

In Memoriam:

MARY LOUISA CANNON, AN OLD GALLOVIDIAN (1819-1911).

BY R. C.

FROM 1900 to 1908, I paid many visits to The Shieling. Grasmere. In the gloaming, Miss Cannan, my father's cousin, often told me little anecdotes of her family and of her early life. One of her great-great-grandfathers, an Alexander of Stirling, was killed at Culloden while fighting for Prince Charlie in 1745. One of his daughters, Margrat Alexander, was brought up by Lady Kenmuir, and afterwards married Robert Kennedy of Knocknalling, Kirkcudbrightshire (Miss Cannan's great-grandfather).

The Cannans were always Covenanters, and could boast of one martyr (James) in their family. Love of learning and thrift were their chief characteristics. Miss Cannan's paternal grandfather only spent £4 a year on his clothes; but there was great feasting at his funeral in the Glenkens, and £30 were spent on 'bake-meats.'

Miss Cannan's father, Thomas, was licensed in Edinburgh, and soon after he became travelling tutor to a young nobleman. They were on the Continent when Napoleon escaped from Elba, which caused them to beat a hasty retreat. After that he was tutor to Sir William Ogilvie's family. There were nine sons, and their father was at sea. Mr Cannan was highly respected, and was offered a lifelong pension to stay on as chaplain. He, however, accepted instead the parish of New Spynie, Elgin, in 1818, and the same year, aged 27, he married one of the four Miss Kennedys of Knocknalling, aged 25. The stipend was very poor, the inhabitants being mostly fisher folk. At the Manse next year, 1819, Mary Louisa Cannon was born, the eldest of eight. She remembered the old walnut tree opposite the nursery window, and the view of the sea. Elgin was near by, and a garrison town, so that her parents enjoyed the society of the officers.

When she was four she could read, and she received a Testament from her father. At a very early age she was sent to a dame-school to learn sewing, but the boys threaded her needles for her and the girls did her sewing, while she herself read stories to them. A bed stood in the corner of the room, on the top of which were laid fresh birch twigs, handy for chastisement. The boys brought oatcake and cheese for their lunch, and, wanting to be like them, wee Mary would often exchange her bread-and-jam piece for their humbler fare. She always remembered her mother wearing white dresses and muslin turbans. She herself wore white jean in summer and ugly yellow stuff in winter and nankeen bonnets. Her earliest recollection in headgear was of a close-fitting plush cap with a gold band round it.

The Rev. Thomas Cannon remained at Spynie eight years. Through Lord Selkirk he was then presented to the living of Carsphairn, Kirkcudbrightshire, 1826. It was in the gift of the Crown. The stipend was better than that of Spynie, and Carsphairn had the further inducement of being near Mrs Cannon's old home at Knocknalling. By this time there were five children; Mary was seven years old, and David was the baby. They all travelled by coach from Spynie to Edinburgh, which took a week. At Edinburgh they had to wait a week, as all the seats in the coaches were booked up. One day when she was walking down Princes Street with her mother, Walter Scott was pointed out to her, dressed in dark blue with brass buttons. Near Moffat the snow was so deep every one had to get out and walk. Eighty years after, her nephew remarked to her, "It must have been very uncomfortable." "Humph," she replied, "we didn't think so much of comfort in those days."

She was happy at Carsphairn, It was a free, wild life, running about the hills with her brothers and sisters, playing hare and hounds; while a large stone wrapped in a rag served for a doll, its top, stained green with grass, for a face. In winter there was curling and sliding, and she did not feel cold in her short sleeves and low-necked dress. Mr Cannan kept sheep, three cows, and a horse, and the children all learned to ride. They had a ram for a pet -- a huge brute. They used to ride on his back, and he came to the kitchen cupboard for oatcake. He was savage with strangers, and once knocked over the Rev. G. Hamilton, minister of Kirkcudbright, as he was putting on his boots. Mr Cannan had pupils who boarded at the Manse. He was severe as a teacher, and constant thrashings formed part of the school-room discipline. He taught Mary Latin along with his pupils, and languages were never any difficulty to her. Sunday was not an unhappy day. The children learned their Psalms and Paraphrases and Shorter Catechism, and attended their father's midday service at the Parish Church of Carsphairn. The shepherds came from miles around, wearing their plaids through all the seasons--in summer to keep out the heat and in winter to keep it in -- and they were attended by their faithful sheep-dogs, which lay at their masters' feet during the service in the most exemplary manner; but the moment the minister had pronounced the blessing, they rushed out, and old scores were paid off in the churchyard. Mr Cannan was a good preacher, and must have been a very practical one, for he used to admonish his parishioners to whitewash their cottages.

