

JUNE DAYS IN THE GLENKENS.

I have recently been looking at comparisons between these two chapters in *The Lilac Sunbonnet* (1894) and Kit Kennedy (1899) for an article I'm still in the process of writing. They both evoke June in the Glenkens for me, in different ways – and much more. I thought it would be good to share them as a bit of light reading for the long summer days and I'd be most happy to hear any and all comments from other Raiders. In due course I will publish my article on the website. But, without further ado, here are the two chapters for your entertainment.

ANDREW KISSOCK GOES TO SCHOOL

(From *The Lilac Sunbonnet*, 1894)

Love is, at least in maidens' hearts, of the nature of an intermittent fever. The tide of Solway flows, but the more rapid his flow the swifter his ebb. The higher it brings the wrack up the beach, the deeper, six hours after, are laid bare the roots of the seaweed upon the shingle. Now Winsome Charteris, however her heart might conspire against her peace, was not at all the girl to be won before she was asked. Also there was that delicious spirit of contrariness that makes a woman even when won, by no means seem won.

Besides, in the broad daylight of common day she was less attuned and touched to earnest issues than in the red dawn. She had even taken the poem and the exercise book out of the sacred enclosure, where they had been hid so long. She did not really know that she could make good any claim to either. Indeed, she was well aware that to one of them at least she had no claim whatever. Therefore she had placed both the note-book and the poem within the same band as her precious housekeeping account-book, which she revered next her Bible—which very practical proceeding pleased her, and quite showed that she was above all foolish sentiment. Then she went to churn for an hour and a half, pouring in a little hot water critically from time to time in order to make the butter come. This exercise may be recommended as an admirable corrective to foolish flights of imagination. There is something concrete about butter-making which counteracts an overplus of sentiment— especially when the butter will not come. And hot water may be overdone.

Now Winsome Charteris was a hard-hearted young woman—a fact that may not as yet have appeared; at least so she told herself. She had come to the conclusion that she had been foolish to think at all of Ralph Peden, so she resolved to put him at once and altogether out of her mind, which, as everyone knows, is quite a simple matter. Yet during the morning she went three times into her little room to look at her housekeeping book, which by accident lay within the same band as Ralph Peden's lost manuscripts. First, she wanted to see how much she got for butter at Cairn Edward the Monday before last; then to discover what the price was on that very same day last year. It is an interesting thing to follow the fluctuations of the produce market, especially when you churn the butter yourself. The exact quotation of documents is a valuable thing to learn. Nothing is so likely

to grow upon one as a habit of inaccuracy. This was what her grandmother was always telling her, and it behooved Winsome to improve. Each time as she strapped the documents together she said, 'And these go back today by Andra Kissock when he goes to school.' Then she took another look, in order to assure herself that no forgeries had been introduced within the band while she was churning the butter. They were still quite genuine.

Winsome went out to relieve Jess Kissock in the dairy, and as she went she communed with herself: 'It is right that I should send them back. The verses may belong to somebody else—somebody in Edinburgh—and, besides, I know them by heart.'

A good memory is a fine thing.

The Kissocks lived in one of the Craig Ronald cot-houses. Their father had in his time been one of the herds, and upon his death, many years ago, Walter Skirving had allowed the widow and children to remain in the house in which Andrew Kissock, senior, had died. Mistress Kissock was a large-boned, soft-voiced woman, who had supplied what dash of tenderness there was in her daughters. She had reared them according to good traditions, but as she said, when all her brood were talking at the same time, she alone quietly silent:

'The Kissocks tak' efter their faither, they're great hands to talk—a' bena [except] An'ra.'

Andrew was her youngest, a growing lump of a boy of twelve, who was exceeding silent in the house. Every day Andra betook himself to school, along the side of Loch Grannoch, by the path which looked down on the cloud-flecked mirror of the loch. Some days he got there, but very occasionally.

