



ReaderWorks

Standard



Text of The End of the World by Murray R. Gilchrist

It was the first night of the Wakes, and the carrier's big cart was crowded with folk who came from the neighbouring country to visit their relations and friends. The greasy lamps that diffused a rank, fishy smell threw quivering lights on fantastic bonnets, that ranged in style from the antiquated scuttle with its fall of black net embroidered with chenille of the rich old farmer's wife, to the saucy tangle of scarlet poppies that crowned the auburn plaits of the innkeeper's daughter.

In the right-hand corner, farthest from the door, sat a withered spinster, dressed in a crape gown and a loose bertha of knitted silk which her mother had worn forty years ago. Her peaked face was very wan, and her eyes sparkled in the semi-darkness like live coals.

The woman who sat nearest to her noted her suppressed excitement, and offered her a draught from a jack-bottle of gin.

'Tek a pull, Miss Bland,' she said. 'Trouble's ower-coomin' yo'. I reckon yo'r brother's end's bin a sad trial.'

The spinster waved her uncouthly-gloved hand. 'Hoosh!' she whispered, faintly, 'they're talkin' abaat a roary-boary-ailis daan theer!'

The wearer of the scuttle was describing a meteor which she had seen in the night.

'Well, I'd just wakkened an' turned raand i' bed when a leet 'gan to shine ower th' moor exactly as ef th' day were breekin'. But I felt as I hedna bin a bed long, so I ups an' looks at mester's watch, an' et were on'y five minutes past twelve. "O Lord," says I, "th' heather mun be afire an' th' corn's ready for cuttin'!" Peter he hears me an' slips fro' th' bed an' draws up th' blind, an' when we looks aat, we sees all th' north sky blazin' wi' colours like a rainbow. Et were i' th' form o' a crown at first, then et gathered westwards an' changed to summat like a sword. Theer werena hawf-an-hour ere et died, but nayther me nor mester slept a wink after. I've heerd as et's a sign o' fair weather.'

The girl with the poppies chimed in with: 'Fayther said as fowk proffersied th' end o' th' world fro' et!'

A low moan crept from the spinster's lips. She had slept heavily at the house in the distant town where her brother had died, and this was the first she had heard of the apparition. She pressed her thin hands against the back of the seat and attempted to rise, but fell back awkwardly.

'I canna tell 'em,' she muttered. 'Et'ld breek their hearts. Best for et to coom like a thief i' th' neet.'

The facetious man who sat in the opposite corner overheard her last words.

'Bless me, mam, hes somebody stole yo'r purse?' he said. 'Yo' do look bad.'

She strove to regain her self-possession.

'No,' she replied, with a sickly smile. 'Et's on'y as I'm more nor a bit tired. I'll be all reet i' a day or two ay, me, what am I sayin', when th' world's I mean when I'm a' wh'am.'

'I s'pose yo'r feelin' duller 'cause o' bein' away fro' yo'r young chap,' he remarked, giggling foolishly. 'I b'lieve as yo've never bin parted for so long sin' he began coortin' yo', thirty-five year sin'.'

To their credit, the other travellers ignored his attempt to excite their mirth. The story of her courtship belonged to the older generation, and although in her early days folk had spoken jestingly of the lovers who could never make up their minds to wed, time had accustomed them to look compassionately upon the affair. The sole hindrances had been two old mothers who had declared that their homes should never be broken up. But they had died fifteen years ago, and the courtship had continued until both were grey and wrinkled.

The cart lumbered on and on along the rough heath road that undulated like the waves of a stormy sea down the steep hill and across the ford of the Derwent, where the waters, swollen with a flood in the uplands, touched the horses' bellies and wet the straw near the door. Then through the long stretch of woodland, and up the Lydgate lane to the village.

Afront the 'Bold Rodney' the passengers alighted. A round-shouldered gaffer with a bright, kindly face helped the spinster down the steps and swung her cow-hair trunk over his back.

