The boy even went so far as to warn his friend against his father. But the Master only smiled grimly.

"Thank ye, lad," he said. "But I reck'n we can 'fend for oorsel's, Bob and I. Eh, Owd Un?"

Anxious as David might be, he was not so anxious as to be above taking a mean advantage of this state of strained apprehension to work on Maggie's fears.

One evening he was escorting her home from church, when, just before they reached the larch copse:

"Goo' sakes! What's that?" he ejaculated in horror-laden accents, starting back.

"What, Davie?" cried the girl, shrinking up to him all in a tremble.

"Couldna say for sure. It mought be owt, or agin it mought be nowt. But yo' grip my arm, I'll grip yo' waist."

Maggie demurred.

"Canst see onythin'?" she asked, still in a flutter.

"Be'ind the 'edge."

"Wheer?"

"Theer!"—pointing vaguely.

"I canna see nowt."

"Why, theer, lass. Can yo' not see? Then yo' pit your head along o' mine—so—closer—closer." Then, in aggrieved tones: "Whatever is the matter wi' yo', wench? I might be a leprosy."

But the girl was walking away with her head high as the snow-capped Pike.

"So long as I live, David M'Adam," she cried, "I'll niver go to church wi' you agin!"

"Iss, but you will though—onst," he answered low.

Maggie whisked round in a flash, superbly indignant.

"What d'yo' mean, sir-r-r?"

'Yo' know what I mean, lass," he replied

sheepish and shuffling before her queenly anger.

She looked him up and down, and down and up again.

"I'll niver speak to you agin, Mr. M'Adam," she cried; "not if it was ever so—Nay, I'll walk home by myself, thank you. I'll ha' nowt to do wi' you."

So the two must return to Kenmuir, one behind the other, like a lady and her footman.

David's audacity had more than once already all but caused a rupture between the pair. And the occurrence behind the hedge set the cap on his impertinences. That was past enduring and Maggie by her bearing let him know it.

David tolerated the girl's new attitude for exactly twelve minutes by the kitchen clock. Then: "Sulk wi' me, indeed! I'll teach her!" and he marched out of the door, "Niver to cross it agin, ma word!"

Afterward, however, he relented so far as to continue his visits as before; but he made it clear that he only came to see the Master and hear of Owd Bob's doings. On these occasions he loved best to sit on the window-sill outside the kitchen, and talk and chaff with Tammass and the men in the yard, feigning an uneasy bashfulness was reference made to Bessie Bolstock. And after sitting thus for some time, he would half turn, look over his shoulder, and remark in indifferent tones to

the girl within: "Oh, good-evenin'! I forgot yo',"—and then resume his conversation. While the girl within, her face a little pinker, her lips a little tighter, and her chin a little higher, would go about her business, pretending neither to hear nor care.

The suspicions that M'Adam nourished dark designs against James Moore were somewhat confirmed in that, on several occasions in the bitter dusks of January afternoons, a little insidious figure was reported to have been seen lurking among the farm-buildings of Kenmuir.

Once Sam'l Todd caught the little man fairly, skulking away in the woodshed. Sam'l took him up bodily and carried him down the slope to the Wastrel, shaking him gently as he went.

Across the stream he put him on his feet.

"If I catches yo' cadgerin' aroun' the farm agin, little mon," he admonished, holding up a warning finger; "I'll tak' yo' and drap yo' in t' Sheep-wash, I warn yo' fair. I'd ha' done it noo an' yo'd bin a bigger and a younger mon. But theer! yo'm sic a scrappety bit. Noo, rin whoam." And the little man slunk silently away.

For a time he appeared there no more. Then, one evening when it was almost dark, James Moore, going the round of the out-buildings, felt Owd Bob stiffen against his side.

"What's oop, lad?" he whispered, halting;

and, dropping his hand on the old dog's neck felt a ruff of rising hair beneath it.

"Steady, lad, steady," he whispered; "what is 't?" He peered forward into the gloom; and at length discerned a little familiar figure huddled away in the crevice between two stacks.

