

## A NOVEL VIEW OF JUNIPER GREEN

***A Talk on two 19<sup>th</sup> century local novels, The Misty Morning and The Dark Night, given by Richard Watt 26<sup>th</sup> October 2007***

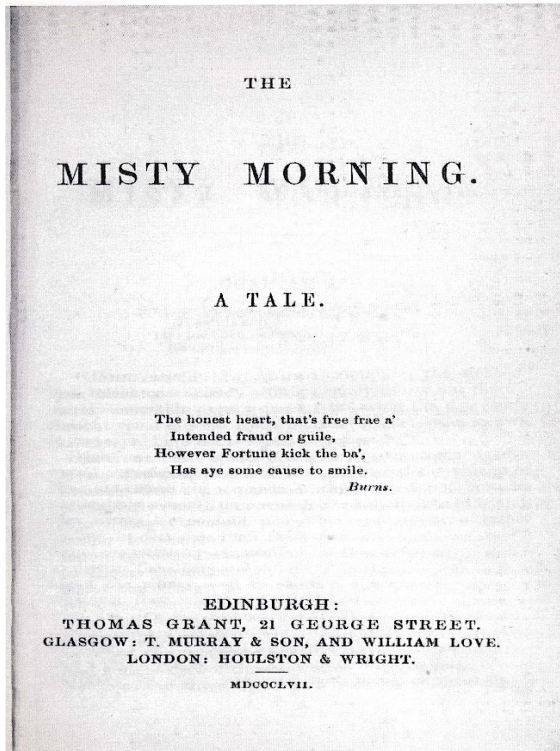


Figure 1: Misty Morning Title Page

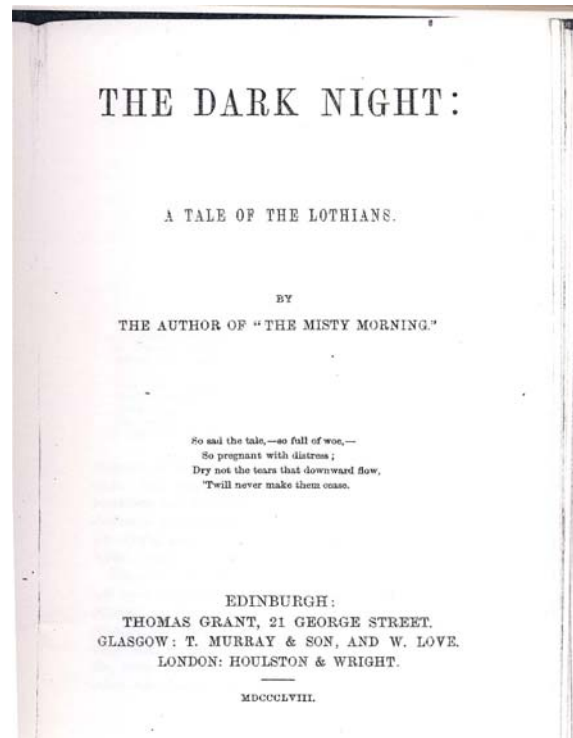


Figure 2: Dark Night Title Page

Two novels, *The Misty Morning* published in 1857, and *The Dark Night* by the same anonymous author, which appeared a year later in 1858, are both supposed to be based in a fictionalised Juniper Green. The authorship of these two books is not absolutely certain, but a newspaper report of the 1890's or early 1900's attributes them to the pen of Thomas Finnie, grandson of James Thomson, described as 'the Kinleith poet'. Following a description of a visit to the locality by a Mr Finnie of Glasgow, the reporter says: 'It is interesting to note that it was Mr Finnie's older brother Thomas who was the author of "The Misty Mornin" [sic], a book published about 40 years ago, anonymously, with local connections, the authorship of which was wrongly attributed to a Dr Cunningham, then of Currie, who suffered in consequence.'

The fact of 'local connections' and the damage done to poor Dr Cunningham by his assumed responsibility for *The Misty Morning* suggest that some of the locals recognised and resented the portrait of themselves and their village as depicted in the novel. The event which triggers the plotline of the book is a real historical one, the sensational murder of the local doctor by a madman who had been released into the community from the asylum in Morningside. Only the historical names of the murderer and his victim are disguised, as is that of the locality, though 'Bramble Green' as the name of the fictional village may be seen as a pretty thin disguise for Juniper Green. Although the precise topography of the village of Bramble Green is left some what vague, there is another detail which strongly suggests the author had Juniper Green in mind: on page 151 reference is made to ' the "Doukin Hole", a deep pool in the river that ran past the village'. There are people in the village today who learned to swim or tried to get their sex education at the "Doukin Hole" downriver from Woodhall Mill. You can read Ann Gowans' reminiscences on the Juniper Green 300 website.

"At the dooking hole we girls would watch the boys swim. It was just along from the station near the waterfall. Girls didn't swim: we just waited for them to come out as they were in the nuddy! They got freezing waiting for us to go away!"

