PROLOGUE

Time, my grandfather used to say, stood still in that glen of his. But the truth of the saying did not survive his death, and the first daisies had scarcely withered on his grave before a new world was knocking at the gate. That was thirty years ago, and to-day the revolution is complete. The parish name has been changed; the white box of a kirk which served the glen for more than two centuries has been rebuilt in red suburban gothic; a main railway line now runs down the Aller, and the excellent summer service brings holiday-makers from a hundred miles distant: houses and shops have clustered under the Hill of Deer; there may be found a well-reputed boarding school for youth, two inns—both of them reformed—a garage, and a bank agent. The centre of importance has moved from the old village to the new town by the station, and even the old village is no more a clachan of thatched roofs straggling by a burn-side. Some enemy of the human race has taught the burn to run straight like a sewer, and has spanned it with a concrete bridge, while the thatch of the houses has been replaced by slates of a metallic green. Only the ruins of the old kirkton have not been meddled with; these stand as I remember them, knee-deep in docks and nettles, defended by a crumbling dry-stone dyke against inquisitive cattle from Crossbasket.

The old folk are gone, too, and their very names are passing from the countryside. Long before my day the Hawkshaws had disappeared from Calidon, but there was a respectable Edinburgh burgess family who had come there in the seventeenth century; now these have given place to a rawer burgess graft from the West. The farmers are mostly new men, and even the peasant, who should be the enduring stock, has shifted his slow bones. I learned from the postman that in Woodilee to-day there was no Monfries, no Sprot, but one Pennecuik, and only two bearers of the names of Ritchie and Shillinglaw, which had once been plentiful as ragwort. In such a renovated world it was idle to hope to find surviving the tales which had perplexed my childhood. No one could tell me when or why the kirk by the Crossbasket march became a ruin, and its gravestones lay buried in weeds. Most did not even know that it had been a kirk.

I was not greatly surprised by this, for the kirk of Woodilee had not been used for the better part of three centuries; and even as a child I could not find many to tell me of its last minister. The thing had sunk from a tale to an "owercome," a form of words which every one knew but which few could interpret. It was Jess Blane, the grieve's daughter,

who first stirred my curiosity. In a whirl of wrath at some of my doings she prayed that the fate of the minister of Woodilee might be mine—a fate which she expounded as to be "claught by the Deil and awa' wi'." A little scared, I carried the affair to my nurse, who was gravely scandalized, and denounced Jess as a "shamefu' tawpie, fyling the wean's mind wi' her black lees." "Dinna you be feared, dearie," she reassured me. "It wasna the Deil that cam' for the minister o' Woodilee. I've aye heard tell that he was a guid man and a kind man. It was the Fairies, hinny. And he leev'd happy wi' them and dee'd happy, and never drank out o' an empty cup." I took my information, I remember, to the clan of children who were my playmates, and they spread it among their households and came back with confirmation or contradiction. Some held for the Devil, some for the Fairies—a proof that tradition spoke with two voices. The Fairy school slightly outnumbered the others, and in a battle one April evening close to the ruined kirk we routed the diabolists and established our version as the canon. But save for that solitary fact—that the minister of Woodilee had gone off with the Fairies—the canon remained bare.

Years later I got the tale out of many books and places: a folio in the library of a Dutch college, the muniment-room of a Catholic family in Lancashire, notes in a copy of the second Latin edition of Wishart's Montrose, the diaries of a captain of Hebron's and of a London glove-maker, the exercise book of a seventeenth-century Welsh schoolgirl. I could piece the story together well enough, but at first I found it hard to fit it to the Woodilee that I knew—that decorous landscape, prim, determinate, without a hint of mystery; the bare hilltops, bleak at seasons, but commonly of a friendly Pickwickian baldness, skirted with methodically-planned woods of selected conifers, and girdled with mathematical stone dykes; the even, ruled fields of the valley bottom; the studied moderation of the burns in a land meticulously drained; the dapper glass and stone and metal of the village. Two miles off, it was true, ran the noble untamed streams of Aller; beyond them the hills rose in dark fields to mid-sky, with the glen of the Rood making a sword-cut into their heart. But Woodilee itself—whither had fled the savour? Once, I knew from the books, the great wood of Melanudrigill had descended from the heights and flowed in black waves to the village brink. But I could not re-create the picture out of glistening asphalted highway, singing telegraph wires, spruce dwellings, model pastures, and manicured woodlands.