'Yo're lookin' faint, Sarah,' he said, 'an' I dunna wonder. Et'ld try yo' sorely bein' wi' him at th' last. By jowks, I hev bin lonesome wi'aat yo' et seems a year o' Sundays sin' yo' went away. Yo'll soon be reet, tho'. I stepped across to th' house after tea, an' I dusted all an' leeted th' fire an' set th' kettle on, an' then took th' cat an' laid her i' th' chair. Yo'll be ready for yo'r supper?'

She caught his arm, for her knees were giving way.

'I canna eat owt I shanna want onything else to eat or drink,' she groaned. 'O Dave, th' end o' th' world's coomin' to-neet!'

He gave such a start that the strap of the trunk loosened and it fell heavily to the ground. The intensity of her manner and his knowledge of her truthfulness brought instant conviction.

'An' all them 'ams i' pickle, an' th' owd mare due to foal to-morrow!' he lamented.

'Dunna bother abaat such things,' she whimpered.

'Theer's weightier matters i' hond. Coom indoors, an' I'll tell yo' all abaat et. Et's no use frightin' other fowk; we mun beer et oursens.'

He followed to the house-place and set the trunk on the dresser, and stood tremblingly waiting for her to disburden herself of the fatal news. She untied the strings of her bonnet, and unfastened the glossy buttons of the berth.

'Et were th' neet after Jake's buryin',' she began, hurriedly. 'I'd gone to th' market-place for a change, for th' house were that stiflin', an' I wanted to be wh'am again, but Jane said I mun stop another day. An' theer were a man preachin' on th' steps o' th' cross an aged, venerable man like th' picture o' Is-yah i' th' Bible.'

She paused for breath. 'An' what did he tell yo'?' Dave stammered.

'He said as he'd med it up aat o' th' proffercies i' th' Owd Testament an' th' Revelations i' th' New as th' world were doomed. But we were to hev a sign gi'en a breet leet i' th' sky at midnight a leet sim'lar to th' roary-boary-ailis as cem last neet, an' twenty-four hours after that everything 'ld hap as he foretold. Th' d%oad'll rise. Eh dear! eh dear!'

She began to sob violently; Dave put his arm around her waist.

'Wench,' he said, with much fervour, 'dunna fret. Yo've done nowt to be 'shamed o', an' no more hev I, an' ef we mun die, well, we mun. Hark to th' kettle boilin'; theer's buttered cake i' th' oven. Surely theer 's no call for us to go wi' empty bellies. An' for th' Lord's sake dunna let's mention what 's coomin' till we've doon eatin'.'

So they partook of a comfortable meal, and when it was finished, Sarah washed the cups and dishes and replaced them on the rack.

'We've on'y got two more hours to live, Dave,' she said, quietly. 'If I could hev hed my way, I'd hev chosen soom other time. Th' "owd-man apples" is finer nor they've bin sin' mother died, an' theer's that bacon o' yo'rs wi' none to eat et.'

'Never bother,' he said, despondently. 'Et'll be all th' same soon. Let us sit an' wait hond-i'-hond.'

They drew nearer the hearth and rested silently until the tall clock struck eleven. Then Sarah rose and moved her chair to the wall.

'Lad,' she said, 's'pose we go daan to th' churchyard an' wait theer. Yo'r fowk an' mine are buried alongside, an' et'ld seem more respectful ef we were theer when they cem up. I'll tek a shawl to put under us.'

He agreed at once, and they went stealthily down the dark street and over the stile to the south side of the church. There they sat on the grass beside a square tombstone that was embellished with designs of cherubim, and death's-heads, and hour-glasses. As time passed Sarah's head sank to her lover's shoulder. She was worn out with excitement and fatigue. In a few minutes she fell asleep.

Twelve chimed from the tower and Dave was filled with supreme terror. But no thunderclap came, nor did the graves show any signs of subterranean disturbance. He also began to grow drowsy and he leaned back against the stone, his face touching hers.

Dawn broke, a glorious red dawn, and soon the sunlight touched their eyelids. They awoke simultaneously, and after a moment of amazement, Sarah drew herself away, blushing like a young girl.