The weir that created this local swimming pool was later destroyed with explosives, probably in the interests of health and safety.



Figure 3: The Water of Leith near the former Doukin Hole

No doubt the more literate inhabitants of Currie and Colinton revelled in the scandalous representation of their Juniper Green neighbours and enjoyed trying to identify the originals for the gossips, drunkards, dimwits, scheming parents and air-headed girls of the novel. For this book paints a pretty unflattering picture of the worthies of Bramble Green, caricaturing them and satirising their activities. For a few of his characters the author appears to have some affection, showing them as basically good-hearted, but ignorant, gullible and, in most cases, excessively addicted to alcohol. The majority, including the more prominent citizens such as the schoolmaster and the tradesmen and shopkeepers who are the leaders of the community, are not good hearted, but are greedy and self-promoting, as well as being ignorant and addicted to alcohol, quarrelsome, liable to drunken brawling, petty rivalries and having a good conceit of themselves. In this novel nearly all the characters belong to the lower middle-class or the working class, uneducated, semi-literate at best and living in a world dominated by rumour and gossip. Only the doctors are represented as superior in education and social accomplishments, but of the three mentioned or described in the text, two are charlatans and only one, the replacement for the murdered practitioner and the central figure (I hesitate to use the word "hero") of the story, is in any way positively presented. The dominie, Mr Tawse, is also educated, but pedantic, narrow minded, hypocritical and greedy and is, indeed, one of the most unpleasant characters in the village.

The community of *The Dark Night*, however, shows a different social mix in a hamlet called Knockdrumlie and its surrounding countryside. Here we follow the fortunes of a middle to upper middle class cast of characters; landowners and their families, a student of divinity and a retired naval surgeon, as well as the humbly born daughter of a woodcutter and a golden-hearted tollkeeper and his wife. In this novel Thomas Finnie sets out to tell a story of love and tangled relationships. The satire of *The Misty Morning* is behind him. His venom is reserved for the socially climbing and money and property obsessed middle class parents. Here the working class characters are poor but honest and generous to a fault. In this second book the setting of the story seems less likely to be based closely on Juniper Green, and is far vaguer and more general.

Therefore in this talk I will concentrate mainly on *The Misty Morning* and its snapshot of life in a village that is almost certainly the Juniper Green of 150 years ago. Certainly it was *The Misty Morning* rather than the relatively benign *Dark Night* that, according to the newspaper report of 40 years after the book's publication, was seen as having local connections and caused sufficient upset as to harm Dr Cunningham's good name. I shall look at some of the institutions, the social composition, the economy of the village and the preoccupations and customs of its inhabitants as depicted in these two books. The mixture is a rich one and, making allowances for the author's intention to ridicule most of his characters in *The Misty Morning*, one that may be seen as representing reasonably accurately village life on the edge of Edinburgh. Owing to the restrictions of time, I can take only some of the books' themes. The different headings under which I shall look at the Juniper Green of Thomas Finnie are: Occupations and the Village Economy, Drinking and Leisure, Health and Medicine, Diet, Social Customs and Class Divisions, and Transport.

### **Occupations and the Village Economy**

First of all, one of the things that strikes the twenty first century reader is how many different trades were carried on in Bramble Green and how inward-looking as well as self-sufficient the inhabitants are. Of course we have to allow for the novelist's need to deal with a self-contained group of characters, but, even so it is clear that the community looks very little beyond its boundaries for its necessities of life and its entertainment. Characters we meet early on in the book are Benjie Artichoke the market gardener, Charlie Spades the parish gravedigger, Watty Baton the village policeman, Dr Plyphleme, the general practitioner, Mr Tawse the schoolmaster, Mr Skeldrin the tenant farmer, Mr Butterscales the chief grocer, Mr Chizzle the builder, the landlord of The Cheerie Farmers pub, and Doctor Hornie Golloch, the candidate to replace the murdered doctor Boltpill. Other trades mentioned are butchers, the baker, the blacksmith, the postmistress, the wright, who makes coffins which are much in demand thanks to Dr Plyphleme's ministrations, and the road scraper, the gamekeeper and a shepherd. Later in the story the minister and the precentor are introduced. The fact that butchers are mentioned in the plural and that Mr Butterscales is the "chief grocer"

suggests that Bramble Green supports a number of both. Farmers are people of consequence and importance in the village.