"It's yo, is it, M'Adam?" he said, and, bending, seized a wisp of Owd Bob's coat in a grip like a vice.

Then, in a great voice, moved to rare anger: "Oot o' this afore I do ye a hurt, ye meeserable spyin' creetur!" he roared. "Yo' mun wait till dark cooms to hide yo', yo' coward, afore yo daur coom crawlin' aboot ma hoose, frightenin' the women-folk and up to yer devilments. If yo've owt to say to me, coom like a mon in the open day. Noo git aff wi' yo', afore I lay hands to yo'!"

He stood there in the dusk, tall and mighty, a terrible figure, one hand pointing to the gate, the other still grasping the gray dog.

The little man scuttled away in the half-light, and out of the yard.

On the plank-bridge he turned and shook his fist at the darkening house.

"Curse ye, James Moore!" he sobbed, "I'll be even wi' ve yet."

CHAPTER XV

DEATH ON THE MARCHES

ON the top of this there followed an attempt to poison Th' Owd Un. At least there was no other accounting for the affair.

In the dead of a long-remembered night James Moore was waked by a low moaning beneath his room. He leapt out of bed and ran to the window to see his favorite dragging about the moonlit yard, the dark head down, the proud tail for once lowered, the lithe limbs wooden, heavy, unnatural—altogether pitiful.

In a moment he was downstairs and out to his friend's assistance. "Whatever is't, Owd Un?" he cried in anguish.

At the sound of that dear voice the old dog tried to struggle to him, could not, and fell, whimpering.

In a second the Master was with him, examining him tenderly, and crying for Sam'l, who slept above the stables.

There was every symptom of foul play: the tongue was swollen and almost black; the breathing labored; the body twitched horribly; and the soft gray eyes all bloodshot and straining in agony.

With the aid of Sam'l and Maggie, drench-

ing first and stimulants after, the Master pulled him around for the moment. And soon Jim Mason and Parson Leggy, hurriedly summoned, came running hot-foot to the rescue.

Prompt and stringent measures saved the victim—but only just. For a time the best sheep-dog in the North was pawing at the Gate of Death. In the end, as the gray dawn broke, the danger passed.

The attempt to get at him, if attempt it was, aroused passionate indignation in the countryside. It seemed the culminating-point of the excitement long bubbling.

There were no traces of the culprit; not a vestige to lead to incrimination, so cunningly had the criminal accomplished his foul task. But as to the perpetrator, if there where no proofs there were yet fewer doubts.

At the Sylvester Arms Long Kirby asked M'Adam point-blank for his explanation of the matter.

"Hoo do I 'count for it?" the little man cried. "I dinna 'count for it ava."

"Then hoo did it happen?" asked Tammas with asperity.

"I dinna believe it did happen," the little man replied. "It's a lee o' James Moore's—a caractereestic lee." Whereon they chucked him out incontinently; for the Terror for once was elsewhere.

Now that afternoon is to be remembered for threefold causes. Firstly, because, as has

been said, M'Adam was alone. Secondly, because, a few minutes after his ejection, the window of the tap-room was thrown open from without, and the little man looked in. He spoke no word, but those dim, smouldering eyes of his wandered from face to face, resting for a second on each, as if to burn them on his memory. "I'll remember ye, gentlemen," he said at length quietly, shut the window, and was gone.

Thirdly, for a reason now to be told.

Though ten days had elapsed since the attempt on him, the gray dog had never been his old self since. He had attacks of shivering; his vitality seemed sapped; he tired easily, and, great heart, would never own it. At length on this day, James Moore, leaving the old dog behind him, had gone over to Grammoch-town to consult Dingley, the vet. On his way home he met Jim Mason with Gyp, the faithful Betsy's unworthy successor, at the Dalesman's Daughter. Together they started for the long tramp home over the Marches. And that journey is marked with a red stone in this story.