Then one evening from the Hill of Deer I saw with other eyes. There was a curious leaden sky, with a blue break about sunset, so that the shadows lay oddly. My first thought, as I looked at the familiar scene,

was that, had I been a general in a campaign, I should have taken special note of Woodilee, for it was a point of vantage. It lay right in the pass between the Scottish midlands and the south—the pass of road and water—yes, and—shall I say?—of spirit, for it was in the throat of the hills, on the march between the sown and the desert. I was looking east, and to my left and behind me the open downs, farmed to their last decimal of capacity, were the ancient land of Manann, the capital province of Pictdom. The colliery headgear on the horizon, the trivial moorish hilltops, the dambrod-pattern fields, could never tame wholly for me that land's romance, and on this evening I seemed to be gazing at a thing antique and wolfish, tricked out for the moment with a sheep's coat… . To my right rose the huddle of great hills which cradle all our rivers. To them time and weather bring little change, yet in that eerie light, which revealed in hard outline while it obscured in detail, they seemed too remote and awful to be the kindly giants with whose glens I daily conversed… . At my feet lay Woodilee, and a miracle had been wrought, for a gloom like the shadow of an eclipse seemed to have crept over the parish. I saw an illusion, which I knew to be such, but which my mind accepted, for it gave me the vision I had been seeking.

It was the Woodilee of three hundred years ago. And my mind, once given the cue, set out things not presented by the illuded eye… . There were no highways—only tracks, miry in the bogs and stony on the braes, which led to Edinburgh on one hand and to Carlisle on the other. I saw few houses, and these were brown as peat, but on the knowe of the old kirkton I saw the four grey walls of the kirk, and the manse beside it among elders and young ashes. Woodilee was not now a parish lying open to the eye of sun and wind. It was no more than a tiny jumble of crofts, bounded and pressed in upon by something vast and dark, which clothed the tops of all but the highest hills, muffled the ridges, choked the glens and overflowed almost to the edge of the waters—which lay on the landscape like a shaggy fur cast loosely down. My mouth shaped the word "Melanudrigill," and I knew that I saw Woodilee as no eye had seen it for three centuries, when, as its name tells, it still lay in the shadow of a remnant of the Wood of Caledon, that most ancient forest where once Merlin harped and Arthur mustered his men… .

An engine whistled in the valley, a signal-box sprang into light, and my vision passed. But as I picked my way down the hillside in the growing dusk I realized that all memory of the encircling forest had not gone from Woodilee in my childhood, though the name of Melanudrigill had been forgotten. I could hear old Jock Dodds, who had been keeper on

Calidon for fifty years, telling tales for my delectation as he sat and smoked on the big stone beside the smithy. He would speak of his father, and his father's father, and the latter had been a great hero with his flint-lock gun. "He would lie in the moss or three on the winter mornin's, and him an auld man, and get the wild swans and the grey geese when they cam' ower frae Clyde to Aller. Ay, and mony's the deer he would kill." And when I pointed out that there were no deer in the countryside, Jock shook his head and said that in his grandfather's day the Black Wood was not all destroyed. "There was a muckle lump on Windyways, and anither this side o' Reiverslaw." But if I asked for more about the Wood, Jock was vague. Some said it had been first set by the Romans, others by Auld Michael Scott himself… . "A grand hidy-hole for beasts and an unco bit for warlocks." … Its downfall had begun long ago in the Dear Years, and the last of it had been burnt for firewood in his father's day, in the winter of the Sixteen Drifty Days… .

I remembered, too, that there had been places still sacrosanct and feared. To Mary Cross, a shapeless stone in a field of bracken, no one would go in the spring or summer gloaming, but the girls decked it with wild flowers at high noon of Midsummer Day. There was a stretch of Woodilee burn, between the village and the now-drained Fennan Moss, where trout, it was believed, were never found. Above all, right in the heart of Reiverslaw's best field of turnips was a spring, which we children knew as Katie Thirsty, but which the old folk called the Minister's Well, and mentioned always with a shake of the head or a sigh, for it was there, they said, that the minister of Woodilee had left the earth for Fairyland.

Chapter 1

THE COMING OF THE MINISTER

The Reverend David Sempill began his ministry in Woodilee on the fifteenth day of August in the year of grace sixteen hundred and forty-four. He was no stranger to the glen, for as a boy he had spent his holidays with his grandfather, who was the miller of Roodfoot. In that year when the horn of the Kirk was exalted the voice of a patron mattered less; Mr. Sempill had been, as they said, "popularly called," and so entered upon his office with the eager interest of the parish which had chosen him. A year before he had been licensed by the presbytery of Edinburgh; he was ordained in Woodilee in the present year on the last Sabbath of June, and "preached in" on the first Sabbath of August by the weighty voice of Mungo Muirhead, the minister of Kirk Aller. His plenishing—chiefly books—had come from Edinburgh on eight pack-horses, and, having escaped the perils of Carnwath Moss, was now set out in an upper chamber of the little damp manse, which stood between the kirk and Woodilee burn. A decent widow woman, Isobel Veitch by name, had been found to keep his house, and David himself, now that all was ready, had ridden over on his grey cob from his cousin's at Newbiggin and taken seisin of his new home. He had sung as he came in sight of Woodilee; he had prayed with bowed head as he crossed the manse threshold; but as he sat in the closet which he named his "study," and saw his precious books on the shelf, and the table before him on which great works would be written, and outside the half-glazed window the gooseberry bushes of the garden and the silver links of the burn, he had almost wept with pure gratitude and content.