'That fellow were a liar an' a brute,' she cried, angrily, 'gettin' two decent fowk to stop aat-o'-doors all neet. Whatever'll Milton say ef et gets abaat? We mun steal wh'am afore onybody's stirrin'.'

When they entered her garden, they heard the whistling of an approaching ploughboy. Sarah tried to run along the narrow path, but stumbled over a projecting currant bough, and Dave was obliged to carry her indoors.

'Ef we've bin seen aar character's gone,' she wailed. 'Milton were e'er th' evilest thinkin' spot i' th' Peak!'

But her lover only laughed. 'I fear theer's nowt for us but to get wed at onct,' he said. 'Yo' want someone to look after yo'. I'll go an' tell parson

abaat th' spurrin's this morn. An' now I mun go an' see how th' mare 's gettin' on.'

The Last Posset

The Yeld is a small, stuccoed farmstead, lying in a concave on the south slope of Milton Edge. Three or four fields surround the buildings; beyond, in every direction, runs the moor with its marshes and rocks and tumuli. A few spruce firs shelter the house from the east wind: the storms of two centuries have made them lop-sided and bent the trunks bow-shape, so that such as are nearest rest their tops on the lichened slates.

Miss Bimble was toiling up the sandy path, with a basket of provisions bought in the village of Milton, which lies out of sight beyond the curve of the valley. There was a look of virtuous resolution on her puckered face, an uncommon kindness that for the nonce made her almost comely. At the stile, where the path entered the first field, she put down her burden, 'phewed', and mopped her forehead with her apron.

'By'r leddy,' she muttered, 'et's more nor hot et 's griddlin'. I reckon I suffer more wi' bein' fat. When that poor lad Aitchilees were a-courtin' me, we used for to think nowt o' th' climb et were but child's play then. But I measured nineteen inch raand th' waist i' those days, an' naa I'm forty an' five inch! Solid flesh, tho',' she struck her bosom heavily with her closed hand; 'better nor's to be fun' naa'-days!'

A cur-dog came limping towards her from the house. She recognized it as belonging to her nearest neighbour, an old farmer who lived two miles farther along the Edge. When she reached the gate of the cobbled yard, where the stable and house front and 'shippon' formed three sides of a court, in whose midst steamed a lush, dock-grown manure heap that was surrounded by a brown moat, she saw her visitor sitting on the pig-block beside the door.

'Good e'en to yo', Hannah,' he said.

'Good e'en, James. God's mercy, haa I hev sweated!'

'Ay, et's close. Theer 's thun'er abaat. An' yo've been weighted, too. I thowt I'd coom ower wi'a bit o' news for yo'. I went ower th' hill to Thornhill this morn, to see haa Aitchilees Chapman were gettin' on.'

She unlocked the door. 'Coom in an' hev a sup o' beer,' she said. 'I tapped et yesternoon et 's th' March brewin'. Well, an' haa 's he doin'?'

'I'm sorry to say as he's d%oad he died just afore I got to th' spot.'

'Eh dear! eh dear! an' he were such a fine fellow, he were. An' on'y fifty. Whate'er mun his wife an' childer do? Hoo's no push abaat her, an' th' eldest gal esna owd enow to go to sarvice!'

'Th' woman as were nursin' him said as he'd begged an' prayed as they shouldna be sent to th' Bastille. Th' wife's abed wi' another babby th' tenth, an' hoo couldna be wi' him at th' last. Theer's talk already o' gettin' up a 'scription an' fixin' em up i' a shop.'

'I'll tell yo' what, James, ef they do I shanna be again gi'in' summat. I've thowt o' helpin' 'em all day. Yo' know fowk said once upon a time as he were after me?'

'Oo, ay, I hevna forgot. Yo' jilted th' poor chap, yo' did.'

She bridled foolishly and ran on tiptoe (to show that she was still agile) to the pantry, where she drew a pot of ale.

'I wanna tell yo' what I'll gie,' she said. 'I might surprise yo'. Theer'll be little need o' other 'scriptions when they get mine. Sup savagely, man, theer's plenty more.'

