

**A**  
**SON OF THE SOIL.**

BY  
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# **A SON OF THE SOIL.**

## CHAPTER I.

“I SAY, you boy, it always rains here, doesn’t it?—or ‘whiles snaws’—as the aborigines say. You’re a native, ar’nt you? When do you think the rain will go off?—do you ever have any fine weather here? I don’t see the good of a fine country when it rains for ever and ever! What do you do with yourselves, you people, all the year round in such a melancholy place?”

“You see we know no better”—said the farmer of Ramore, who came in at this moment to the porch of his house, where the young gentleman was standing, confronted by young Colin, who would have exploded in boyish rage before now, if he had not been restrained by the knowledge that his mother was within hearing—“and, wet or dry, the country-side comes natural to them it belongs to. If it werena for a twinge o’ the rheumatics noo and then—and my lads are ower young for that—it’s a grand country. If it’s nae great comfort to the purse, it’s aye a pleasure to the e’e. Come in to the fire, and take a seat till the rain blows by. *My lads,*” said Colin of Ramore, with a twinkle of approbation in his eye, “take little heed whether it’s rain or shine.”

“I’m of a different opinion,” said the stranger, “I don’t like walking up to the ankles in those filthy roads.” He was a boy of fifteen or so, the same age as young Colin, who stood opposite him breathing hard with opposition and natural enmity; but the smart Etonian considered himself much more a man of the world and of experience than Colin the elder, and looked on the boy with calm contempt. “I’ll be glad to dry my boots if you’ll let me,” he said,

holding up a foot which beside young Colin's sturdy hoof looked preternaturally small and dainty.

"A fit like a lassie's!" the country boy said to himself with responsive disdain. Young Colin laughed half aloud as his natural enemy followed his father into the house.

"He's feared to wet his feet," said the lad, with a chuckle of mockery, holding forth his own, which to his consciousness were never dry. Any moralist, who had happened to be at hand, might have suggested to Colin that a faculty for acquiring and keeping up wet feet during every hour of the twenty-four which he did not spend in bed was no great matter to brag of: but then moralists did not flourish at Ramore. The boy made a rush out through the soft-falling incessant rain, dashed down upon the shingly beach with an impetuosity which dispersed the wet pebbles on all sides of him, and jumping into the boat, pushed out upon the loch, not for any particular purpose, but to relieve a little his indignation and boyish discomfiture. The boat was clumsy enough, and young Colin's "style" in rowing was not of a high order, but it caught the quick eye of the Eton lad, as he glanced out from the window.

"That fellow can row," he said to himself, but aloud, with the *nonchalance* of his race, as he went forward, passing the great cradle which stood on one side of the fire, to the chair which the farmer's wife had placed for him. She received with many kindly homely invitations and welcomes the serene young potentate as he approached her fireside throne.

"Come awa—come in to the fire. The roads are past speaking o' in this soft weather. Maybe the young gentleman would like to change his feet," said the soft-voiced woman, who sat in a wicker-

work easy chair, with a very small baby, and cheeks still pale from its recent arrival. She had soft, dark, beaming eyes, and the softest pink flush coming and going over her face, and was wrapped in a shawl, and evidently considered an invalid—which, for the mother of five or six children, and the mistress of Ramore Farm, was an honourable but inconvenient luxury. “I could bring you a pair of my Colin’s stockings in a moment. I dare say they’re about your size—or if you would like to gang ben the house into the spare room, and change them——”

“Oh, thanks; but there is no need for that,” said the visitor, with a slight blush, being conscious, as even an Eton boy could not help being, of the humorous observation of the farmer, who had come in behind him, and in whose eyes it was evident the experienced “man” of the fifth form was a less sublime personage than he gave himself credit for being. “I am living down at the Castle,” he added, hastily; “I lost my way on the hills, and got dreadfully wet; otherwise I don’t mind the rain.” And he held the dainty boots, which steamed in the heat, to the fire.

“But you maunna gang out to the hills in such slight things again,” said Mrs. Campbell, looking at them compassionately; “I’ll get you a pair of my Colin’s strong shoes and stockings that’ll keep your feet warm. I’ll just lay the wean in the cradle, and you can slip them off the time I’m away,” said the good woman, with a passing thought for the boy’s bashfulness. But the farmer caught her by the arm and kept her in her chair.

“I suppose there’s mair folk than you about the house, Jeannie?” said her husband, “though you’re so positive about doing everything yoursel’. I’ll tell the lass; and I advise you, young



gentleman, not to be shamefaced, but take the wife's advice. It's a great quality o' hers to ken what's good for other folk."