His mother had got him ready early this June morning. He had brought in the kye for Jess. He had helped Jock Gordon to carry water for Meg's kitchen mysteries. He had listened to a brisk conversation proceeding from the 'room' where his very capable sister was engaged in getting the old people settled for the day. All this was part of the ordinary routine. As soon as the whole establishment knew that Walter Skirving was again at the window over the marshmallows, and his wife at her latest book, a sigh of satisfaction went up and the wheels of the day's work revolved. So this morning it came time for Andra to go to school all too soon. Andra did not want to stay at home from school, but it was against the boy's principle to appear glad to go to school, so Andra made it a point of honour to make a feint of wanting to stay every morning.

'Can I no bide an' help ye wi' the butter-kirnin' the day, Jess?' said Andra, rubbing himself briskly all over as he had seen the ploughmen do with their horses. When he got to his bare red legs he reared and kicked out violently, calling out at the same time:

'Wad ye then, ye tairger, tuts—stan' still there, ye kickin' beast!' as though he were some fiery untamed from the desert.

Jess made a dart at him with a wet towel.

'Gang oot o' my back kitchen wi' yer nonsense!' she said. Andra passaged like a strongly bitted charger to the back door, and there ran away with himself, flourishing in the air a pair of very dirty heels. Ebie Farrish was employed over a tin basin at the stable door, making his breakfast toilet, which he always undertook, not when he shook himself out of bed in the stable loft at five o'clock, but before he went in to devour Jess with his eyes and his porridge in the ordinary way. It was at this point that Andra Kissock, that prancing Galloway barb, breaking away from all restrictions, charged between Ebie's legs, and upset him into his own horse-trough. The yellow soap was in Ebie's eyes, and before he got it out the small boy was far enough away. The most irritating thing was that from the back kitchen came peal on peal of laughter.

'It's surely fashionable at the sea-bathin' to tak' a dook in the stable-trough, nae less!'

Ebie gathered himself up savagely. His temperature was something considerably above summer heat, yet he dared not give expression to his feelings, for his experiences in former courtships had led him to the conclusion that you cannot safely, having regard to average family prejudice, abuse the brothers of your sweetheart. After marriage the case is believed to be different.

Winsome Charteris stood at the green gate which led out of the court-yard into the croft, as Andra was making his schoolward exit. She had a parcel for him. This occasioned no surprise, nor did the very particular directions as to delivery, and the dire threatenings against forgetfulness or failure in the least dismay Andra. He was entirely accustomed to them. From his earliest years he had heard nothing else. He never had been reckoned as a 'sure hand,' and it was only in default of a better messenger that Winsome employed him. Then these directions were so explicit that there did not appear to be any possibility of mistake. He had only to go to the manse and leave the parcel for Mr. Ralph Peden without a message.

So Andrew Kissock, nothing loath, promised faithfully. He never objected to promising; that was easy. He carried the small, neatly wrapped parcel in his hand, walking most sedately so long as Winsome's eyes were upon him. He was not yet old enough to be under the spell of the witchery of those eyes; but then Winsome's eye controlled his sister Meg's hand, and for that latter organ he had a most profound respect.

Now we must take the trouble to follow in some detail the course of this small boy going to school, for though it may be of no interest in itself save as a study in scientific procrastination, a good deal of our history directly depends upon it.

As soon as Andrew was out of sight he pulled his leather satchel round so that he could open it with ease, and, having taken a handful of broken and very stale crumbs out of it for immediate use, he dropped Winsome's parcel within. There it kept company with a tin flask of milk which his mother filled for him every morning, having previously scalded it well to restore its freshness. This was specially carefully done after a sad occasion upon which his mother, having poured in the fine milk for Andra's dinner fresh from Crummie the cow, out of the flask

mouth there crawled a number of healthy worms which that enterprising youth had collected from various quarters which it is best not to specify. Not that Andra objected in the least. Milk was a good thing, worms were good things, and he was above the paltry superstition that one good thing could spoil another. He will always consider to his dying day that the very sound licking which his mother administered to him, for spoiling at once the family breakfast and his own dinner, was one of the most uncalled-for and gratuitous, which, even in his wide experience, it had been his lot to recollect.