His first hour he had spent exploring his property. The manse was little and squat, and gave lodging in its heather-thatched roof to more than one colony of bees. The front abutted on the kirkton road, save for a narrow strip of green edged with smooth white stones from the burn. The back looked on a garden, where stood a score of apple trees, the small wild fruit of which was scarcely worth the gathering. There was

also a square of green for bleaching clothes, a gean tree, a plot of gilly-flowers and monkshood, and another of precious herbs like clary, penny-royal, and marjoram. At one end of the manse stood a brewhouse and a granary or girnel, for the storing of the minister's stipend meal; at the other a stable for two beasts, a byre with three stalls, a hen-house of mud, and, in the angle of the dykes of the kirk loan, a midden among nettles.

Indoors the place was not commodious, and even on that warm August day a chill struck upward from the earthen floors. The low-ceiled lobby had no light but the open door. To the right of it was the living-room with a boarded ceiling, a wooden floor, and roughly plastered walls, where the minister's eight-day clock (by John Atchison, Leith, 1601) had now acclimatized itself. To the left lay Isobel's kitchen, with a door leading to the brewhouse, and Isobel's press-bed at the back of it, and a small dog-hole of a cellar. The upper story was reached by a wooden staircase as steep as a ladder, which opened direct into the minister's bedroom—an apartment of luxury, for it had a fireplace. One door led from it to the solitary guest-chamber; another to a tiny hearth-less room, which was his study or closet, and which at the moment ranked in his mind as the most miraculous of his possessions.

David ranged around like a boy back from school, and indeed with his thick, sandy hair and ruddy countenance and slim, straight back he seemed scarcely to have outgrown the schoolboy. He spilt the browst in the brewhouse, and made a spectacle of himself with pease-meal in the girnel. Isobel watched him anxiously out of doors, where he sampled the fruit of the apple trees, and with various rejected specimens took shots at a starling in the glebe. Then, in response to his shouts, she brought him a basin of water and he washed off the dust of his morning ride. The August sun fell warm on the little yard; the sound of the burn in the glen, the clack of the kirkton smithy, the sheep far off on Windyways, the bees in the clove gillyflowers, all melted into the soothing hum of a moorland noontide. The minister smiled as he scrubbed his cheeks, and Isobel's little old puckered apple-hued face smiled back. "Ay, sir," she said, "our lines is fallen intil a goodly place and a pleasant habitation. The Lord be thankit." And as he cried a fervent amen and tossed the tow-el back to her, a stir at the front door betokened his first visitors.

These were no less than three in number, neighbouring ministers who had ridden over on their garrons to bid the young man welcome to Woodilee. Presently stable and byre were crowded with their beasts, and the three brethren had bestowed themselves on the rough bench which

adjoined the bleaching-ground. They would have their dinner at the village ordinary—let not Mr. Sempill put himself about—they would never have come thus unannounced if they had thought that they would be pressed to a meal. But they allowed themselves to be persuaded by the hospitable clamour of Isobel, who saw in such a function on her first day at the manse a social aggrandizement. "Mr. Sempill would think black burnin' shame if the gentlemen didna break breid… ." There was walth o' provender in the house—this moment she had put a hen in the pot—she had a brace of muir-fowl ready for brandering that had been sent from Chasehope that very morn… . The three smiled tolerantly and hopefully. "Ye've gotten a rare Abigail, Mr. Sempill. A woman o' mense and sense—the manse o' Woodilee will be well guidit."

The Reverend Mungo Muirhead had a vast shaven face set atop of a thick neck and a cumbrous body. He had a big thin-lipped mouth which shut tight like a lawyer's, a fleshy nose, and large grey eyes which at most times were ruminant as a cow's, but could on occasion kindle to shrewdness. His complexion was pale, and he was fast growing bald, so the impression at first sight was of a perfect mountain of countenance, a steep field of colourless skin. As minister of Kirk Aller he was the metropolitan of the company, and as became a townsman he wore decent black with bands, and boasted a hat. The Reverend Ebenezer Proudfoot, from the moorland village of Bold, was of a different cast. He wore the coarse grey homespun of the farmer, his head-covering was a blue bonnet, his shoes were thick brogues with leather ties, and he had donned a pair of ancient frieze leggings. A massive sinewy figure, there was in his narrow face and small blue eyes an air of rude power and fiery energy. The third, Mr. James Fordyce from the neighbouring parish of Cauldshaw, was slight and thin, and pale either from ill-health or from much study. He was dressed in worn blue, and even in the August sun kept his plaid round his shoulders. In his face a fine brow was marred by the contraction of his lean jaws and a mouth puckered constantly as if in doubt or pain, but redeemed by brown eyes, as soft and wistful as a girl's.