On Sunday afternoon the children could go for a walk, and in the evenings, as a great treat, they were allowed to look at an illustrated *Pilgrim's Progress*. There was a good garden at the Manse, and plenty of strawberries, gooseberries, apples, and pears, and abundance of vegetables in summer. Mrs Cannan was a notable housekeeper, and made quantities of preserves. In winter they worked through a sheep, salted, and owing to lack of vegetables, scurvy was very prevalent in the district. Coal was cheap at half-a-crown a cartload from Dalmellington and a penny for the toll, and peat was to be had for the asking. Servants' wages were very low (Mr Cannan's man got £14 per annum), but they grew attached and a Stayed long. A woman, Jeanie Miller, used to weed the Manse garden at ninepence a day. She had a very independent Scotch spirit, and her grandfather having received parish relief, Jeanie gave a donation of £5 out of her savings to the parish. On Sundays she always wore the same blue print gown, drawn through the pocket-holes of a stuff petticoat. Tea was six shillings per lb., and Miss Cannan's grandmother Kennedy only drank it on Sundays. Meal and milk were abundant. There was always broth, and meat was to be had from New-Galloway. There was no lack of light in the long winter evenings, for home-made candles (made from rushes and sheeps' tallow) were plentiful; but Mrs Cannan did not spin, as her husband could not endure the sound of the whirring wheel. At the neighbouring village of Dalry the cottages were all thatched and were just a collection of hovels, there being only one slated roof among them. In one cottage, "Crumml," opposite Knocknalling, the "lum" was in the middle of the floor, and the smoke found its way out through a hole in the roof. Everything inside was coloured a rich, sooty black. Stilts were used at Carsphairn by the shepherds, and Miss Cannan's mother remembered being carried over a stream on the back of the schoolmaster (Douglas) while he walked on stilts.

The arrival of the packman was a great event in the quite lives of the Cannan children. Those in carts were much grander than those who walked. They brought Birmingham wares — knives, "braws," ballads, &c--and a deal of "troking" went on. There was no bank in the district in Mr Cannan's day, the nearest being at Ayr, and there were no cheques. He simply wrote, 'Please debit account.' Letters were brought in the coal-carts from Dalmellington. Miss Cannan's earliest political recollection was of the Catholic

Emancipation Bill in 1829. She heard it much discussed by her father and Dr Maitland of Kells. Mr Cannan was the only minister in the district who approved of the Bill. He took in the *Dumfries Courier*, a weekly paper, *The Spectator*, and for books he subscribed to the library at Ayr. Mary was often away from home visiting with her uncles and aunts in the neighbourhood. Her father's eldest brother, James, rented The Shiel, a large farm belonging to Sir William Millar of Glenlee. The rent was £1200, and the surrounding cottages paid an annual rent of £1 with peat free. This farm had been leased by the Cannan family since the reign of James II., and was originally called "The Shield." Miss Cannan's uncle, James, was always known as "Shiel," and is reported to have had an extraordinary knowledge of the faces of sheep. Once at a prize day, the same sheep being sent in from last year, and being thereby disqualified, he, as judge, exclaimed wrathfully, "I ken thae faces frae last year."

She also visited her mother's eldest sister, "Aunty Bess," who had married, while very young, Mr Barbour, farmer in Muirdrockwood. There was more amusement than comfort staying there, for excessive economy was practised in house and person. Indeed, so much was this the case that they never had in the house furniture nor appliances considered necessary in the plainest-living families nowadays. On the contrary, the small rooms, old furniture and thrifty habits peculiar to Scotland 100 years ago were all retained without change. "Aunty Bess" never changed the fashion of her dress—a blue print with a large tippet in the morning, and a black silk with a large tippet in the afternoon, a net cap with no strings, white stockings, and stout shoes. She gave up going to church nearly 30 years before she died, so had no occasion for a bonnet. When she became a widow, however, in 1855, she bought one of the high-crowned shape fashionable in, her youth, and the only time she ever left her home was when she came in it to her mother's funeral (Mrs Kennedy) that same year. Though miserly in all her ways, she yet was exceedingly kind to the beggars, partly, no doubt, from timidity, for they were a long way from neighbours. At Muirdrockwood she had an outhouse fitted up for them that they might be kept all night, and she always gave them a good supper and breakfast of porridge and milk.