There are no job opportunities for most women, and none for the middle class girls in the story who consequently are desperate to find suitable husbands. For working class women there are few chances of employment apart from domestic service, though early on in the book "Saut Meg's" cuddie throws Mrs Curmuddie's son into a water butt. Saut Meg would have been a seller or hawker of salt, a recognised occupation of the time. Otherwise a woman's role is to look after the bairns and keep house for her husband, attend to his every need and scold him at the same time as accepting that it is normal for a husband to go out at night and get drunk with his friends. Even so, the lower class women, like the two gossips, Mrs Artichoke and Mrs Curmuddie, are presented as strong characters who can generally keep the men in their place, largely thanks to the sharpness of their tongues. Middle class girls, by force of economic necessity searching for husbands, may either, like Mr Tawse's unpleasant daughters, be unscrupulous man hunters, consumed by vanity and envy of their love rivals, or genteel, demure, self-effacing young ladies fit to grace the drawing room of a successful man. Jeanie Skeldrin, the new doctor's choice of future partner, and his sister, Sarah, fall into the latter category.



*Figure 4: Two Fashionable Young Ladies of 1857*

## Drinking and Leisure

Drinking and drunkenness are constant motifs of life in Bramble Green. Whisky is the great social lubricant both for women of a certain class as well as for almost all of the men of whatever class. In the opening chapter Mrs Artichoke and her fellow gossip, Mrs Curmuddie, don't go to the pub, the preserve of their menfolk, but keep a bottle of "speerits" hidden away about the garden or stable to assist discussion of their neighbours and of village events. The convention, however, is to preserve respectability by concealing the bottle beneath one's apron before producing it and then pretending not to enjoy drinking alcohol but to take a glass reluctantly in the interests of friendship and good health and the vital business of dissecting the reputations of others. Both ladies agree that whisky is best taken neat. The men, however, need make no concealment and show little or no restraint. At the start of the story of *The Misty Morning* Benjie Artichoke fails to return home at the expected hour from taking his garden produce to the market in the neighbouring town. When he does eventually appear very late at night he is lying unconscious through drink in his own cart, brought home by his son Willie. According to Willie he has had a drink at all the intervening villages where he had stopped to sell his vegetables, Colinton being, no doubt, one of these ports of call.

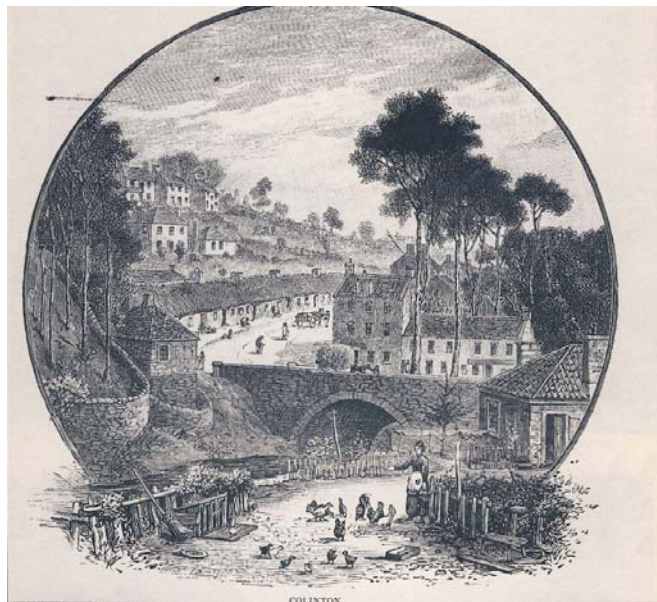


Figure 5: Colinton

According to Benjie the next morning he has drunk “a wee drap whisky” and “three half mutchkins an’ twa bottles o’ yill”. A mutchkin was three quarters of an imperial pint.

Generally speaking whisky appears to be the drink of choice, but when Mr Tawse, the self-important dominie who regards himself as the natural leader and organiser of village affairs, calls a meeting of Bramble Green’s more notable citizens to discuss the choice of the replacement doctor at The Cheerie Farmers pub, the company, in the author’s words, do “infinite justice to drink of every description”, and soon “most uproarious yelling and squabbling reigned on all sides.”.



SPLENDID OPENING FOR A YOUNG MEDICAL MAN.

*Figure 6: Selecting a New Doctor*

It all ends unfortunately with Mr Skeldrin and his prospective son-in-law, Grinton Gobbler, chasing Mr Tawse from the room with a view to avenging themselves on Mr Tawse for slighting Mr Skeldrin’s command of English. Mr Tawse just reaches his front door in time, but in his drunken rage Mr Skeldrin falls and injures his arm. Normally Tawse and Skeldrin are friends, and Tawse, who is a great free-loader of other peoples’ whisky, calls regularly at Thistle Ha’, Skeldrin’s farm, in order to enjoy a dram or two or more at his host’s expense. Incidentally, Benjie on this occasion is taken home in a wheelbarrow.



*Figure 7: The Pleasures of Drink*

A similar drunken fiasco occurs when the new doctor invites the same notables of the village to dinner. Tawse mistakenly thinks the doctor has made an offensive comment about the beauty, accomplishments and marriageability of his daughters and throws his tumbler and its contents in the doctor's face. The doctor seizes the dominie by the throat and, in attempting to separate them, the overweight Butterscales falls on top of the struggling pair, knocking the fight out of them. Drink in Bramble Green is not only the means of promoting good fellowship, but is also often the cause of disharmony and violence. Throughout the book details of drinking bouts recur, often when Mr Skeldrin is entertaining Mr Tawse or Grinton Gobbler at home or in the pub.