At the hour of noon they sat down to meat. Mr. Muirhead said a lengthy grace, which, since he sniffed the savour from the kitchen, he began appropriately with "Bountiful Jehovah." All the dishes were set out at once on the bare deal table—a bowl of barley kail, a boiled fowl, the two brandered grouse, and a platter of oatcakes. The merchant in the Pleasance of Edinburgh had given his son a better plenishing than fell to the usual lot of ministers, for there were pewter plates and a knife and a fork for each guest. The three stared at the splendour, and Mr.

Proudfoot, as if to testify against luxury, preferred to pick the bones with his hands. The home-brewed ale was good, and all except Mr. Fordyce did full justice to it, so that the single tankard, passed from hand to hand, was often refilled by Isobel. "Man, Mr. David," cried Mr. Muirhead in high good-humour, "this is a great differ from the days of your predecessor. Worthy Mr. Macmichael had never muckle but bannocks to set before his friends. But you've made us a feast of fat things."

David inquired about his predecessor, whom he remembered dimly from his boyhood as a man even then very old, who ambled about the parish on a white shelty.

"He was a pious and diligent minister," said Mr. Muirhead, "but since ever I kenned him he was sore fallen in the vale of years. He would stick to the same 'ordinary' till he had thrashed it into stour. I've heard that he preached for a year and sax months on Exodus fifteen and twenty-seven, the twelve wells of water and three score and ten palm trees of Elim, a Sabbath to ilka well and ilka tree. I've a notion that he was never very strong in the intellectuals."

"He wrestled mightily in prayer," said Mr. Proudfoot, "and he was great at fencing the Tables. Ay, sirs, he was a trumpet for the pure Gospel blast."

"I doubt not he was a good man," said Mr. Fordyce, "and is now gone to his reward. But he was ower auld and feeble for a sinful countryside. I fear that the parish was but ill guided, and, as ye ken, there was whiles talk of a Presbytery visitation."

"I differ!" cried Mr. Muirhead. "I differ *in toto*. Woodilee has aye been famous for its godly elders. Has it not Ephraim Caird, who was a member of Assembly and had a hand in that precious work of grace done in the East Kirk of St. Giles's two years syne? Has it not Peter Pennecuik, who has a gift of supplication like Mr. Rutherford himself? Ay, and in the Bishops' War you'll mind how Amos Ritchie was staunch to uphold the Covenant with the auld matchlock that had been his gudesire's. There's no lack of true religion in Woodilee."

"There's no lack of carnal pride, Mr. Mungo. The folk of Woodilee are ready enough for any stramash in Kirk or State. But what of their perishing souls, I ask? Are they striving to get a grip of Christ, as a bird scrapes with its claws at a stone wall? And do they bring forth works meet for repentance?"

"There was no clash of cauld morality in worthy Mr. Macmichael," said Mr. Proudfoot sourly.

"Is there the spirit of God in the people? That's what I want to ken. There's ill stories in the countryside anent Woodilee. The Black Wood could tell some tales if the trees could talk."

Mr. Muirhead, having finished his meal and said a second grace, was picking his teeth in great good-humour.

"Hoot toots, Mr. James, you'll give our young brother a scunner of the place, to which it has pleased the Almighty to call him, before he has had a look at it himself. I'm not denying that the Wood is ower near Woodilee. It's a wanchancy thing for any parochine to have a muckle black forest flung around it like a maud [plaid]. And no doubt the Devil walks about like a roaring lion in Woodilee as in other bits. But there's men of God here to resist him. I tell you, sirs, there have been more delations to the Presbytery for the sin of witchcraft in Woodilee than in any other parish on the water of Aller."

"And what does that prove, Mr. Mungo?"

"That there's wealth of prayerful and eident [careful] folk to confound the Adversary. This is no season to despair of Kirk and Covenant, when this day they hold the crown of the causeway. You'll no have heard of the astonishing mercy vouchsafed to us in England? A post came to Kirk Aller yestreen, and it seems that some weeks syne there was a great battle beside the city of York, where our Scots wrought mightily, and our own Davie Leslie gave the King's horsemen their kail through the reek. What does that portend?"

"It portends," said Mr. Proudfoot, whom food did not mellow, "that our pure and reformed Kirk of Scotland is linked more than ever with sectaries and antinomians and those, like the bloody and deceitful Cromwell, that would defile the milk of the Word with the sour whey of their human inventions. What avails a triumphant Kirk if its doctrine be sullied?"