All day long the hills had been bathed in impenetrable fog. Throughout there had been an accompanying drizzle; and in the distance the wind had moaned a storm-menace. To the darkness of the day was added the sombreness of falling night as the three began the ascent of the Murk Muir Pass. By the time they

emerged into the Devil's Bowl it was altogether black and blind. But the threat of wind had passed, leaving utter stillness; and they could hear the splash of an otter on the far side of the Lone Tarn as they skirted that gloomy water's edge. When at length the last steep rise on to the Marches had been topped, a breath of soft air smote them lightly, and the curtain of fog began drifting away.

The two men swung steadily through the heather with that reaching stride the birth-right of moor-men and highlanders. They talked but little, for such was their nature: a word or two on sheep and the approaching lambing-time; thence on to the coming Trials; the Shepherds' Trophy; Owd Bob and the attempt on him; and from that to M'Adam and the Tailless Tyke.

"D'yo' reck'n M'Adam had a hand in't?" the postman was asking.

"Nay; there's no proof."

"'Ceptin' he's mad to get shut o' Th' Owd Un afore Cup Day."

"'Im or me—it mak's no differ." For a dog is disqualified from competing for the Trophy who has changed hands during the six months prior to the meeting. And this holds good though the change be only from father to son on the decease of the former.

Jim looked up inquiringly at his companion.

"D'yo' think it'll coom to that?" he asked.

"What?"

"Why—murder "

"Not if I can help it," the other answered grimly.

The fog had cleared away by now, and the moon was up. To their right, on the crest of a rise some two hundred yards away, a low wood stood out black against the sky. As they passed it, a blackbird rose up screaming, and a brace of wood-pigeons winged noisily away.

"Hullo! hark to the yammerin'!" muttered Jim, stopping; "and at this time o' night too!"

Some rabbits, playing in the moonlight on the outskirts of the wood, sat up, listened, and hopped back into security. At the same moment a big hill-fox slunk out of the covert. He stole a pace forward and halted, listening with one ear back and one pad raised; then cantered silently away in the gloom, passing close to the two men and yet not observing them.

"What's up, I wonder?" mused the postman.

"The fox set 'em clackerin', I reck'n," said the Master.

"Not he; he was scared 'maist oot o' his skin," the other answered. Then in tones of suppressed excitement, with his hands on James Moore's arm: "And, look'ee, theer's ma Gyp a-beckonin' on us!"

There, indeed, on the crest of the rise beside the wood, was the little lurcher, now

looking back at his master, now creeping stealthily forward.

"Ma word! theer's summat wrong yonder!" cried Jim, and jerked the post-bags off his shoulder. "Coom on, Master!"—and he set off running toward the dog; while James Moore, himself excited now, followed with an agility that belied his years.

Some score yards from the lower edge of the spinney, upon the farther side of the ridge, a tiny beck babbled through its bed of peat. The two men, as they topped the rise, noticed a flock of black-faced mountain-sheep clustered in the dip 'twixt wood and stream. They stood martialled in close array, facing half toward the wood, half toward the newcomers, heads up, eyes glaring, handsome as sheep only look when scared.

On the crest of the ridge the two men halted beside Gyp. The postman stood with his head a little forward, listening intently. Then he dropped in the heather like a dead man, pulling the other with him.

"Doon, mon!" he whispered, clutching at Gyp with his spare hand.

"What is't, Jim?" asked the Master, now thoroughly roused.

"Summat movin' i' th' wood," the other whispered, listening weasel-eared.

So they lay motionless for a while; but there came no sound from the copse.

"'Appen 'twas nowt," the postman at length

allowed, peering cautiously about. "And yet I thowt—I dunno reetly what I thowt."

Then, starting to his knees with a hoarse cry of terror: "Save us! what's yon theer?"

Then for the first time the Master raised his head and noticed, lying in the gloom between them and the array of sheep, a still, white heap.

James Moore was a man of deeds, not words.

"It's past waitin'!" he said, and sprang forward, his heart in his mouth.

The sheep stamped and shuffled as he came, and yet did not break.

"Ah, thanks be!" he cried, dropping beside the motionless body; "it's nob'but a sheep." As he spoke his hands wandered deftly over the carcass. "But what's this?" he called. "Stout! she was as me. Look at her fleece—crisp, close, strong; feel the flesh—firm as a rock. And ne'er a bone broke, ne're a scraf on her body a pin could mak'. As healthy as a mon—and yet dead as mutton!"