He drained the mug and laid it heavily on the table.

'No more, thank yo', Hannah. Et's good, thatten none o' malt-coom-an-peep-at-th'-wayter stuff. Naa I mun r%oally go, milkin's near, an' my owd lass 'll be gettin' oneasy.'

When he had started, she called her own kine, with a shrill, oily: 'Leddy, coom up, coom up, leddy,' and milked and set everything in order for the night. After she had returned to the house-place; she went to an oaken cabinet that stood between the hearth and the window. It was a fine piece of furniture, carved with scenes from Holy Writ. Here Daniel scowled at man-faced lions; there Balaam mercilessly flogged his ass.

She unlocked one of the topmost doors and took from the shelf an uncouth pitcher of shiny green ware, covered with monstrous figures in high relief. As dusk was falling, she lighted a candle, so that she might watch the glittering of the bulging sides.

'I dunna like to part wi' et, but et seems my duty,' she said, sadly. 'Et's bin i' aar fam'ly for hunnerds o' years. Feyther always hed et as a sailor brought et fro' Chaney.'

She passed her hand over the rotund belly.

'Mony's th' carouse yo've helped!' she murmured, in fond apostrophe.
'Mony's the Bimble as hes gone to bed wi' een small as grey peas after
suppin' fro' thee. But thaa mun go to save Aitchilees' b,,irns. I'm fain to part
wi' thee, but no paar upon earth 'ld mek' me touch th' money as I saved as
es i' th' bank.'

The dragons' eyes winked seducingly, tempting her to a last posset.

'We'll part i' mirth. Good owd frien's hev we bin, an' to-morrow I mun tek
thee daan to Squire Bagshawe's, an' mind him as he offered ten good pun'
for thee when he set him daan for a drink last Twelfth. I little thowt that I'd
ever find i' my heart to part wi' thee, but thaa mun know I were fond o'
Aitchilees, tho' I did gi'e him th' mitten. I were sure as he were after th'
land, an' I'd heerd as he 'd walked more nor once wi' th' wench he wed for
th' first wife. He might hev her for me: hoo were fow as neet!'

She put the jug on the oven-top to heat, and went again to the pantry, to
draw another pint of ale.

'Feyther said as thaa wert to pass to my eldest lad,' she said, as she
returned; 'an' as I hevna ony childer, an' surely ne'er will have ony naa, et 's
as well thaa'rt goin'. Cousin Richard Henry's my heir, an' I wouldna hev his
slut o' a wife chippin' bits aat o' thee, an' belike gi'en thee to th' childer for
a plaything. Nay, thaa'dst best go an' set up Aitchilees' young uns for life.'

The door of the cabinet still hung open, showing a row of stone-ware pint
bottles.

'Et shall be a posset a Kirsmas posset i' harvest time. Little else but posset
hes been drunk aat o' thee i' my livin' mem'ry. An' et mun be th' strongest
posset as thaa'st held i' thy belly for mony a long year.
Gin i' et, an' rum, an' whiskey, an' nutmegs, an' cloves, an' ginger. I wanna
hev no milk a gill o' cream wi' lump sugar 's th' best. An' a raand o' toast to
soften et.'

She took a little brass saucepan from the rack and poured in the ale and set
it over the clear heart of the fire. One by one she dropped in the spices, and
when the contents had begun to simmer, she moved the pan to the hob and
cut a slice of bread. This she toasted until it was of uniform straw-colour;
then she broke it into the posset jug and soaked it with cream. The ale sent
a pungent aroma through the room.

'Et 's abaat ready,' she said, sniffing. 'Naa I mun pour et in. By th' godlings, et smells gran!' I'll do thee honour, owd jug; et 's the last posset as e'er I'll sup fro' thee, an' I'll mek et r%oal powerful.'

She filled a tea-cup with neat rum and added it to the rest, stirring carefully meanwhile. When she believed it to be thoroughly mixed, she used the same quantities of whisky and gin. The fragrance actually brought tears to her eyes.