So Andra took his way to school. He gambolled along, smelling and rooting among the ragged robin and starwort in the hedges like an unbroken collie. It is safe to say that no further thought of school or message crossed his mind from the moment that the highest white steading of Craig Ronald sank out of view, until his compulsory return. Andra had shut out from his view so commonplace and ignominious facts as home and school.

At the first loaning end, where the road to the Nether Crae came down to cross the bridge, just at the point where the Grannoch lane leaves the narrows of the loch, Andra betook himself to the side of the road, with a certain affectation of superabundant secrecy.

With prodigious exactness he examined the stones at a particular part of the dyke, hunted about for one of remarkable size and colour, said 'Hist! hist!' in a mysterious way, and ran across the road to see that no one was coming.

As we have seen, Andra was the reader of the family. His eldest brother had gone to America, where he was working in New York as a joiner. This youth was in the habit of sending across books and papers describing the terrible encounters with Indians in the Boone country—the 'dark and bloody land' of the early romancers. Not one in the family looked at the insides of these relations of marvels except Andra, who, when he read the story of the Indian scout trailing the murderers of his squaw across a continent in order to annihilate them just before they entered New York city, felt that he had found his vocation—which was to be at least an Indian scout, if indeed it was too late for him to think of being a full-blooded Indian.

The impressive pantomime at the bridge was in order to ascertain whether his bosom companion, Dick Little, had passed on before him. He knew, as soon as he was within a hundred yards of the stone, that he had *not* passed. Indeed, he could see him at that very moment threading his way down through the tangle of heather and bog myrtle, or, as he would have said, 'gall busses opposite.' But what of that?—For mighty is the power of make-believe, and in Andra, repressed as he was at home, there was concentrated the very energy and power of some imaginative ancestry. He had a full share of the quality which ran in the family, and was exceeded only by his brother Jock in New York, who had been 'the biggest leer in the country side' before he emigrated to a land where at that time this quality was not specially marked among so many wielders of the long bow. Jock, in his letters, used to frighten his mother with dark tales of his hair-breadth escapes from savages and desperadoes on the frontier, yet, strangely enough, his address remained steadily New York.

Now it is not often that a Galloway boy takes to lying; but when he does, a mere Nithsdale man has no chance with him, still less a man from the simple-minded levels of the 'Shire.' Wigtonshire is invariably spoken of in Galloway as the Shire, Kirkcudbrightshire as the Stewartry. But Andra Kissock always lied from the highest motives. He elevated the saying of the thing that was not to the height of a principle. He often lied, knowing that he would be thrashed for it—even though he was aware that he would be rewarded for telling the truth. He lied because he would not demean himself to tell the truth.

It need not therefore surprise us in the least that when Dick Little came across the bridge he was greeted by Andra Kissock with the information that he was in the clutches of The Avenger of Blood, who, mounted upon a mettle steed with remarkably dirty feet, curveted across the road and held the pass. He was required to give up a 'soda scone or his life.' The bold Dick, who had caught the infection, stoutly refused to yield either. His life was dear to him, but a soda scone considerably dearer. He had rather be dead than hungry.

'Then die, traitor!' said Andra, throwing down his bag, all forgetful of Winsome Charteris's precious parcel and his promises thereanent. So these two brave champions had at one another with most surprising valour.

They were armed with wooden swords as long as themselves, which they manoeuvred with both hands in a marvellously savage manner. When a blow did happen to get home, the dust flew out of their jackets. But still the champions fought on. They were in the act of finishing the quarrel by the submission of Dick in due form, when Allan Welsh, passing across the bridge on one of his pastoral visitations, came upon them suddenly. Dick was on his knees at the time, his hands on the ground, and Andra was forcing his head determinedly down toward the surface of the king's highway. Meanwhile Dick was objecting in the most vigorous way.

'Boys,' said the stern, quiet voice of the minister, 'what are you doing to each other? Are you aware it is against both the law of God and man to fight in this way? It is only from the beasts that perish that we expect such conduct.'

'If ye please, sir,' answered Andra in a shamefaced way, yet with the assurance of one who knows that he has the authorities on his side, 'Dick Little wull no bite the dust.'