*Figure 8: Entertaining a Friend at Home*

Mr Tawse seems able to desert his charges in the school to go on a drinking spree in *The Cheerie Farmers* and Benjie consumes excessive amounts of drink to the very end. In the penultimate chapter Willie Artichoke marries Katie Curmuddie and this time Benjie, amid general drunkenness, ends up insensible for several hours in a child's cradle.

Any excuse for a drink is eagerly sought, whether it be a chance encounter with a friend, a visit to one's house, a village meeting, a trip to town, a celebration, a party and so on. This is very much a drinking culture and the author is not judgemental about excessive consumption and drunkenness in themselves. Drink is sometimes a means by which people make themselves ridiculous, but is definitely not seen as bad in itself.



*Figure 9: Made Ridiculous through Drink*

It is other defects in their characters such as vanity or wounded pride that cause people to behave badly when drunk. Indeed, Benjie, the greatest drunkard of them all, is a sympathetic, good-hearted character, who is never aggressive but is the life and soul of the party, until he lapses into unconsciousness when he is treated indulgently by his family and friends.

Drinks mentioned are whisky, toddy (a mixture of whisky, hot water and sugar) and grog (rum diluted with water), which seem to be the most popular. Ale is also drunk in the pubs. The doctor's social position means that he serves wine at home. The only brand of whisky mentioned is Glenlivet which Butterscales the grocer serves to Mr Tawse. Clearly Glenlivet is superior to the fiery 'speerits' drunk by Mrs Artichoke and Mrs Curmuddie. By the 1850's the manufacture of whisky had been cleaned up and regulated in response to a shortage of wine and brandy caused by a phylloxera outbreak in France at the end of the 18th century. Well-known brands of malt whisky had appeared by the mid-century to meet a demand for a reliable and refined alternative to brandy.

Apart from drinking there seem to be limited opportunities for leisure pursuits in the village. Older women spend much time in gossiping with the neighbours. The “quality” arrange visits and dinner parties, often with a view to enabling their daughters to meet eligible young men. Singing, whether it be in middle class homes around the piano, or among revellers in the pub, is a very important social skill. Benjie Artichoke has an enormous stock of songs committed to memory and at any excuse will sing them for friends or acquaintances, or to himself when drunk. In the days when people had to make their own entertainment a good singer was in demand, but every member of a gathering in the book is expected to contribute at least one song, whether they have the ability or not. There are drinking songs, love songs, comic songs and ballads, several of which in the book are clearly Irish, which may reflect the influence of the large number of Irish immigrants who arrived in Scotland early in the nineteenth century. There is even an Irish character in the story, Larry O’Grunter, who enables the author to show off his ability to handle the comic possibilities of stage Irish. Larry and Benjie and Willie Artichoke have a lengthy singing contest up on the moorland towards the end of the book. Large numbers of Irish navvies were brought into the area in the 1840’s to excavate the compensation reservoirs on the edge of the Pentlands. Perhaps local people associated the moorland with an Irish presence. At the wedding of Willie Archibald and Katie Curmuddie the entertainment consists of dancing to the music of the fiddle and songs from the guests. Cockie Cheeper, the village fiddler, is an important resource for the community and much in demand.

Another pastime was playing cards. Watty Baton, the policeman, spends a whole evening playing cards with Charlie Spades, the gravedigger, and had been playing a game of “birkie” for two hours when interrupted by the doctor who needs Watty’s services. So absorbed had they been in the game that they leave their respective hands of cards so that they can resume at a later date. “Birkie” was a simple game for two people, the person who throws down the highest card taking the trick. It is known in English as beggar-my-neighbour and appears to have been popular, especially among the less educated members of society. The toll-keeper in *The Dark Night* plays draughts. Middle class girls may do crochet work or read a novel to while away the hours spent in the drawing room.

Somewhat surprisingly, given that the ability to swim was not very common at the time, Willie Archibald is a very strong swimmer. One can only assume that the boys of the village made good use of the “Doukin Hole”, just as they did two or three generations later and that swimming would have been a major summer leisure activity for boys.

A children’s game called kittly-kout is referred to and seems to involve trying to find a sweetie, but I’ve not been able to find out exactly what it is.

In winter there was curling on the ice. In *The Dark Night* it seems to have been accompanied by rowdiness and loud revelry. But this is described as being ‘on the loch’, and Juniper Green had no loch or curling pond. Perhaps, as this activity takes place over the fields at some distance from the village, the author had the Currie curling pond in mind.