When Mary Was nine years old she was very ill with typhus fever, and she was sent away from home to the Manse at Balmaclellan, the Rev. Cavin Cullen having married her mother's sister, Mary Kennedy. She was shut up by herself in a small room for many weeks, and the window was not made to open. Alan Charteris, the herd boy, lent her books, scarcely fitted for her tender years, which whiled away the time, and Dr Douglas paid her professional visits. Her father once rode over to see her, and to her joy broke the window with his fist, but she hated the room ever after.

Once when she was visiting her mother's uncle, McMillan, at The Holm, she hid herself at intervals under a poster-bed and read in a week thirteen volumes of Walter Scott's novels, which were just being published. She saw much of her grand-parents (Kennedy) at Knocknalling. Her grandmother remembered when it was considered quite the correct thing for the gentlemen to get drunk at a dinner party, and to be in no fit state to join the ladies later. By this time (1828) her grandfather's brother, John Kennedy, was living at Ardwick Hall, Manchester, and the firm of McConnel & Kennedy had made its fortune in the cotton spinning trade. At the age of 15, in 1784, he had left Knocknalling and begun working as an apprentice to Mr Cannan (Miss Cannan's great-uncle) at Chowbent, near Manchester, he there learnt the business of mangle-making, and afterwards he invented many of the improvements in cotton spinning machinery. The Rev. Thomas Cannan suffered greatly from the lack of society in the neighbourhood. Except for Dr Maitland at Kells there was no one with whom he could exchange ideas. He was a Liberal in politics, and at this time Fergusson was the Liberal member for Kirkcudbrightshire. Even in the

Cannans' nursery the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832 had left its mark, for on the wall Mary had pinned up a coloured handkerchief representing a tree with nests which the bishops were supporting. The nests were the rotten boroughs, and Lord John Russell and his party were trying to cut the tree down with an axe.

The bleak climate of Carsphairn did not suit Mr Cannan, and at the early age of 42, in December, 1832, he died of inward consumption—preaching in the cold, unheated church a fortnight before his death. Mrs Cannan was left with seven children (Mary, the oldest, being 13), and an income of £100 a year. They soon migrated to Kirkcudbright, making the long days' journey of 31 miles in carts. It was a hard struggle for the young widow. A kind relative paid the rent of her house in Castle Street, but beyond that she received no pecuniary help whatever, and she was called the proudest woman in Galloway. The Selkirk family were very kind to her, and Lady Selkirk invited Mary to join the drawing classes of her daughters, Lady Isabella and Lady Catherine. The Cannan children were all sent to the Kirkcudbright Academy. There the boys and girls were educated together, but they played separately and had little intercourse out of school. Mrs Cannan was very particular about her children's friends, and she did not approve of Mary's democratic ways. At this time Mr Hope was the dominie. He was a great character, and an autocrat in his own domain. One day one of his class was missing, and on the boy's reappearance next day Mr Hope asked him why he had played truant. "Ma mither telled me," replied the boy. Whereupon the dominie administered the tawse, and remarked, on the conclusion of the operation, "Ye can send yer mither here too, and I'll gie her the same."

Mary was a prodigious favourite with her masters. The Commercial master did not mind how many quill pens he mended for her, and the other girls knowing this, always gave her their pens to be handed up along with her own. She once drew the dominie on the side of her slate, but beyond a mild "Eh! what's that you're doing?" nothing was said, whereas, the other pupils would have got a slap in the face. Mrs Cannan sent all her children to learn dancing, which Mary enjoyed; but she greatly preferred acting, and often took part in charades.

Mrs Cannan saw the first silver spoon in use at Kenmuir Castle. Before that, horn had always been used, and long after silver had become general, horn spoons were still kept for supping porridge. Mary saw the first lucifer match struck in Kirkcudbright; before that she remembered tinder-boxes being used.