'Bite the dust!—what do you mean, laddie?' asked the minister, frowning.

'Weel sir, if ye please, sir, the Buik says that the yin that got his licks fell down and bit the dust. Noo, Dick's doon fair aneuch. Ye micht speak till him to bite the dust!'

And Andra, clothed in the garments of conscious rectitude, stood back to give the minister room to deliver his rebuke.

The stern face of the minister relaxed.

'Be off with you to school,' he said; 'I'll look in to see if you have got there in the afternoon.'

Andra and Dick scampered down the road, snatching their satchels as they ran. In half an hour they were making momentary music under the avenging birch rod of Duncan Duncanson, the learned Dullarg schoolmaster. Their explanations were excellent. Dick said that he had been stopped to gather the eggs, and Andra that he had been detained conversing with the minister. The result was the same in both cases—Andra getting double for sticking to his statement. Yet both stories were true, though quite accidentally so, of course. This is what it is to have a bad character. Neither boy, however, felt any ill-will whatever at the schoolmaster. They considered that he was there in order to lick them. For this he was paid by their parents' money, and it would have been a fraud if he had not duly earned his money by dusting their jackets daily. Let it be said at once that he did most conscientiously earn his money, and seldom overlooked any of his pupils even for a day.

Back at the Grannoch bridge, under the parapet, Allan Welsh, the minister of the Kirk of the Marrow, found the white packet lying which Winsome had tied with such care. He looked all round to see whence it had come. Then taking it in his hand, he looked at it a long time silently, and with a strange and not unkindly expression on his face. He lifted it to his lips and kissed the handwriting which addressed it to Master Ralph Peden. As he paced away he carefully put it in the inner pocket of his coat. Then, with his head farther forward than ever, and the immanence of his great brow overshadowing his ascetic face, he set himself slowly to climb the brae.

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CHAPTER TWENTY THREE KIT'S EYES ARE OPENED

(From *Kit Kennedy*, 1899)

Kit stopped abashed and ashamed. There is doubtless, a disembodied moral law, a spiritual essence of right somewhere in the air about us, but we seldom let it alight on us till it comes in human guise. We rather shoo it off like a troublesome fly.

Kit Kennedy remembered for the first time that he ought to have gone to school.

'Kit,' said Liliac MacWalter, with sad directness, 'you are playing truant.'

'Yes,' said Kit, hanging his head, and standing meanwhile like a spare young Apollo erect before his mother. The moral law had alighted now.

There was a basket by his mother's side covered with a white napkin. She had been on her way to meet Heather Jock and his donkey as he passed along the highway, that he might take it to the Crae Cottage. She had not seen her father or her mother for many months.

Without saying a word Liliac took the napkin from the basket, and calling Kit to her she began, with strange thrills and upleapings of her mother's heart, to rub some warmth into the boy's chilled limbs. She had not done so much since he was a little lad of three

years old. This made her glad that she had chanced upon him that morning, though she meant to speak seriously to the boy all the same. For the space of five long minutes both were silent, the tears welling up in the woman's averted eyes, and the boy casting about for some non-committal subject of conversation.

Then, garment by garment, she helped him on with his clothes, till he stood completely arrayed before her.

Royal had swum and barked, and barked and swum between the deeps and the shallows ever since Kit's desertion. But now he came up the bank, sheepishly wagging his lank wet tail, keeping meanwhile one eye on the intentions of Liliass's hand and one on her uncovered basket.

'Kit,' said his mother, gravely, 'sit down. I want to speak to you.'

Much subdued Kit sat down. He wished that he had been suffering under Dominie Duncanson's taws instead. But he sat meekly down as he was bidden.

Royal settled himself upon his haunches a few yards below on a spit of broiling shingle, cocking his ears alternately at these inexplicable humans, who on such a morning preferred the land to the water, and, having a basket of delicacies such as he could see plainly with his nose, went on making foolish noises with their mouths. Royal could have shown them a better use for these last.