'I amna sure as I hevna put too much sperrit to et, but I do consider et 's a success. Here's to thy good health i' th' fine place thaa'rt goin' to. Thaa'lt stan' i' a press full o' Crown Derby better comp'ny thaa'st ne'er known!'

She drank and smacked her lips. 'I've fun' aat haa to mek posset naa, I do b'lieve,' she exclaimed, gleefully. 'I ne'er supped such i' my life afore.'

Then she drew the table nearer the settle and snuggled in the warmest corner. 'I'll think abaat Aitchilees as I drink. Happen he'll know as he 's i' my mind, an' as I'm tendin' to do well for them as he 's left behind. Like as not my help'll set the childer all on theer feet. They may coom to be well-to-do fowk, an' all aat o' my posset jug!'

The blood, chilled for so many years, grew warm and vigorous as she sipped and sipped. The coarse brush of her fancy painted bright pictures of the past vignettes akin to those one sees on the porcelain faces of old Derbyshire 'long-sleeved clocks'. She saw herself leaning on his arm as they strolled through meadows aglow with daffy-down-dillies and primroses; she saw him waiting for her at the 'leppings' of the Milton Brook. Then they were kneeling together in one of the square pews of the church, praying from one book. It seemed to her as if she heard his voice, soft and wheedling as ever.

'Aitchilees, lad, I looved yo', I did,' she whispered.

It was near bedtime now: she took up the jug and drank what was left with one long gulp.

'I'm afeard et 's gotten i' my y%oad,' she sighed, faintly. 'I'm sick-like I do b'lieve I've tekken a drop too much!'

She stretched herself full length on the lang-settle, and fell asleep and dreamed that she was turned out of the house for debts that she knew nothing about. When she awoke, candle and fire were out and the room was in utter darkness. She felt as if she cared not whether she lived or died, but

her depression was not caused by her lover's death. Rain was beating loudly against the windows; a rumble of thunder shook the air.

She rose, and with the sudden motion, upset the three-legged table. The posset jug fell to the hearth and broke into fragments.

'Drat th' thing, an' drat et an' drat et!' she snarled. 'Aitchilees' brats 'll hev nowt fro' me naa!'

And she stumbled blindly to the door.

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The woman who sat nearest to her noted her suppressed excitement, and offered her a draught from a jack-bottle of gin.

'Tek a pull, Miss Bland,' she said. 'Trouble's ower-coomin' yo'. I reckon yo'r brother's end's bin a sad trial.'

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abaat th' spurrin's this morn. An' now I mun go an' see how th' mare 's gettin' on.'

The Last Posset

The Yeld is a small, stuccoed farmstead, lying in a concave on the south slope of Milton Edge. Three or four fields surround the buildings; beyond, in every direction, runs the moor with its marshes and rocks and tumuli. A few spruce firs shelter the house from the east wind: the storms of two centuries have made them lop-sided and bent the trunks bow-shape, so that such as are nearest rest their tops on the lichened slates.

Miss Bimble was toiling up the sandy path, with a basket of provisions bought in the village of Milton, which lies out of sight beyond the curve of the valley. There was a look of virtuous resolution on her puckered face, an uncommon kindness that for the nonce made her almost comely. At the stile, where the path entered the first field, she put down her burden, 'phewed', and mopped her forehead with her apron.

'By'r leddy,' she muttered, 'et's more nor hot et 's griddlin'. I reckon I suffer more wi' bein' fat. When that poor lad Aitchilees were a-courtin' me, we used for to think nowt o' th' climb et were but child's play then. But I measured nineteen inch raand th' waist i' those days, an' naa I'm forty an' five inch! Solid flesh, tho',' she struck her bosom heavily with her closed hand; 'better nor's to be fun' naa'-days!'

A cur-dog came limping towards her from the house. She recognized it as belonging to her nearest neighbour, an old farmer who lived two miles farther along the Edge. When she reached the gate of the cobbled yard, where the stable and house front and 'shippon' formed three sides of a court, in whose midst steamed a lush, dock-grown manure heap that was surrounded by a brown moat, she saw her visitor sitting on the pig-block beside the door.