"I ken by mysel'," said the gentle-voiced wife, with a smile—and she got up and went softly to the window, while the young stranger took her counsel. "There's Colin out in the boat again, in a perfect pour of rain," she said to herself, with a gentle sigh—"he'll get his death o' cauld; but, to be sure, if he had been to get his death that gate, it would have come afore now. There's a great deal of rain in this country, you'll be thinking?—a' the strangers say sae; but I canna see that they bide away for a' that, though they're aye grumblin'. And if you're fond o' the hills, you'll get reconciled to the rain. I've seen mony an afternoon when there was scarce an hour without two or three rainbows, and the mist liftin' and droppin' again, as if it was set to music. I canna say I have any experience mysel', but so far as ane can imagine, a clear sky and a shining sun, day after day, would be awfu' monotonous—like a face wi' a set smile. I tell the bairns it's as guid as a fairy-tale to watch the clouds—and it's no common sunshine when it does come, but a kind o' wistful light, as if he couldna tell whether he ever might see you again; but it's awfu' when the crops are out, as they are the noo—the Lord forgive me for speaking as if I liked the rain!"

And by this time her boy-visitor, having succeeded, much to his comfort and disgust, in replacing his wet *chaussures* by Colin's dry, warm stockings and monstrous shoes, Mrs. Campbell came back to her seat and lifted her baby again on her knee. The baby was of angelic disposition, and perfectly disposed to make itself comfortable in its cradle, but the usually active mother evidently made it a kind of excuse to herself for her compulsory repose.

“The wife gets easy to her poetry,” said the farmer, with a smile, “which is pleasant enough to hear, though it doesn’t keep the grain from sprouting. You’re fond o’ the hills, you Southland folk? You’ll be from level land yoursel’, I reckon?—where a’ the craps were safe housed afore the weather broke? We have nae particular reason to complain yet, if we could but make sure o’ a week or twa’s dry weather. It’ll be the holidays still with you?”

“Yes,” said young Frankland, slightly disgusted at being so calmly set down as a schoolboy.

“I hear there’s some grand schools in England,” said Mrs. Campbell; “no’ that they’re to compare wi’ Edinburgh, I suppose? Colin, there’s some sherry wine in the press; I think a glass wouldna’ harm the young gentleman after his wetting. He’ll take something any-way, if you would tell Jess. It’s hungry work climbing our hills for a laddie like you—at least if I may reckon by my ain laddies that are aye ready at meal times,” said the farmer’s wife, with a gracious smile that would not have misbecome a duchess. “You’ll be at ane o’ the great schools, I suppose? I aye like to learn what I can when there’s ony opportunity. I would like my Colin to get a’ the advantages, for he’s well worthy o’ a good education, though we’re rather out of the way of it here.”

“I am at Eton,” said the English boy, who could scarcely refrain from a little ridicule at the idea of sharing “a’ the advantages” of that distinguished foundation with a colt like young Colin; “but I should think you would find it too far off to send your son there,” he added, all his good breeding being unable to smother a slight laugh as he looked round the homely apartment, and wondered what “all the fellows” would say to a schoolfellow from Ramore.

“Nae occasion to laugh, young gentleman,” said Colin the elder; “there’s been Lord Chancellors o’ England, and generals o’ a’ the forces, that have come out of houses nae better than this. I am just as ye find me, but I wouldna’ say what might befall our Colin. In this country there’s nae law to bind a man, to the same line o’ life as his fathers. Despise naebody, my man, or you may live to be despised in your turn.”

“I beg your pardon,” said young Frankland, blushing hotly, and feeling Colin’s shoes weigh upon his feet like lead; “I did not intend——”

“No, no,” said Mrs. Campbell, soothingly; “it’s the maister that takes up fancies; but nae doubt Eton is far ower expensive for the like of us, and a bit callant like you may laugh without ony offence. When Colin comes to be a man he’ll make his ain company, or I’m mista’en; but I’ve no wish to pit him amang lords and gentlemen’s sons that would jeer at his homely ways. And they tell me there’s schules in Edinburgh far afore onything that’s kent in England—besides the college,” said the mother, with a little pride; “our Colin’s done with his schuling. Education takes longer wi’ the like of you. After Martinmas he’s gaun in to Glasgow to begin his *course*.”