Mr. Muirhead laughed. "It portends nothing of the kind. The good work goes cannily on, and the noble task to which the Assembly of Divines at Westminster set itself is advanced by a long mile. Man, Eben, you folk at Bold live ower far from the world. It's the Kirk of Scotland that holds the balance to-day and can enforce its will on both King and sectaries. Two days back I had a letter from that gospel-loving nobleman, the Earl of Loudoun … "

Mr. Muirhead was mounted on his high horse. He lit his pipe and for the space of half an hour dealt comprehensively with politics, labouring to show the happy posture of affairs for what he called the "good cause." The Solemn League and Covenant bound all Scotland in a pact with the

Lord, and presently all England would follow suit. There would be soon that comfortable sight which had been foretold by their godly fathers, a uniform Kirk and a pure Gospel established by law from London to the Orkneys, and a covenanted Sion to which all the peoples of the earth would go up. Mr. Muirhead was eloquent, for he repeated a peroration which he had once used in the General Assembly.

"I have heard," he concluded, "that in Woodilee there was a signing of the Covenant by every soul that could make a scart with a pen. That for your encouragement, Mr. David."

Mr. Fordyce shook his head. "How many appended their names out of fear or from mere carnal policy? Mankind will run like jukes after a leader. I much misdoubt if there is any spiritual health to be got from following a multitude under duress. I would have left the choice to every man's conscience."

"You're not sound," cried Mr. Muirhead. "You're shaky on the fundamentals, Mr. James. I will confound you out of the Word. When King Josiah made a solemn covenant, did he leave it to ilka man's fancy to sign or no? Nay, he caused all—all, I say—in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. See Second Chronicles thirty-four and thirty-two."

There was a touch of asperity in the one disputant and of recalcitrance in the other, so David for good-fellowship's sake suggested that he might show them the manse in its new guise. But at that moment Isobel appeared with word that Chasehope was at the door seeking speech with the minister of Kirk Aller. At her back appeared the fiery head of the visitor, who was that Ephraim Caird whom Mr. Muirhead had already praised as a pillar of the Covenant and who farmed the largest tack in the parish. He was a big fellow, red as a fox, with a white freckled face, no eyebrows, and greenish blue eyes, a man of over forty, whose muscular frame was now somewhat overlaid by flesh. His mouth was small and generally puckered together, a habit which gave him an air of thought and gravity. He had been an opponent of David Sempill before the call, but had acquiesced in the majority vote and had welcomed the new minister at the "preaching in" with a great show of goodwill. To-day he was apologetic and affable. He asked pardon for his intrusion—he would take neither bite nor sup—he had heard that the ministers were at the manse, and he begged a word with Mr. Muirhead on Presbytery matters which would save him a journey to Kirk Aller, when he was busy with the bog hay. So David took the other two to his closet and left Chasehope and Mr. Muirhead to their colloquy.

Mr. Proudfoot eyed with disapproval the books in the little dark chamber. He was content, he said, with the Bible and the Institutes of John Calvin and old Robert Rollock's commentary on the Prophet Daniel. He read the lettering on one volume, *Sancti Clementi Opera,* and on another, a work by a Dutch theologian, *De Sancti Pauli Epistolis.* The word "Saint" roused his ire. "Rags of Popery," he muttered, as he banged the books back on their shelves. "What for 'Saint' Paul and not 'Saint' Moses or 'Saint' Isaiah? It's a queer thing that Antichrist should set himself to miscall the godly Apostles of the New Testament and let the auld prophets alone. You're a young man, Mr. Sempill, and, as is natural in youth, with but a small experience of religion. Take the advice of an older man, and no clog yourself on the road to Heaven with ower much printit lear, when you can put the whole Word of God in your pouch."

But Mr. Fordyce looked at the shelves with greedy eyes. The moorfowl at dinner had loosened a tooth, and now it came out in his hand and was wrapped carefully in his kerchief. "I have kept ilka tooth I have ever cast," he told the others, "and they will go into my coffin with me that my bodily parts may be together at the Resurrection." "Would you shorten the arm of the Lord?" Mr. Proudfoot had asked testily. "Can He no gather your remnants from the uttermost parts of the earth?" "True, true," the other had answered gently, "but it's just my fancy to keep all my dust in the one place." This ceremony over, he flung himself on the books like a hungry man on food. He opened them lovingly, read their titles, fingered them as if he could scarcely bear to part with them. "You're no half my age," he told the owner, "but you've twice as many books as there are in the Cauldshaw manse. You start well provided, Mr. David."