'Good e'en to yo', Hannah,' he said.

'Good e'en, James. God's mercy, haa I hev sweated!'

'Ay, et's close. Theer 's thun'er abaat. An' yo've been weighted, too. I thowt I'd coom ower wi'a bit o' news for yo'. I went ower th' hill to Thornhill this morn, to see haa Aitchilees Chapman were gettin' on.'

She unlocked the door. 'Coom in an' hev a sup o' beer,' she said. 'I tapped et yesternoon et 's th' March brewin'. Well, an' haa 's he doin'?'

'I'm sorry to say as he's d%oad he died just afore I got to th' spot.'

'Eh dear! eh dear! an' he were such a fine fellow, he were. An' on'y fifty. Whate'er mun his wife an' childer do? Hoo's no push abaat her, an' th' eldest gal esna owd enow to go to sarvice!'

'Th' woman as were nursin' him said as he'd begged an' prayed as they shouldna be sent to th' Bastille. Th' wife's abed wi' another babby th' tenth, an' hoo couldna be wi' him at th' last. Theer's talk already o' gettin' up a 'scription an' fixin' em up i' a shop.'

'I'll tell yo' what, James, ef they do I shanna be again gi'in' summat. I've thowt o' helpin' 'em all day. Yo' know fowk said once upon a time as he were after me?'

'Oo, ay, I hevna forgot. Yo' jilted th' poor chap, yo' did.'

She bridled foolishly and ran on tiptoe (to show that she was still agile) to the pantry, where she drew a pot of ale.

'I wanna tell yo' what I'll gie,' she said. 'I might surprise yo'. Theer'll be little need o' other 'scriptions when they get mine. Sup savagely, man, theer's plenty more.'

He drained the mug and laid it heavily on the table.

'No more, thank yo', Hannah. Et's good, thatten none o' malt-coom-an-peep-at-th'-wayter stuff. Naa I mun r%oally go, milkin's near, an' my owd lass 'll be gettin' oneasy.'

When he had started, she called her own kine, with a shrill, oily: 'Leddy, coom up, coom up, leddy,' and milked and set everything in order for the night. After she had returned to the house-place; she went to an oaken cabinet that stood between the hearth and the window. It was a fine piece of furniture, carved with scenes from Holy Writ. Here Daniel scowled at man-faced lions; there Balaam mercilessly flogged his ass.

She unlocked one of the topmost doors and took from the shelf an uncouth pitcher of shiny green ware, covered with monstrous figures in high relief. As dusk was falling, she lighted a candle, so that she might watch the glittering of the bulging sides.

'I dunna like to part wi' et, but et seems my duty,' she said, sadly. 'Et's bin i' aar fam'ly for hunnerds o' years. Feyther always hed et as a sailor brought et fro' Chaney.'

She passed her hand over the rotund belly.

'Mony's th' carouse yo've helped!' she murmured, in fond apostrophe.
'Mony's the Bimble as hes gone to bed wi' een small as grey peas after
suppin' fro' thee. But thaa mun go to save Aitchilees' b,,irns. I'm fain to part
wi' thee, but no paar upon earth 'ld mek' me touch th' money as I saved as
es i' th' bank.'

The dragons' eyes winked seducingly, tempting her to a last posset.

'We'll part i' mirth. Good owd frien's hev we bin, an' to-morrow I mun tek
thee daan to Squire Bagshawe's, an' mind him as he offered ten good pun'
for thee when he set him daan for a drink last Twelfth. I little thowt that I'd
ever find i' my heart to part wi' thee, but thaa mun know I were fond o'
Aitchilees, tho' I did gi'e him th' mitten. I were sure as he were after th'
land, an' I'd heerd as he 'd walked more nor once wi' th' wench he wed for
th' first wife. He might hev her for me: hoo were fow as neet!'

She put the jug on the oven-top to heat, and went again to the pantry, to
draw another pint of ale.