In *The Dark Night* game shooting, boating and fishing appear as relaxations of the landowning class. The only allusions to the outdoor leisure activities of the rich in *The Misty Morning* are to grouse shooting on the moors and the care the “gamie” takes of the birds. It appears from one of Benjie’s comments that poorer people are likely to shoot blackbirds and other smaller birds, but it seems that this is to protect the fruit crops and not for sport or the pot.

## Health and Medicine



Figure 10: Doctor and Sick Child

Given that the plot of *The Misty Morning* is kick-started by the murder of a doctor, which allows the introduction of a new, single young doctor who is the catalyst for all sorts of disruption in the village, it is hardly surprising that medical matters get a good deal of coverage in the book. The nineteenth century saw huge changes in medical practice as well as in the reputation and status of medical men. At the start of the century there was a clear social gulf between the surgeon and the physician. The surgeon was a tradesman who had served an apprenticeship and got his hands dirty, so was socially well down the ladder and not accepted in polite society. The physician, on the other hand, was likely to have been schooled in the classics with little or no scientific or anatomical training, but, as an educated man good at writing obscure prescriptions in Latin, and with a convincing bedside manner, could get away, often literally, with murder, and also be accepted in society as a gentleman. Edinburgh University pioneered scientific and anatomical medical training, finally uniting the skills of surgeon and physician, enabling the emergence of the general practitioner who actually had knowledge of the way the body works and which remedies were likely to be beneficial, while enjoying the social standing of the well educated gentleman. In *The Misty Morning* we see these changes exemplified in the conflict between Dr Plyphleme, the surviving incumbent doctor, and Dr Horrie Golloch, the incomer who has the benefit of the latest medical training and skills. The community in general has no faith in Dr Plyphleme or in his traditional remedies of bleeding, blistering and applying leeches. They had felt the much the same way about the murdered man, Dr Boltpill. The ministrations of both had been accepted merely for the want of anything better, while it was recognised that they were more likely to kill than cure. Plyphleme constantly insists on being treated with the deference due to a professional gentleman which only emphasises that his professional skills and qualifications are practically non-existent and that he's little more than a sham. When Dr Golloch arrives he is an immediate success with his modern methods and scientific knowledge, and Dr Plyphleme's practice suffers as a result.

There are several examples of Dr Plyphleme's bizarre and ineffective remedies which appear to fool almost no one. Dr Plyphleme attends Benjie Artichoke after his first drunken binge and takes copious

quantities of blood from the unconscious man's arm. Benjie is furious when he wakes to see the bowl of his own blood beside him. Other patients have even more startling treatment; when Mrs Curmuddie's son nearly drowns in a barrel of water, Dr Plyphleme wants to shave his head and 'clap a slaiger o' mustard on it' to counteract the water that has got into it. Mrs Curmuddie prevents him on the grounds that she had seen what happened when 'auld Sawdust, the wright, 'fil't his stamack wi' the haggis'. Dr Plyphleme had 'scraped a' the hair off the puir man's head, an' stuck it owre wi' leeches'. The patient had tolerated the treatment only because the doctor put 'a good when coffins his road'. Later Doctors Plyphleme and Golloch and the old and new medicines come directly into conflict when Mr Skeldrin falls and hurts his arm in his drunken pursuit of Mr Tawse. Dr Plyphleme is called first and prescribes that the injured limb should be inserted up to the elbow into a half wellington boot filled with tar and grease which should be allowed to cool and left in place, while the other, sound, arm should be bled. In addition the patient is to take 'a dozen of the most noxious powders which laboratory ever created'. Mrs Skeldrin is most impressed with the doctor's manner and parade of learning:

'Dr Plyphleme had been called in and had pronounced the hand of Mr Skeldrin to be labouring under some derangement, which he took the pains to describe in the Latin language, with all the precision of an anatomical lecturer; and being his first visit to Thistle Ha', that style was quite new there, and so astounded Mrs Skeldrin, that even though she did not understand what was meant, she at once set the doctor down as a very learned man.....'.

In spite of this, the boot, tar and grease and powders fail to mend the arm. After a week or so, Dr Golloch is summoned, ridicules Plyphleme's remedy as useless, diagnoses and resets the dislocated wrist and bandages up the arm. Skeldrin immediately feels better. Plyphleme appears but leaves in a huff on discovering that his new rival has taken over the case and rejected his treatment. Bramble Green is on the side of scientific progress in health care and fed up with the quackery and social pretensions of the old style physician who mystified his patients with Latin and whose cures were usually worse than the disease.

We must remember that the mid nineteenth century was a time of high infant mortality and of endemic diseases which we no longer encounter in everyday life. Both typhus and cholera were common. When Benjie is unconscious and groaning in his drunken stupor his wife tells Dr Plyphleme she is 'awfu' feared it's the cholera or some o' thay things'. Two children in the village have the typhus fever and it is feared they may die.