To this proud intimation the young visitor listened in silence, not being able to connect the roughshod lad in the boat with a University, whatever might be its form. He addressed himself instead to the scones and butter which Jess the servant, a handsome, powerful woman of five feet eight or so, had set before him on the table. Jess lingered a little, ere she left the room, to pinch the baby’s cheeks, and say, “Bless the lamb! eh, what a guid bairn!” with patriarchal friendly familiarity. Meanwhile the farmer sat

down, with a thump which made it creak, upon the large old haircloth sofa which filled up one end of the room.

“I’ve heard there’s a great difference between our colleges and the colleges in England,” said Colin. “Wi’ you they dinna train a lad to onything in particular; wi’ us it’s a’ for a profession,—the kirk, or the law, or physick, as it may be,—a far mair sensible system. I’m no sure it’s just civil, though,” said the farmer, with a quaint mingling of Scotch complacency and Scotch politeness, “to talk to a stranger of naething but the inferiority o’ his ain country. It may be a’ true enough, but there’s pleasanter topics o’ discourse. The Castle’s a bonnie situation? and if you’re fond o’ the water, yachting, and boating, and that kind o’ thing, there’s grand opportunity amang our lochs.”

“We’ve got a yacht,” said the boy, who found the scones much to his taste, and began to feel a glow of comfort diffusing itself through his inner man—“the fastest sailer I know. We made a little run yesterday down to the Kyles; but Sir Thomas prefers the grouse, though it’s awfully hard work, I can tell you, going up those hills. It’s so beastly wet,” said the young hero. “I never was down here before; but Sir Thomas comes every year to the Highlands; he likes it—he’s as strong as a horse—but I prefer the yacht, for my part.”

“And who’s Sir Thomas, if ane may speer—some friend?” said the farmer’s wife.

“Oh—he’s my father!” said the Etonian; and a natural flush of shamefacedness at acknowledging such a relationship rose upon the countenance of the British boy.

“Your father?” said Mrs. Campbell, with some amazement, “that’s an awfu’ queer way to speak of your father; and have you ony brothers and sisters that you’re this lang distance off your lane,—and your mamma maybe anxious about you?” continued the kind mother, with a wistful look of inquiry. She was prepared to be sorry for him, concluding that a boy who spoke of his father in such terms, must be motherless, and a neglected child. It was the most tender kind of curiosity which animated the good woman. She formed a theory about the lad on the spot, as women do, and concluded that his cruel father paid no regard to him, and that the boy’s heart had been hardened by neglect and want of love. “Figure our Colin ca’ing the maister Mr. Campbell!” she said to herself, and looked very pitifully at young Frankland, who ate his scone without any consciousness of her amiable imaginations.

“Oh, I’m not afraid,” said the calm youth. “She knows better; there’s ten of us, and some one of the family comes to grief most days, you know. She’s used to that. Besides, I’ll get home long before Sir Thomas. It’s only four now, and I suppose one could walk down from here—how soon?” All this time he went on so steadily at the scones and the milk, that the heart of the farmer’s wife warmed to the possessor of such a frank and appreciative appetite.

“You might put the horse in the gig and drive the young gentleman down,” said the soft-hearted woman; “or Colin could row him in the boat as far as the pier. It’s a lang walk for such a callant, and you’re no thrang. It’s awfu’ to think o’ the rain, how it’s taking the bread out of us poor folk’s mouths; but to be sure it’s the Lord’s will—if it be na,” said the homely speculator, “that the weather’s ane of the things that has been permitted, for wise reasons, to fa’ into Ither Hands; and I’m sure, judging by the way it

comes just when it's no' wanted, ane might think so, mony a time, in this country side. But ah! it's sinfu' to speak,—and look at yon bonnie rainbow,” she continued, turning to the window with her baby in her arms.

Young Frankland got up slowly as he finished his scone. He was only partially sensible of the extreme beauty of the scene before him; but the farmer's wife stood with her baby in her arms, with hidden lights kindling in her soft eyes, expanding and beaming over the lovely landscape. It did her good like a cordial; though even Colin, her sensible husband, looked on, with a smile upon his good-humoured countenance, and was a little amused and much puzzled, as he had been a hundred times before—seeing his wife's pleasure in those common and every-day processes of nature, to know why.