The theology he knew already and approved, but there were other works over which he shook a moralizing head. "You've a hantle of pagan writers, Mr. David. I would counsel a young minister to apply himself rather to the Hebrew than to the Greek, for though the Greek was the tongue of the New Testament, it was also the tongue of lascivious poets and mocking philosophers, whereas the Hebrew was consecrate wholly to God… . But you have the Hebrew too, I see. Losh, here's the lexicon of Bamburgius, of which I have read but have never seen. We must consult, Mr. David. I've a new theory of the Hebrew accents on which I would like your judgment."

As he ran over the list he suddenly cried aloud with pleasure, and then checked himself almost shamefacedly. "Preserve us, but here's Hieronymus Cardanus, and other astrologic works. Man, I've diverted

myself whiles with the science of the stars, and can make a shape at calculating a nativity. I cannot see why the thing should not be turned to holy uses, as when the star guided the Wise Men of the East to Bethlehem. You and me must have long cracks some day. These books will be like the Pole Star to draw me to Woodilee, and I'm looking to see you soon at Cauldshaw. It's but a poor desert bit, but there have been precious occasions there and many an outpouring of grace. I'm sore troubled with the gravel, Mr. David, and the goodwife has had a flux in the legs this twelvemonth back, but the Lord has showed me singular favour, and my damps are lightened since a leech in Edinburgh prescribed a hyperion of bourtree and rue… . We're a childless household, for we had but the one bairn, and sax year syne the Lord gathered her to Himself."

Downstairs Mr. Muirhead had finished his talk, and the three ministers took their leave—they of Bold and Cauldshaw to jog the moorland miles to their homes, he of Kirk Aller to take his "four-hours" with Chasehope at Lucky Weir's in the clachan. Each of the three kissed David on the cheek and blessed him after his fashion. "May you live to be a pillar of the Kirk," said Mr. Muirhead. "Keep a Gospel walk," said Mr. Proudfoot, "on the narrow rigging of the truth." But Mr. Fordyce took the young man's hand, after saluting him, and held it with a kind of wistful affection. "I pray," he said, "that your windows may be ever open towards Jerusalem."

When his guests had gone David Sempill explored once more his little domain, like a child who counts his treasures. Then, as the afternoon mellowed into evening, the slopes of the Hill of Deer, red with flowering heather, drew him for a walk. He wanted a wide prospect, to see his parish in its setting of hill and glen, and recall the landmarks now blurred in his childhood's memory. His black coat and breeches were of Edinburgh make and too fine for moorland work, but he had stout country shoes and hose of ram's wool, the gift of his cousin's wife at Newbiggin, and he moved over the bent with the long stride of a shepherd. He crossed the burn of Mire, and saw below him the farm-town of Mirehope, with barley and nettles at strife in the infield, and the run-rigs of the outfield feathered with very green oats. Presently he was on the Hill of Deer, where the long stacks of peats were drying so well that every breath of air sent up from them a fine flurry of dust. The Mirehope cattle, wretched little black beasts, were grazing under the charge of a herd-boy, and the Mirehope sheep, their coats matted with tar till they looked

like monstrous slugs, were picking up an uneasy livelihood among the heather bushes, leaving tufts of smelly wool behind them on the scraggy twigs which were still charred from the March moorburn. He reached the low summit, and flung himself down on a patch of thymy turf between the whinstone screes, with his face to the valley.

His holiday mood still held. The visit of his ministerial brethren had not dashed him, for he saw their prosiness through a golden haze. Mr. Muirhead was a stout warder on the walls of Sion, Mr. Proudfoot a guardian of the purity of the Temple, and Mr. Fordyce beyond question a saint, with his haggard face and his wistful eyes. It was Mr. Fordyce who stuck in his memory. A lovable saint, with his cast teeth saved up to make easy the business of a bodily resurrection, his love of the stars, his pathetic bookishness. David was full of the zest of his calling, but for himself he was ready to circumscribe its duties. Not for him to uphold the Kirk against its ill-wishers in the State; in that cause he would do battle when the need arose, but not till then. He left to others the task of keeping the canon of truth pure from alloy: he accepted the Kirk's doctrine loyally, but let others do the dogmatizing. The work for which he longed was to save and comfort human souls.

Seen on that hilltop the minister of Woodilee was a different figure from that beheld by his colleagues in the dim light of the manse. His active form, his colour, his tumbled hair, spoke of the boy, but his face was not boyish. In its young contours there were already thought and resolution and spiritual fineness, and there was a steady ardour in the eyes. If his chin was the fighter's, his mouth was the comforter's. Five years before he had been set on a scholar's life. At the college he had been a noted Grecian, and in Robert Bryson's bookshop at the Sign of the Prophet Jonah in the West Bow his verses, Latin and English, had been praised by the learned. When religion called him it was as a challenge not to renounce but to perfect his past. A happy preoccupation with his dream made him blind to the harshness and jealousies which beset the Kirk, and he saw only its shining mission. The beauty which was to be found in letters seemed in very truth a part of that profounder beauty which embraced all earth and Heaven in the revelation of God. He had not ceased to be the humanist in becoming the evangelist. Some had looked askance at him as too full of carnal learning for the sacred office, some as too cheerful for a shepherd of souls in a perishing world. But his critics as yet were few, for David carried with him a light and warmth which it was hard for the sourest to resist. "He is a gracious youth," an old minister had said at his ordination. "May the Lord deal tenderly with him!"