Cholera was a frequent visitor to Edinburgh and its suburbs before sewers were built to separate waste water, urine and faeces from the water supply. Generally houses had a midden at the back onto which raw sewage was emptied direct from the privy. This got into the ground water and contaminated the well from which the domestic water supply was drawn.



*Figure 11: House of Rural Poor*

Similarly typhus is the product of crowded and insanitary conditions, being spread by lice, ticks and fleas, especially rat fleas.

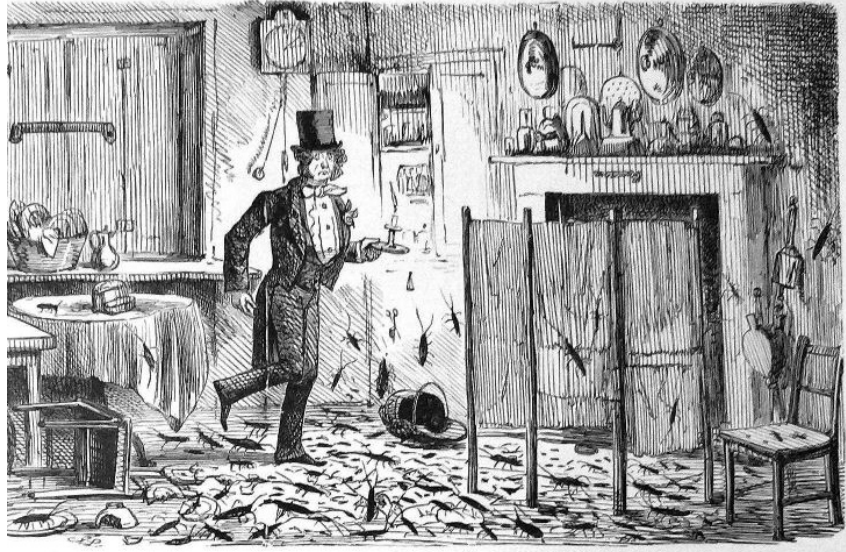


Figure 12: An Infested Kitchen

Another disease which often caused a long and lingering decline culminating in death was consumption or tuberculosis. TB is caused by a bacillus generally found in infected milk. Today we have tuberculin tested cows and the BCG inoculation, but in the mid-nineteenth century many shared the fate of the woodcutter's daughter, Caroline, in *The Dark Night*, and wasted away as the illness slowly destroyed them. There is also a reference to high child mortality in *The Misty Morning*. Charlie Spades, the gravedigger, has to dig a grave for one of Lowrie Lingle the shoemaker's children. He almost grudges having to break the soil for 'sich a wee crater', but does not want to disappoint the family who have been "good customers" and might be needing a job of the same kind soon.

Home remedies for a range of ailments involve the indiscriminate use of purgatives. Both senna and castor oil are used and Mrs Artichoke suggests the drastic sounding expedient of adding salts to senna tea as a means of restoring Mrs Curmuddie's laddie to health after he has been well soused in the water barrel.

From my own childhood I remember frequent dosing with laxatives such as Syrup of Figs and Liquid Paraffin. The obsession with curing all by bowel movements persisted for at least another century after *The Misty Morning*.





Figure 13: Syrup of Figs

## Diet

It is not easy to get a clear picture of what the Bramble Green and Knockdrumlie residents ate, but the diet of the poorer members of the community appears to have been very limited. When Watty Baton the policeman turns up at Charlie Spades' house at breakfast time, his host has little choice of offerings. There is no porridge because they have run out of oatmeal and there's nothing left but a little tea in the pot, a piece of bannock and some treacle. Much to Mrs Spades' dismay one of the children blurts out that his mother has hidden bread in her bed. Charlie gets the loaf, tears it to bits with his hands and Wattie and the children devour treacle pieces. It seems that 'baker's bread' is a luxury and a treat which Mrs Spades is reluctant to waste on her children and the policeman. Porridge, or 'parritch' as it is called by the villagers, seems to be universally eaten for breakfast by the working people. In *The Dark Night* much is made of the sugarallie (or liquorice) stick permanently stuck in Mungo Monypenny the toll keeper's baby's mouth to keep it quiet.

By contrast the Tawse family sit down to breakfast on herrings. Everyone of all degrees drinks tea. Haggis is also mentioned, though presumably not eaten at breakfast. Benjie Artichoke offers onions for sale to his neighbours. There are cheeses and hams hanging in the peat smoke of Gobbler's filthy kitchen and butter is also made on the farm. Probably these are for sale as Gobbler takes cheeses to

market, but no doubt some were kept for family use. Butterscales' shop sells 'country grown barley and inexhaustable [sic] pork'. Meat is not otherwise mentioned as being eaten, but the commonest crime investigated by Watty Baton is the stealing of hens. Larry O'Grunter, in the thick mist on the moorland, takes Benjie and Willie Artichoke to be sheep stealers, while in *The Dark Night* poachers are a preoccupation of the landowners. It appears that when fresh meat was obtained for the pot it was not always paid for. It also seems that hens were kept by almost everyone, so that eggs must have been a major source of protein. The Tawses serve cookies bought from the bakery with afternoon tea, but this is an unusual luxury intended to impress Grinton Gobbler who lives up to his name by scoffing the lot. We don't learn much about the diet of the better-off, but the Grahams in *The Dark Night*, who are landowners, serve a dinner of several courses, one of which is hare soup, the hare having been shot on the estate.