Young Colin in the boat understood better,—he was lying on his oars gazing at it the same moment; arrested in his petulant boyish thoughts, as she had been in her anxieties, the lad came out of, and lost himself in the scene. The sun had burst out suddenly upon the noble range of hills which stretched across the upper end of the loch—that wistful tender sun which shone out always, dazzling with pathetic gleams of sudden love in this country, “as if he couldna tell whether he might ever see you again,” as Mrs. Campbell said—and, just catching the skirts of the rain, had flung a double rainbow across the sheltered lovely curve of the upper banks. One side of the arch stooping over the heathery hillside, lighted it up with an unearthly glory, and the other came down in stately columns one grand shaft within the other, with solid magnificence and steadiness, into the water. Young Frankland at the window could not help thinking within himself, what a beautiful picture it would make, “if any of those painter fellows

could do a rainbow;” but as for young Colin in the boat, the impulse in his heart was to dash up to those heavenly archways, and embrace the shining pillar, and swing himself aloft half-boy, half-poet, to that celestial world, where fiery columns may stand fast upon moving waters—and all is true, but nothing real. The hills, for their share, lay very quiet, taking no part in the momentary drama of the elements; standing passive, letting the sudden light search them over and over, as if seeking for hidden treasure. Just in the midst of the blackness of the rain, never was light and joy so sweet and sudden. The farmer’s wife came away from the window with a sigh of pleasure, as the baby stirred in her arms; “Eh, but the world’s bonnie, bonnie!” she said to herself, with a feeling that some event of joyful importance had just been enacted before her. As for the boy on the loch, who, being younger, was more abstracted from common affairs, his dream was interrupted loudly by a call from the door: “Come in wi’ the boat; I’ve a message to gie ye for the pier,” cried the farmer, at the top of his voice; and the country boy started back to himself, and made a dash at his oars, and pulled inshore as violently and unhandsomely as if the nature of his dreams had been found out, and he was ashamed of himself. Colin forgot all the softening influences of the scene, and all the fine thoughts that had, unconscious to himself, come into his head, when he found that the commission his father meant to give him was that of rowing the stranger-boy as far as the pier, which was about three miles farther down the loch. If disobedience had been an offence understood at Ramore, possibly he might have refused; but neither boy nor man, however well-inclined, is likely to succeed in doing, the first time of trying, a kind of sin with which he has no acquaintance. To give Colin justice, he did his best, and showed a cordial inclination to make himself disagreeable. He came in so clumsily that the boat

grounded a yard or two off shore, and would not by any coaxing be persuaded to approach nearer. And when young Frankland, much to his amazement, leapt on board without wetting his feet, as the country lad maliciously intended, and came against Colin with such force as almost to knock him down, the young boatman thrust his passenger forward very rudely, and was as near capsizing the boat as pride would permit him. "Sit forrit in the stern, sit forrit. Were ye never in a boat afore, that ye think I can row and you sitting there?" said the unchristian Colin, bringing one of the oars heavily against his adversary's shins.

"What the deuce do you mean by that? Give me the oar! We don't row like that on the Thames, I can tell you," said the stranger; and the brief skirmish between them for the possession of the oar having terminated abruptly by the intervention of Colin the elder, who was still within hearing, the two boys set off, sullenly enough, down the loch. The rainbow was dying off by this time, the clouds rolling out again over the hills; and the celestial pillars and heavenly archways had no longer, as may be supposed, since this rude invasion of the real and disagreeable, the least remnant of ground to stand upon in the thoughts of young Colin of Ramore.



## CHAPTER II.

“YE saw the young gentleman safe to the pier? He’s a bonnie lad, though maybe no as weel-mannered as ane would like to see,” said Mrs. Campbell. “Keep me! such a way to name his father—Bairns maun be awfu’ neglected in such a grand house—aye left wi’ servants, and never trained to trust their bits of secrets to father or mother. Laddies,” said the farmer’s wife, with a little solemnity, looking across the sleeping baby upon the four heads of different sizes which bent over their supper at the table before her, “mind you aye, that, right or wrong, them that’s maist interested in whatever befalls you is them that belongs to you—maist ready to praise if ye’ve done weel, and excuse you if ye’ve done wrang. I hope you were civil to the strange callant, Colin, my man?”

“Oh, ay,” said young Colin, not without a movement of conscience; but he did not think it necessary to enter into details.

“When a callant like that is pridefu’, and looks as if he thought himself better than other folk, I hope my laddies are no the ones to mind,” said the mistress of Ramore. “It shows he hasna had the advantages that might have been expected. It’s nae harm to you, but a great deal o’ harm to him. Ye dinna ken how weel off you are, you boys,” said the mother, making a little address to them as they sat over their supper; Little Johnnie, whose porridge was too hot for him, turned towards her the round, wondering black eyes, which beamed out like a pair of stray stars from his little freckled face, and through his wisps of flaxen hair, bleached white by rain and sun; but the three others went on very steadily with their supper, and did not disturb themselves; “there’s aye your father at

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