Jim, still trembling from the horror of his fear, came up, and knelt beside his friend. "Ah, but there's bin devilry in this!" he said; 'I reck'ned they sheep had bin badly skeared, and not so long agone."

"Sheep-murder, sure enough!" the other answered. "No fox's doin'—a girt-grown two-shear as could 'maist knock a h'ox."

Jim's hands travelled from the body to the dead creature's throat. He screamed.

^aStout—heartly

"By gob, Master! look 'ee theer!" He held his hand up in the moonlight, and it dripped red. "And warm yet! warm!"

"Tear some bracken, Jim!" ordered the other, "and set a-light. We mun see to this."

The postman did as bid. For a moment the fern smouldered and smoked, then the flame ran crackling along and shot up in the darkness, weirdly lighting the scene: to the right the low wood, a block of solid blackness against the sky; in front the wall of sheep, staring out of the gloom with bright eyes; and as centre-piece that still, white body, with the kneeling men and lurcher sniffing tentatively round.

The victim was subjected to a critical examination. The throat, and that only, had been hideously mauled; from the raw wounds the flesh hung in horrid shreds; on the ground all about were little pitiful dabs of wool, wrenched off apparently in a struggle; and, crawling among the fern-roots, a snake-like track of red led down to the stream.

"A dog's doin', and no mistakin' thot," said Jim at length, after a minute inspection.

"Ay," declared the Master with slow emphasis, "and a sheep-dog's too, and an old un's, or I'm no shepherd."

The postman looked up.

"Why thot?" he asked, puzzled.

"Becos," the Master answered, "'im as did this killed for blood—and for blood only. If

had bin ony other dog—greyhound, bull, tARRIER, or even a young sheep-dog—d'yo' think he'd ha' stopped wi' the one? Not he; he'd ha' gone through 'em, and be runnin' 'em as like as not yet, nippin' 'em, pullin' 'em down, till he'd maybe killed the half. But 'im as did this killed for blood, I say. He got it—killed just the one, and nary touched the others, d'yo' 'see, Jim?"

The postman whistled, long and low.

"It's just what owd Wrottesley'd tell on," he said. "I never nob'but half believed him then—I do now though. D'yo' mind what th' owd lad'd tell, Master?"

James Moore nodded.

"Thot's it. I've never seen the like afore myself, but I've heard ma grandad speak o' mony's the time. An owd dog'll git the cravin' for sheep's blood on him, just the same as a mon does for the drink; he creeps oot o' nights, gallops afar, hunts his sheep, downs 'er, and satisfies the cravin'. And he nary kills but the one, they say, for he knows the vallie o' sheep same as you and me. He has his gallop, quenches the thirst, and then he's for home, maybe a score mile away, and no one the wiser i' th' mornin'. And so on, till he cooms to a bloody death, the murderin' traitor."

"If he does!" said Jim.

"And he does, they say, nigh always. For he gets bolder and bolder wi' not bein' caught,

until one fine night a bullet lets light into him. And some mon gets knocked nigh endways when they bring his best tyke home i' th' mornin', dead, wi' the sheep's wool yet stickin' in his mouth."

The postman whistled again.

"It's what owd Wrottesley'd tell on to a tick. And he'd say, if ye mind, Master, as hoo the dog'd niver kill his master's sheep—kind o' conscience-like."

"Ay, I've heard that," said the Master. "Queer too, and 'im bein' such a bad un!"

Jim Mason rose slowly from his knees.

"Ma word," he said, "I wish Th' Owd Un was here. He'd 'appen show us summat!"

"I nob'but wish he was, pore owd lad!" said the Master.

As he spoke there was a crash in the wood above them; a sound as of some big body bursting furiously through brushwood.

The two men rushed to the top of the rise. In the darkness they could see nothing; only, standing still and holding their breaths, they could hear the faint sound, ever growing fainter, of some creature splashing in a hasty gallop over the wet moors.