When she was 16 (in 1835) she went for one winter to a school in Edinburgh as pupil teacher. Among other subjects, the use of the globes was taught. Mary so hated this lesson that once she played truant and escaped to her aunt, Mrs Douglas, at Newington, greatly to the amusement of Mr Douglas, the retired schoolmaster.

When she was 17 (in 1836) she went to her first situation as governess to the young children of a lady at Skaleraw, east of Dunbar. There she had her first love affair. It was not on her side, and every one said the man was "daft". At this time she had to pay tenpence for her letters, which she often grudged; but her mother used to get Lord Selkirk to frank her epistles to her daughter.

When she was about 20, she went to Edinburgh as holiday governess to two little Miss Wilsons, and there her cleverness was much appreciated, and she greatly enjoyed meeting their uncle, "Christopher North," and all the literary lions of the day, and from that time began a lifelong friendship with the Wilson family.

She preferred teaching boys to girls, and her knowledge of Latin enabled her to coach them in that language preparatory to going to school. Among her pupils were the two Brunel boys, grandsons of the famous engineer; and at Wansfell, on Lake Windermere, she taught Percy and Eustace Greg, sons of W. R. Greg, in 1846. With his help she there gave £146 for an annuity worth £20 a year, to begin twenty years later, and this annuity she drew till the time of her death, 70 i.e., for forty-five years. At Wansfell she began to nourish the ambition of settling eventually in the Lake District, an ambition realised thirty-eight years later. There she got acquainted with the Claudes of Ambleside, and she went to visit their relations in Berlin. They found an opening for her in a German family. She lived in lodgings, taught her pupils English in the mornings, and in the evenings had lessons in German grammar and literature, and she became friendly with Grimm, author of the famous *Fairy Tales*, and with other celebrities.

Before leaving England, in 1850, she stayed in London with the Brunels, and on the night of May 27th she happened to be at the Opera House when Queen Victoria was present. The enthusiasm of the audience was roused to a tremendous pitch, and there was great cheering, and loud singing of "God Save the Queen," for that afternoon when driving she had been struck on the forehead with a cane by Robert Pate as she was leaving Cambridge House, Piccadilly, where her uncle was ill, and the bruise on her forehead was still evident as she sat in the Royal box.

Miss Cannan lived abroad for four years, from 1850 to 1854. From Berlin she went to Rome, where she had rooms on the Tarpeian Rock. She kept herself there by writing articles on artistic subjects for *Chambers's Encyclopedia*. She then became private secretary to a Dr Emil Braun and his wife. He was a German professor, and she helped him in his translations and in writing his guide book to *The Ruins and Museums of Rome*. She greatly enjoyed this romantic time, and in her spare moments she learnt Italian, and found leisure for sketching. One summer she travelled with her friends on muleback from village to village through the Sabeian Alps, and she was struck by the good looks of the Italian peasantry. The great drawback to living in Rome was the plague of fleas. In one room, near the Forum, not far from the Capitol, she used to sit surrounded by basins of water to keep them off, and often at parties she had seen ladies pick them off their dresses. The bedding, however, was clean, and the mattresses were often aired. They were stuffed with leaves of Indian corn, and slits being left, the leaves were often turned over and changed. She had very good introductions, and often attended great functions. Once she went to a grand reception given in honour of Prince Frederick of Prussia (afterwards Emperor of Germany), and there were present the Prince, the Duke of Bavaria, and many others of high rank. The cardinals in their red robes, the white marble staircase lined with soldiers, and the splendid dresses and flashing diamonds of the ladies made up a picture she never forgot.

On her way home in 1854 the Crimean war broke out, and she saw the French soldiers embarking for the Crimea, and was struck by their sad faces, their short stature, and their baggy red trousers. She then lived for a short time at St. Leonards, looking after the children of her cousin, General Robert Cannon, while their father was at the Crimea. After that she lived for some time in George Street, Edinburgh, translating from the German for *Chambers's Journal*. There, in 1854, her uncle, Rev. Dr David Cannan, died. When 74 (in 1848) he had thrown up his living of the Mains, near Dundee, and retired to Edinburgh. He used to write a good deal, principally for the *Edinburgh Courant*, and must have been rather eccentric, for, in the intervals of literary inspiration, he would take a huge pair of scissors out of his desk and proceed to cut his hair. His niece sometimes stayed with him at the Mains, where he was looked after by two old servants, Nanny and Betty Morrison,

types of a former age, who spent their lives in the same family. He was a man of some intellectual power and scholarship, and on a rainy day he would shut himself up in an old tower in the precincts of the Manse called the "Dookit" (dove-cot), and there read Greek authors. His first parish, Kirriemuir, Forfarshire, became famous a century later, as being the original of Barrie's *Thrums*.