### **Social Customs and Class Divisions**

As I've already dealt with drinking and drunkenness which appeared to occupy much of the leisure time of Bramble Green, it is time to consider the picture offered by the novel of the social mores of the village which do not involve the excessive consumption of alcohol. With a few exceptions, the abstemious characters are the womenfolk, especially the middle class women or those who are ambitious to climb the social ladder into the middle class.

For there is a good deal of class consciousness in Bramble Green. The doings of the 'nabs' as Mrs Curmuddie and Mrs Artichoke, the gossips, call them, are a source of constant entertainment and speculation. There were spies in every middle class home in the form of servants. These servants were often youngsters who would be pumped by their parents for information about their employers at every opportunity. Mrs Curmuddie and Mrs Artichoke have a daughter and a son respectively in Dr Golloch's house which gives them a great advantage in the rivalry between gossips to come up with the latest news, the more sensational the better. In those days celebs and the destruction of their reputations by the tabloids were unknown, so the neighbours had to do instead. Sexual scandal is the best, just as today, and Bramble Green is shocked and delighted in equal measure when Katie Curmuddie, the doctor's servant girl,

vanishes, leaving an apparent suicide note on the kitchen table in which she expresses undying affection or, according to the note, 'infection', for her employer who has just become engaged to Jeanie Skeldrin. The doctor, who had been riding so high in peoples' estimation, is brought down with a crash and is now vilified as the seducer of a helpless young girl and as a heartless, unscrupulous man who has used his position of power as employer and social superior to have his wicked way with the servant while his fiancée is safely out of the way with his sister on a visit to his parents. The scenario of young servant seduced by employer or employer's son is a common enough theme of Victorian times, so much so that one assumes that it must have been a regular occurrence. In fact, in the novel the accusation is unjust. The doctor's love rival, the uncouth moorland farmer, Grinton Gobbler, has kidnapped Katie and faked the suicide note to destroy the doctor's reputation and win back Jeanie whom he had regarded as his by virtue of her father's preference for him as a son-in-law. It is ironic that in real life a real local doctor, Dr Cunningham, should have had his reputation ruined by the actual nineteenth century gossips of Juniper Green and Currie who assumed, without foundation, that he was the author of the novel.

Class consciousness works both ways. While the lower class gossips may enjoy seeing their superiors come down with a bump, the upper levels of society want the lower orders to know their place and hate to see their social inferiors giving themselves airs and aping their betters. Mr Tawse's catty and spiteful daughters spend their time in church on a Sunday examining the dress of other members of the congregation.



Figure 14: Fashionable Girls of the 1850's

They are especially aghast at the audacity of uppity servant girls who dress above their station:

'...who, they thought, had been trying to imitate them by adorning their wrists with mournful-looking black beads, and leaning their arms so beautified over the seats, and otherwise impertinently exposing them to view. This had raised the ire of the Tawse family; for ladies like them felt hurt when they saw servants or others of the class either carrying a parasol, or wearing any small ornaments, however honestly they might have been purchased or come by.'



Figure 15: Crinoline and Parasol

Incidentally, the black beads are almost certainly Whitby jet which was the height of fashion at the time. Poorer people were expected to wrap their heads and shoulders in a plaid for protection against the weather, not to carry parasols. The young ladies are infuriated too by another 'outrage on their aristocratic rights' which makes them 'excessively bitter'. This is that customarily middle and upper class attendees at church wait behind in their pews and scrutinize the lower orders as they leave at the end of the service, mainly to avoid rubbing shoulders in the aisle or the doorway with those beneath them. Some people who, in the eyes of the Tawse family should leave with the mob and have no right to remain seated in the church, have started to stay behind. This breach of etiquette is regarded by the Tawses as outrageous and totally unacceptable.

Language is the chief marker of class and a sensitive subject to those who want to better themselves or to be thought better than they are. One's position in society is indicated by one's linguistic background and command of standard English. At the drunken meeting of the village worthies to choose their doctor, Mr Tawse shows his superiority by correcting the grammar of Mr Chizzle and then the vocabulary and pronunciation of Mr Skeldrin. Both Chizzle and Skeldrin are mortified and angry at having their grasp of English criticized. There are subtle gradations of language. The doctor and his sister speak standard English, as do other middle class, educated characters. The self-made men such as Butterscales the grocer and Skeldrin the farmer speak a Scots slightly less broad than that of the working class from which they have recently emerged. The gossips and their husbands use a Scots that is extremely rich, down to earth, pithy and vigorous, perfect for invective and insult, containing words and expressions that have now dropped out of use. If there is time, I will show you some examples at the end of the talk.