David's eyes from his perch on the hilltop rested first on the kirkton of Woodilee. He saw the manse among its trees, and the church with its thatched roof—the roof had been lead till Morton the Regent stripped it and melted it down for bullets. He saw the little beehive cottages in the clachan with the taller gable-end of Lucky Weir's ale-house. He saw the adjoining farm-towns—the Mains, Chasehope, Nether Windyways, Crossbasket, the two Fennans, each with its patches of crops lifted well above the bogs of the glen. He saw the mill of Woodilee at present idle by the burn, and hay being cut on the side of Windyways hill, and what looked like the clipping of the miller's sheep. In the bright evening the scene was all of peace and pastoral, and David's heart kindled. There dwelled his people, the little flock whom God had appointed him to feed. His heart yearned over them, and in a sudden glow of tenderness he felt that this sunset prospect of his parish was a new and more solemn ordination.

It was long before he lifted his eyes beyond the glen to the great encircling amphitheatre of the hills. At first he gazed at them in an abstraction, till childish memories came back to him and he began to name the summits to himself one by one. There was the bald top of the Lammerlaw, and the peak of the Green Dod, and far beyond the long line of the great Herstane Craig, which in that childhood had been the synonym for untravelled mystery. He saw the green cleft in the hills where the Aller came down from its distant wells, and the darker glen of the Rood where bent was exchanged for rock and heather. He saw the very patches of meadow by Roodside which he had made his boyish playground. Such a hilltop prospect he had never before known, for a child lives in a magnified world, and finds immensity in short vistas. One thing struck hard on his mind. Never before had he realized the extent of the forest ground. He remembered travelling to Roodfoot through trees, and all up the water of Rood there had been a drift of scrub. But it was the meadows and the open spaces that had been his kingdom, and his recollection was of a bare sunny land where whaup and peewit cried and the burns fell headlong from windy moors. But now, as he gazed, he realized that the countryside was mainly forest.

Everywhere, muffling the lower glen of the Woodilee burn and the immediate vale of the Aller, and climbing far up the hillside, was the gloom of trees. In the Rood glen there was darkness only at the foot, for higher up the woods thinned into scrub of oak and hazel, with the knees of the uplands showing through it. The sight powerfully impressed his fancy. Woodilee was a mere clearing in a forest. This was the *Silva Caledonis* of

which old writers spoke, the wood which once covered all the land and in whose glades King Arthur had dwelt. He remembered doggerel Latin of Merlin the Bard and strange sayings of True Thomas—old wives' tales which concerned this sanctuary. He had grown up beside it and had not known of it, and now he had come back to a revelation. *Silva Caledonis!* Up the Rood water lay the house of Calidon. Were the names perhaps the same?

The young man's fancy was quick to kindle, and he looked with new eyes at the great cup of green, broken only at one spot by Aller side with the flash of water. At first in the soft evening light it had worn a gracious and homely air, even the darkness of the pines seemed luminous, and the feathery top of a patch of birches was like the smoke of household fires… . But as the sun sank behind the Rood hills a change seemed to come over the scene. The shade became gloom, a hostile, impenetrable darkness. The birches were still like smoke, but a turbid smoke from some unhallowed altar. The distant shallows of Aller caught a ray of the dying sun and turned to blood… . The minister shivered and then laughed at himself for his folly.

The evening deepened in the hollows, though the hilltops were still faintly bright. The great wood seemed now to be a moving thing, a flood which lapped and surged and might at any moment overflow the sand-spit which was Woodilee. Again the minister laughed at himself, but without conviction. It must be an eerie life under the shadow of that ancient formless thing. Woodilee could not be quite as other parishes, or its folk like other folk. The Wood, this hoary Wood of Caledon, must dominate their thoughts and form their characters… . Had not some one called it the Black Wood?—Yes, they had spoken of it that afternoon. Mr. Muirhead had admitted that it must be queer to live so near it, and Mr. Fordyce had shaken his head solemnly and hinted at tales that would be told if the trees could speak… . Did the Devil use the place as a stronghold and seduce the foolish into its shadows? Could it be said of a lost soul, *Itur in antiquam silvam?*

David was less superstitious than most men, but he had too ready a fancy and a mind too well stored with learning to be easy at the thought. Already he felt that he had found an antagonist. Was Woodilee to prove a frontier-post for God's servant against the horrid mysteries of heathendom? … He gave a sudden start, for a voice had sounded behind him.