"Yon's him! Yon's no fox, I'll tak' oath. And a main big un, too, hark to him!" cried Jim. Then to Gyp, who had rushed off in hot pursuit: "Coom back, chunk-'ead. What's nse o' you agin a gallopip' 'potamus?"

Gradually the sounds died away and away, and were no more.

"Thot's 'im, the devil!" said the Master at length.

"Nay; the devil has a tail, they do say," replied Jim thoughtfully. For already the light of suspicion was focusing its red glare.

"Noo I reck'n we're in for bloody times amang the sheep for a while," said the Master, as Jim picked up his bags.

"Better a sheep nor a mon," answered the postman, still harping on the old theme.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BLACK KILLER

THAT, as James Moore had predicted, was the first only of a long succession of such solitary crimes.

Those who have not lived in a desolate country like that about the Muir Pike, where sheep are paramount and every other man engaged in the profession pastoral, can barely imagine the sensation aroused. In market place, tavern, or cottage, the subject of conversation was always the latest sheep-murder and the yet-undetected criminal.

Sometimes there would be a lull, and the shepherds would begin to breath more freely. Then there would come a stormy night, when the heavens were veiled in the cloak of crime, and the wind moaned fitfully over meres and marches, and another victim would be added to the lengthening list.

It was always such black nights, nights of wind and weather, when no man would be abroad, that the murderer chose for his bloody work; and that was how he became known from the Red Scree to the Muir Pike as the Black Killer. In the Daleland they still call a wild, wet night "A Black Killer's night;"

for they say: "His ghaist'll be oot the night."

There was hardly a farm in the country-side but was marked with the seal of blood. Kenmuir escaped, and the Grange; Rob Sanderson at the Holt, and Tupper at Swinsthwaite; and they were about the only lucky ones.

As for Kenmuir, Tammas declared with a certain grim pride: "He knows better'n to coom wheer Th' Owd Un be." Whereat M'Adam was taken with a fit of internal spasms, rubbing his knees and cackling insanely for a half-hour afterward. And as for the luck of the Grange—well, there was a reason for that too, so the Dalesmen said.

Though the area of crime stretched from the Black Water to Grammoch-town, twenty odd miles, there was never a sign of the perpetrator. The Killer did his bloody work with a thoroughness and a devilish cunning that defied detection.

It was plain that each murder might be set down to the same agency. Each was stamped with the same unmistakable sign-manual: one sheep killed, its throat torn into red ribands, and the others untouched.

It was at the instigation of Parson Leggy that the squire imported a bloodhound to track the Killer to his doom. Set on at a fresh-killed carcass at the One Tree Knowe, he carried the line a distance in the direction of the Muir Pike; then was thrown out by a

little bustling beck, and never acknowledged the scent again. Afterward he became unmanageable, and could be no further utilized. Then there was talk of inducing Tommy Dobson and his pack to come over from Eskdale, but that came to nothing. The Master of the Border Hunt lent a couple of foxhounds, who effected nothing; and there were a hundred other attempts and as many failures. Jim Mason set a cunning trap or two, and caught his own bob-tailed tortoise-shell and a terrible wiggling from his missus; Ned Hoppin sat up with a gun two nights over a new slain victim and Londesley of the Home Farm poisoned a carcass. But the Killer never returned to the kill, and went about in the midst of them all, carrying on his infamous traffic and laughing up his sleeve.

In the mean while the Dalesmen raged and swore vengeance; their impotence, their unsuccess, and their losses heating their wrath to madness. And the bitterest sting of it all lay in this; that though they could not detect him, they were nigh to positive as to the culprit.

Many a time was the Black Killer named in low-voiced conclave; many a time did Long Kirby, as he stood in the Border Ram and watched M'Adam and the Terror walking down the High, nudge Jim Mason and whisper:

"Theer's the Killer—oneasy be his grave!"
To which practical Jim always made the same retort:

"Ay, theer's the Killer; but wheer's the proof?"