'Kit,' said his mother, 'I have been thinking for a long while that you are old enough to be told what is before you. You are nearly eleven, and older than most boys of twelve or fourteen. I did not mean to trouble you yet, for Mr. Duncanson says that you are doing well at school. But now I must speak. You are getting wild and playing truant. I will not rage upon you. Kit. I will only tell you that if you go on in the way you are doing you will break your mother's heart.'

'Oh, mither!' cried Kit, tears springing into eyes which would not have been wet for the best whipping that Duncan Duncanson could have given, 'I forgot. I did not mean to—at least, I didna ken ye were comin' this road.'

'No,' said his mother, gently, 'that is just it. You did not think; you did not mean any wrong. You did not expect to be found out. That is exactly the way to break a mother's heart.'

Kit hung his head. The moral law was biting steadily now.

'Kit,' she went on, after a pause of strengthening silence and upward appeal, 'Kit, laddie mine, I want you to be a good man, a true man. I think you will be a clever man—you have it in you. Listen, Kit. Once I knew a very clever man—not a bad man, but one who, like you, did not think, did not mean, did not care, so long as he was not found out. Kit, your mother would have been the happiest woman in the world if that man had thought, had meant, had remembered. But—he broke my heart and made my life a living death. Now my heart grows alive again to look at you. But, oh, Kit, I see something of that man in you. I would rather see you lie dead before me than that you should break any woman's heart as that man broke mine!'

'Was he my father?' asked Kit, in a low awed tone, not looking at his mother, but down at the loch, which somehow seemed suddenly to have grown misty and far away.

'He was your father,' said the woman Liliass, very softly.

There was a long silence between them twain, so long that Royal dropped his head and pretended to go to sleep.

'Is he dead, mither?' said Kit at last, the realities of life humming in his ears and making his heart like chill water within him.

'No, he is not dead,' said Liliias MacWalter, her face looking ashen gray and drawn in the insolent optimism of the morning sunshine.

Kit thought a while, and then said, with an indignant ring in his voice, 'How you must hate him, mither!'

There was a little rustling beyond the dyke in the broom into which Kit had thrown the stick. A thrush which had flown in as if to visit its nest flew out again, 'cherk-ing' crossly.

His mother did not answer, so Kit repeated his words: 'How you must hate that man, mither.'

With eyes pulsing and misty, like the sky over the Northern sea where the ice floats, Liliias replied. She did not sigh—sighing is for hopeful people who are only temporarily unhappy. But this woman was hopeless, expectationless, convicted on a life sentence from which she did not mean to appeal.

'Hate him — no. I do not hate that man, Kit, she said, slowly, but very distinctly. 'Rather, God forgive him and me — I love him still. For a woman who once loves truly, Kit, as I loved your father, there is in this life no escape, no hope. I do not know about the next. At any rate she loves to the end. You do not understand. Nor can any man fully understand. Like a wasp that is crushed a man turns to sting that which hurts him. But when a woman is bruised, wounded to the death, ground to powder, if the heel be the heel of the man she loves, it cannot grind the great love out of her heart. Such love as this, Kit, does not come at will. It does not go at bidding. It is there, Kit. You do not understand. You never will wholly, for you are a man. But that is the truth. God has made woman so that because I loved that man once I must love him always.'

The relieving tears welled up silently in the gray-blue eyes. There they stood for a moment like water in an overfull glass held by a sort of surface tension. Then they ran slowly over and dripped unheeded one by one upon her lap. One fell on Kit's hand. It was warm.

'Oh, mither, dinna!' he cried, agonized, snatching his hand away with the swift intolerance of youth for mental suffering—an unknown and foolish thing to healthy childhood.

'Do you love Walter MacWalter?' said Kit, presently with the remorseless curiosity of youth, whose inquiries sometimes sting like lashes, sometimes cut like knives.

Liliias started at his words. She formed her lips for some vehement answer. But it was unspoken. The fire that leaped into her eyes died out as swiftly. For a space she was silent, and when she spoke it was in a low, even, colourless voice.

'No,' she said, 'I do not love Walter MacWalter.'

'Did you never love him?' pursued pitiless youth.

'I never loved him.'

'Then why did you marry him?'