After a short visit to Florence, Miss Cannan resumed her teaching, and was for some time with the Laces at Inkhthorpo, near Skipton. Here, under trying circumstances, she performed her duties heroically, and thereby a lifelong friendship sprang up between herself and the Sidgwick family, who were cousins of the Laces.

She also taught two Miss Cloughs at Kingston, and for a short time Walter and Victor, sons of John. Horsley, R.A., were her pupils in 1868. She must have become acquainted with their parents before that date through Mrs Brunel, sister of the famous artist, and when staying with them in Kent she went to a ball given by the artists of that county in honour of the Prince of Wales' wedding, March 10th, 1863. It was a very grand affair; the ballroom was beautifully decorated by the artists, the supper was served on gold plate, and one lady had her diamonds mounted as hops, in honour of the hop country.

For a time Miss Cannan returned to her beloved Lake country, and taught at Ambleside, she afterwards took rooms at Clappersgate, near by, and kept herself by translating Ranke and others into English.

By this time, in 1869, Mrs Cannan had gone to live at Prestwich, Manchester, and as she was now solitary, her daughter Mary went to live with her. It was a trying time, for Mrs Cannan had no respect for literature, and little sympathy with her daughter's intellectual pursuits. One Sunday, horrified at finding a daughter of hers reading Horace, she exclaimed: "It is like Tom Paine!"

For thirteen years they lived together, and by degrees the old lady's health grew more and more infirm. She lost her eyesight, and her mind became clouded. Nobly Miss Cannan took up the uncongenial task of nursing now laid upon her, and with the exception of a woman to help at night, she performed it single-handed, till her mother died, and she was at last free to realise her darling scheme of settling in the Lake District. In 1879 she had bought land at Easedale, Grasmere, from Mr Fletcher, and there in 1882 The Shieling was built, the architect being Gerald Horsley, son of her old friend.

The whole district was hallowed by memories of Wordsworth and his sister, and it was Lady Richardson, Wordsworth's friend, who finally induced Miss Cannan to settle there. When she was at Wansfell she herself remembered seeing Wordsworth, not long before his death. The old man was sitting in a porch engaged in the homely occupation of shelling peas, and the glory of the sunset shed a halo round his venerable head.

For twenty-eight years Miss Cannan lived in retirement at The Shieling enjoying the company of her books and of her many literary friends. Most people regret their youth, but she always said that the best time of her life had been after the age of 60, on account of repose after strenuous work and freedom from anxiety about her resources.

As a young lady she received several offers of marriage, but she always declared Professor Ferrier was the only man she could have married, and that straight off, from sheer admiration of his character and talents. She believed unmarried people attained a

better level of happiness than married ones, although not climbing to the same heights, nor sinking to the same depths.

She was once asked if she believed in ghosts? "Ghosts," she replied, "always seem to appear dressed, and I cannot believe in the immortality of clothes!" Her favourite chapter in the Bible was 1 Corinthians xiii., and it was peculiarly appropriate to her, for mixing with so many different people and living so much abroad made her very charitable in her religious views and in her judgments of other people.

She attended Grasmere Church very regularly till within a few years of her death, and always showed her Presbyterian upbringing by shutting her Prayer Book with a bang when the Athanasian Creed was read.

When she was 86 she was present for the last time at the Grasmere Rush-Bearing Festival; and that same year Frank Bramley, R.A., took a sketch of her as one of the spectators in his large picture of the "Grasmere Rush-Bearing."

Like her father a Liberal in politics, she was a constant reader of the *Manchester Guardian*, and she always insisted on her rights as a citizeness by voting on the Urban District Council. The last time she voted she was driven down to Grasmere in a motor car, but to one accustomed to stop and gaze on the beauties of Nature this rapid mode of progression proved distasteful.

And so, in Wordsworth's lines, often quoted by her,

"an old age serene and bright,
And lovely as a Lapland night,"

led her to her quiet grave among the ever-lasting hills that were so dear to her.