The voice was singing—a charm against bogles which he remembered himself using as a child:

"Weary, Ovie, gang awa',
Haste ye furth o' house an' ha',
Ower the muir and doun the burn,
Wearie, Ovie, ne'er return."

A grotesque figure emerged from the dusk. It was a tall fellow, who seemed to have been broken in the middle, for he walked almost doubled up. His face, seen in the half-light, was that of a man of thirty or so, with a full black beard and red protuberant lips. His clothes were ruinous, an old leather jerkin which gaped at every seam, ragged small-clothes of frieze, and for hosen a wrapping of dirty clouts. There were no shoes on his feet, and his unwashed face was dark as a berry. In his hand he had a long ash pole, and on his head a blue cowl so tight that it was almost a skull-cap.

David recognized the figure for Daft Gibbie, the village natural, who had greeted him with mewing and shouting at his ordination. In the clachan street he had seemed an ordinary deformed idiot—what was known locally as an "object"—but up on this twilight hilltop he was like an uncouth *revenant* from an older world. The minister instinctively gripped his staff tighter, but Gibbie's intention was of the friendliest.

"A braw guid e'en to ye, Mr. Sempill, sir. I saw ye tak' the hill and I bode to follow, for I was wantin' to bid ye welcome to Woodilee. Man, ye gang up the brae-face like a maukin [a hare]. Ower fast, I says to mysel', ower fast for a man o' God, for what saith the Word, 'He that believeth shall not make haste!'"

The creature spoke in a voice of great beauty and softness—the voice rather of a woman than of a man. And as he spoke he bowed, and patted the minister's arm, and peered into his face with bright wild eyes. Then he clutched David and forced him round till again he was looking over the Wood.

"The Hill o' Deer's a grand bit for a prospect, sir, for is it no like the Hill o' Pisgah from which ye can spy the Promised Land? Ye can lift up your eyes to the hills, and ye can feast them on the bonny haughs o' the Aller, or on the douce wee clachan o' Woodilee, wi' the cots sittin' as canty round the kirk as kittlins round an auld cat."

"I was looking at the Wood," said David.

The man laughed shrilly. "And a braw sicht it is in the gloamin' frae the Hill o' Deer. For ye can see the size o' the muckle spider's wab, but doun in the glen ye're that clamjamphried wi' michty trees that your heid

spins like a peery and your e'en are dozened. It's a unco thing the Wud, Mr. Sempill, sir?"

"Do you know your ways in it, Gibbie?"

"Me! I daurna enter it. I keep the road, for I'm feared o' yon dark howes." Then he laughed again, and put his mouth close to the minister's ear. "Not but what I'll tak' the Wud at the proper season. Tak' the Wud, Mr. Sempill, like other folk in Woodilee."

He peered in the minister's face to see if he were understood. Satisfied that he was not, he laughed again.

"Tak' Gibbie's advice, sir, and no gang near the Wud. It's nae place for men o' God, like yoursel', sir, and puir Gibbie."

"Do they call it the Black Wood?"

Gibbie spat. "Incomin' bodies, nae doot," he said in contempt. "But it's just the Wud wi' nae 'black' aboot it. But ken ye the name that auld folk gie'd it?" He became confidential again. "They ca'd it Melanudrigill," he whispered.

David repeated the word. His mind had been running on heathen learning, and he wondered if the name were Greek.

"That might mean the 'place of dark waters,'" he said.

"Na, na. Ye're wrong there, Mr. Sempill. There's nae dark waters in Melanudrigill. There's the seven burns that rin south, but they're a' as clear as Aller. But dinna speak that name to ither folk, Mr. Sempill, and dinna let on that Gibbie telled ye. It's a wanchancy name. Ye can cry it in a safe bit like the Hill o' Deer, but if ye was to breathe it in the Wud unco things micht happen. I daurna speak my ain name among the trees."

"Your name is Gibbie. Gibbie what?"

The man's face seemed to narrow in fear and then to expand in confidence. "I can tell it to a minister o' the Word. It's Gilbert Niven. Ken ye where I got that name? In the Wud, sir. Ken ye wha gie'd it me? The Guid Folk. Ye'll no let on that I telled ye."

The night was now fallen, and David turned for home, after one last look at the pit of blackness beneath him. The idiot hobbled beside him, covering the ground at a pace which tried even his young legs, and as he went he babbled.

"Tak' Gibbie's advice and keep far frae the Wud, Mr. Sempill, and if ye're for Roodfoot or Calidon haud by the guid road. I've heard tell that in the auld days, when there was monks at the kirkton, they bode to gang out every year wi' bells and candles and bless the road to keep it free o' bogles. But they never ventured into the Wud, honest men. I'll no say but what a minister is mair powerfu' than a monk, but an eident