In all her life's trials Liliias never had to endure (save once) any moment so terrible as this.

She tried to speak, but a pulsing check rose rebelliously in her throat, and she stammered like a speaker who has suddenly forgotten his next sentence.

'Kit — Kit! Oh, Kit,' she gasped, 'you are cruel. My lad—my lad—but you do not mean to be. I will tell you—yes, you shall know. I married Walter MacWalter because I thought my heart was dead—Because of the man, your father. I thought he did not love me, that he had deceived me. My mother said, 'Marry the man for your father's sake. The debt crushes him to the ground. He is a good man. Love will come afterwards.' I did

wrong. Kit, I sinned against love. But do not hate me. Kit. I will die if you hate me. I have gotten so little out of life—I who expected so much. I cannot bear that you should hate me, Kit. At least, I have not deserved that.'

The boy felt the tears well up in his own eyes. He did not understand. He could not. Yet Liliias was wise, for the effort to understand made a deeper impression on Kit's mind than if he had understood all. The mystery of suffering sobered him. He grew older and wiser each moment. By instinct this woman had reached the truth that to make children trust you, you must appeal to their understandings as well as to their hearts.

Kit Kennedy reached his hand across to his mother and laid it on hers. She took her left hand and gently patted it. Then she went on again.

'My boy,' she said, 'I did wrong. I sinned against love. But I have been punished, and God, I think, looks upon it so. Whom He loveth He chasteneth. I heard Mr. Osborne say it. But not as if he knew it. Not as I know it. If I have sinned greatly I have also been greatly punished, and God does not exact the penalty in both worlds. Kit, be a good man. Be true. Speak the truth and take the consequences. If you do wrong, as you will, stand up to the punishment. Kit, do not run from trouble, as—as he did. If he had remained God knows how proudly, how gladly I would have stood by his side—aye, through disgrace, penury, and death. But he was afraid and went away. Oh, Kit, do not flinch, stand up to the storm, and be sure that the woman who loves you will stand beside you. I tell you her heart will be proud and rejoicing because she knows it is done for the man she loves.'

A rabbit or some wild thing stirred in the broom bush. Kit turned his head quickly, but saw nothing.

Having spoken out, Liliias MacWalter's heart was happier than it had been for years. The burden was eased. An unseen hand seemed to lift it from her shoulders.

'You do not hate me for this, Kit?' she said, with a yearning pitifulness in her eyes.

The boy sobbed one great sob, felt his face go cold, and then fell on his mother's neck. 'Mither!' was all he said.

And from the heart of Liliias, the sinned-against, the year-long pain ebbed away.

It was some time before these two friends found articulate words again. When they did it was the woman who began to speak in a hushed tone. Kit had forgotten his eleven years, his adult superiority, his dignity of man. He lay with his head on his mother's breast. She kissed his hair and brow as often as she would. And that was not seldom. God did not grudge her this season and slowed the universe to make it longer. He had done as much for Joshua upon a less important occasion. But overhead a dark and threatening cloud drew down from the Girthon Hills, thunder brooding within its blue-black bosom.

'Kit,' the woman said, gently, 'you are a clever boy. I want you to be something in the world. I am sure you can be if you like. For your mother's sake, try. You must do it for yourself. I cannot help you. Your grandfather and grandmother are too poor to aid you. You must help yourself. I do not want you to be only a ploughman. There is more in you than that. Only remember that mere money-making is nothing, Kit; I want you to be a scholar, like your father. But with the strength he had not. Perhaps one day, who knows, God may repent Him of the evil. No, I must not think of it. It is impossible!' She paused, and was silent a long while.

Kit did not interrupt or ask any questions this time. He was pillowed contentedly under his mother's chin. He liked it—when he was sure that no one could see him. Also he was forming great resolves within him. For a boy of eleven can make resolves—and sometimes keep them better than a man of forty.

'Mither, I am going to be a great man,' said the reformed truant. And even as he spoke there came a vivid flash, and the thunder broke above in sonorous mirth at Kit's daring!

'All right, we'll see!' said Kit Kennedy, leaping up and shaking his fist at the elements.