And therien lay the crux. There was scarcely a man in the country-side who doubted the guilt of the Tailless Tyke; but, as Jim said, where was the proof? They could but point to his well-won nickname; his evil notoriety; say that, magnificent sheep-dog as he was, he was known even in his work as a rough handler of stock; and lastly remark significantly that the Grange was one of the few farms that had so far escaped unscathed. For with the belief that the Black Killer was a sheep-dog they held it as an article of faith that he would in honor spare his master's flock.

There may, indeed, have been prejudice in their judgment. For each had his private grudge against the Terror; and nigh every man bore on his own person, or his clothes, or on the body of his dog, the mark of that huge savage.

Proof?

"Why, he near killed ma Lassie!" cries Londesley.

"And he did kill the Wexer!"

"And Wan Tromp!"

"And see pore old Wenus!" says John Swan, and pulls out that fair Amazon, battered almost past recognition, but a warrioress still.

"That's Red Wull—bloody be his end!"

"And he laid ma Rasper by for nigh three weeks!" continues Tupper, pointing to the yet-

unhealed scars on the neck of the big bobtail. "See thisey—his work."

"And look here!" cries Saunderson, exposing a ragged wound on Shep's throat; "thot's the Terror—black be his fa'!"

"Ay," says Long Kirby with an oath; "the tykes love him nigh as much as we do."

"Yes," says Tammias. "Yo' jest watch!"

The old man slips out of the tap-room; and in another moment from the road without comes a heavy, regular pat-pat-pat, as of some big creature approaching, and, blending with the sound, little shuffling footsteps.

In an instant every dog in the room has risen to his feet and stands staring at the door with sullen, glowing eyes; lips wrinkling, bristles rising, throats rumbling.

An unsteady hand fumbles at the door; a reedy voice calls, "Wullie, come here!" and the dogs move away, surly, to either side the fireplace, tails down, ears back, grumbling still; the picture of cowed passion.

Then the door opens; Tammias enters, grinning; and each, after a moment's scrutiny, resumes his former position before the fire.

Meanwhile over M'Adam, seemingly all unsuspecting of these suspicions, a change had come. Whether it was that for the time he heard less of the best sheep-dog in the North, or for some more occult reason, certain it is that he became his old self. His tongue

wagged as gayly and bitterly as ever; and hardly a night passed but he infuriated Tammias almost to blows with his innuendoes and insidious sarcasms.

Old Jonas Maddox, one evening at the Sylvester Arms, inquired of him what his notion was as to identity of the Killer.

"I hae ma suspicions, Mr. Maddox; I hae ma suspicions," the little man replied, cunningly wagging his head and giggling. But more than that they could not elicit from him.

A week later, however, to the question:

"And what are yo' thinkin' o' this black Killer, Mr. M'Adam?"

"Why *black*?" the little man asked earnestly; "why *black* mair than white—or *gray*, we'll say?" Luckily for him, however, the Dalesmen are slow of wit as of speech.

David, too, marked the difference in his father, who nagged at him now with all the old spirit. At first he rejoiced in the change, preferring this outward and open warfare to that aforesaid stealthy enmity. But soon he almost wished the other back; for the older he grew the more difficult did he find it to endure calmly these everlasting bickerings.

For one reason he was truly glad of the altered condition of affairs; he believed that, for the nonce at least, his father had abandoned any ill designs he might have cherished against James Moore; those sneaking night-visits to Kenmuir were, he hoped, discontinued.

Yet Maggie Moore, had she been on speaking terms with him, could have undeceived him. For, one night, when alone in the kitchen, on suddenly looking up, she had seen to her horror a dim, moonlike face glued against the window-pane. In the first mad panic of the moment she almost screamed, and dropped her work; then—a true Moore—controlled herself and sat feigning to work, yet watching all the while.

It was M'Adam, she recognized that: the face pale in its framework of black; the hair lying dank and dark on his forehead; and the white eyelids blinking, slow, regular, horrible. She thought of the stories she had heard of his sworn vengeance on her father, and her heart stood still, though she never moved. At length with a gasp of relief she discerned that the eyes were not directed on her. Stealthily following their gaze, she saw they rested on the Shepherds' Trophy; and on the Cup they remained fixed immovable, while she sat motionless and watched.