'Feyther said as thaa wert to pass to my eldest lad,' she said, as she
returned; 'an' as I hevna ony childer, an' surely ne'er will have ony naa, et 's
as well thaa'rt goin'. Cousin Richard Henry's my heir, an' I wouldna hev his
slut o' a wife chippin' bits aat o' thee, an' belike gi'en thee to th' childer for
a plaything. Nay, thaa'dst best go an' set up Aitchilees' young uns for life.'

The door of the cabinet still hung open, showing a row of stone-ware pint
bottles.

'Et shall be a posset a Kirsmas posset i' harvest time. Little else but posset
hes been drunk aat o' thee i' my livin' mem'ry. An' et mun be th' strongest
posset as thaa'st held i' thy belly for mony a long year.
Gin i' et, an' rum, an' whiskey, an' nutmegs, an' cloves, an' ginger. I wanna
hev no milk a gill o' cream wi' lump sugar 's th' best. An' a raand o' toast to
soften et.'

She took a little brass saucepan from the rack and poured in the ale and set
it over the clear heart of the fire. One by one she dropped in the spices, and
when the contents had begun to simmer, she moved the pan to the hob and
cut a slice of bread. This she toasted until it was of uniform straw-colour;
then she broke it into the posset jug and soaked it with cream. The ale sent
a pungent aroma through the room.

'Et 's abaat ready,' she said, sniffing. 'Naa I mun pour et in. By th' godlings, et smells gran!' I'll do thee honour, owd jug; et 's the last posset as e'er I'll sup fro' thee, an' I'll mek et r%oal powerful.'

She filled a tea-cup with neat rum and added it to the rest, stirring carefully meanwhile. When she believed it to be thoroughly mixed, she used the same quantities of whisky and gin. The fragrance actually brought tears to her eyes.

'I amna sure as I hevna put too much sperrit to et, but I do consider et 's a success. Here's to thy good health i' th' fine place thaa'rt goin' to. Thaa'lt stan' i' a press full o' Crown Derby better comp'ny thaa'st ne'er known!'

She drank and smacked her lips. 'I've fun' aat haa to mek posset naa, I do b'lieve,' she exclaimed, gleefully. 'I ne'er supped such i' my life afore.'

Then she drew the table nearer the settle and snuggled in the warmest corner. 'I'll think abaat Aitchilees as I drink. Happen he'll know as he 's i' my mind, an' as I'm tendin' to do well for them as he 's left behind. Like as not my help'll set the childer all on theer feet. They may coom to be well-to-do fowk, an' all aat o' my posset jug!'

The blood, chilled for so many years, grew warm and vigorous as she sipped and sipped. The coarse brush of her fancy painted bright pictures of the past vignettes akin to those one sees on the porcelain faces of old Derbyshire 'long-sleeved clocks'. She saw herself leaning on his arm as they strolled through meadows aglow with daffy-down-dillies and primroses; she saw him waiting for her at the 'leppings' of the Milton Brook. Then they were kneeling together in one of the square pews of the church, praying from one book. It seemed to her as if she heard his voice, soft and wheedling as ever.

'Aitchilees, lad, I looved yo', I did,' she whispered.

It was near bedtime now: she took up the jug and drank what was left with one long gulp.

'I'm afeard et 's gotten i' my y%oad,' she sighed, faintly. 'I'm sick-like I do b'lieve I've tekken a drop too much!'

She stretched herself full length on the lang-settle, and fell asleep and dreamed that she was turned out of the house for debts that she knew nothing about. When she awoke, candle and fire were out and the room was in utter darkness. She felt as if she cared not whether she lived or died, but

her depression was not caused by her lover's death. Rain was beating loudly against the windows; a rumble of thunder shook the air.

She rose, and with the sudden motion, upset the three-legged table. The posset jug fell to the hearth and broke into fragments.

'Drat th' thing, an' drat et an' drat et!' she snarled. 'Aitchilees' brats 'll hev nowt fro' me naa!'

And she stumbled blindly to the door.