An hour, it seemed to her, elapsed before they shifted their direction, and wandered round the room. For a second they dwelt upon her; then the face withdrew into the night.

Maggie told no one what she had seen. Knowing well how terrible her father was in anger, she deemed it wiser to keep silence. While as for David M'Adam, she should never speak to him again!

And not for a moment did that young man surmise whence his father came when, on the night in question, M'Adam returned to the Grange, chuckling to himself. David was growing of late accustomed to these fits of silent, unprovoked merriment; and when his father began giggling and muttering to Red Wull, at first he paid no heed.

"He! he! Wullie. Aiblins we'll beat him yet. There's many a slip twixt Cup and lip—eh, Wullie, he! he!" And he made allusion to the flourishing of the wicked and their fall; ending always with the same refrain: "He! he! Wullie. Aiblins we'll beat him yet."

In this strain he continued until David, his patience exhausted, asked roughly:

"What is't yo' mumblin' aboot? Wha is it yo'll beat, you and yer Wullie?"

The lad's tone was as contemptuous as his words. Long ago he had cast aside any semblance of respect for his father.

M'Adam only rubbed his knees and giggled.

"Hark to the dear lad, Wullie! Listen hoo pleasantly he addresses his auld dad!" Then turning on his son, and leering at him: "Wha is it, ye ask? Wha should it be but the Black Killer? Wha else is there I'd be wushin' to hurt?"

"The Black Killer!" echoed the boy, and looked at his father in amazement.

Now David was almost the only man in

Wastrel-dale who denied Red Wull's identity with the Killer. "Nay," he said once; "he'd kill me, given half a chance, but a sheep—no." Yet, though himself of this opinion, he knew well what the talk was, and was astonished accordingly at his father's remark.

"The Black Killer, is it? What d'you know o' the Killer?" he inquired.

"Why *black*, I wad ken? Why *black*?" the little man asked, leaning forward in his chair.

Now David, though repudiating in the village Red Wull's complicity with the crimes, at home was never so happy as when casting cunning innuendoes to that effect.

"What would you have him then?" he asked. "Red, yaller, muck-dirt color?"—and he stared significantly at the Tailless Tyke, who was lying at his master's feet. The little man ceased rubbing his knees and eyed the boy. David shifted uneasily beneath that dim, persistent stare.

"Well?" he said at length gruffly.

The little man giggled, and his two thin hands took up their task again.

"Aiblins his puir auld doited fool of a dad kens mair than the dear lad thinks for, ay, or wushes—eh, Wullie, he! he!"

"Then what is it you do know, or think yo' know?" David asked irritably.

The little man nodded and chuckled.

"Naethin' ava, laddie, naethin' worth the

mention. Only aiblins the Killer'll be caught afore sae lang."

David smiled incredulously, wagging his head in offensive scepticism.

"Yo'll catch him yo'self, I s'pose, you and yer Wullie? Tak' a chair on to the Marches, whistle a while, and when the Killer comes, why! pit a pinch o' salt upon his tail—if he has one."

At the last words, heavily punctuated by the speaker, the little man stopped his rubbing as though shot.

"What wad ye mean by that?" he asked softly.

"What wad I?" the boy replied.

"I dinna ken for sure," the little man answered; "and it's aiblins just as well for you, dear lad"—in fawning accents—"that I dinna." He began rubbing and giggling afresh. "It's a gran' thing, Wullie, to ha' a dutiful son; a shairp lad wha has no silly sense o' shame aboot sharpenin' his wits at his auld dad's expense. And yet, despite oor facetious lad there, aiblins we will ha' a hand in the Killer's catchin', you and I, Wullie—he! he!" And the great dog at his feet wagged his stump tail in reply.

David rose from his chair and walked across the room to where his father sat.

"If yo' know sic a mighty heap," he shouted, "happen yo'll just tell me what yo' do know!"

M'Adam stopped stroking Red Wull's massive head, and looked up.

"Tell ye? Ay, wha should I tell if not ma dear David? Tell? Ay, I'll tell ye this"—with a sudden snarl of bitterness—"that you'd be the vairy last person I wad tell."