This was a period when the riches of empire and the fruits of the industrial revolution created an expanding middle class: tradesmen and farmers were educating their sons and daughters who thus became too genteel to follow their parents' profession or lifestyle. The same newly prosperous parents, no matter how poor their early backgrounds, also tried to imitate the aristocracy in dress and manners. The shopkeepers and farmers who are the self-elected

leaders of the community put on their dickies (or false shirt fronts) to go to dinner with the doctor and his sister, even though they end up betraying their pretensions to being members of polite society by getting drunk and brawling. They also have adopted the polite habit of offering their snuff-boxes on meeting an acquaintance. Mr Butterscales is actually the proud owner of a German silver snuff-box.

The Skeldrin family are a case in point of people who have the money to better themselves. Mr Skeldrin is a well to do farmer. His wife speaks standard English, serves afternoon tea on the best china and his daughter Jeanie is an accomplished and well-mannered young lady who can aspire to marry a professional man, the new doctor. Mr Skeldrin himself, however, is in many ways still an unreformed peasant despite his wealth. His main interest is drinking with his boon companions and he is sufficiently uneducated to be impressed by Mr Tawse's learning and to value his friendship, even though it costs him a lot in whisky. Mr Tawse does at one point, however, as I have said, humiliate Skeldrin by correcting his English in public, showing him up and inviting the violent reaction that results. Mr Skeldrin is also vehemently of the view that his daughter should marry another farmer, the uncouth and graceless Grinton Gobbler who represents the old style of farmer who could never ever aspire to being a gentleman. Gobbler, who farms the moorland, lives in squalid circumstances and has no manners or powers of conversation whatsoever, although he is rich enough to be attractive to Skeldrin as a husband for his daughter. Mrs Skeldrin, clearly wanting to mix with the local gentry, is wholly in favour of the doctor who is socially at ease in all sorts of company and indubitably a gentleman. The future lies with the doctor and not with Gobbler and his household whose way of life is little better than that of the animals they care for. No doubt many of the farms and their owners in the area, especially those on marginal land, remained relatively primitive for some time after the 1850's, while the owners of better land were able to enlarge their houses to include drawing rooms, to buy pianos for their daughters and to join the social elite.

It is worth noting that when the doctor is temporarily disgraced by his presumed seduction of Katie Curmuddie, Mr Skeldrin and the repellent Grinton Gobbler get their own way. The wishes of Jeanie, who is in love with Dr Golloch and who detests Gobbler, have to give

way to those of her father. Such was the power of fathers in those days that many a girl was the victim of a forced marriage to an unpalatable spouse. Luckily Gobbler is exposed as Katie's kidnapper just as the wedding is about to happen, attempts to flee across the fields and is killed by a bull. In the end the doctor gets his girl and love is triumphant.



Figure 16: A Happy Ending

## Transport

The sheer difficulty of getting about for most people is one of the greatest differences between the world of *The Misty Morning* and *The Dark Night* and our own frenzied rushing from place to place. The village street is full of puddles and mud, the latter no doubt being a euphemism for the mixture of mud and horse droppings which covered the roads. When the doctor is thought to be responsible for Katie's supposed suicide, people make a point of walking as far away from his door as possible, even walking on the opposite side of the street, choosing to wade 'through the dubs, and jumping over the mud heaps, [rather] than pass too near for fear of being contaminated'. Setting aside the clear comment on the holier than thou hypocrisy of the inhabitants of Bramble Green, it is obvious that Lanark Road one hundred and fifty years ago was no better than a filthy farm track. The doctors make their rounds on horseback. Not many have their own wheeled transport. There is reference to the carriage of a local grandee. When Mr Tawse sees it coming he bows

and scrapes in a servile manner, but is mortified and humiliated when he sees it is occupied by an idle footman who is lolling out of the window and laughing at him. Mr Skeldrin, as the owner of a gig, is the only other with private transport. The gig is used by his friends from time to time when they want to make a social call at any distance from home. It is also used to take friends and family to and from the railway station. Otherwise Benjie Artichoke's pony and cart are much in demand. For instance, when Watty Baton gets a report of a body being found in the river, he borrows the cart to fetch the corpse, which he assumes is that of Katie. (It turns out to be a scarecrow washed down by floodwaters).

I have mentioned the railway station. This cannot be the Juniper Green station: the Water of Leith line did not exist at the time. It must be Curriehill station which had been open for ten years at the time of publication. The train had revolutionised travel with its speed, its timetables and the ease with which people could get from one part of the country to another. It was still new and exciting in the 1850's. Edinburgh and Glasgow were linked by rail in 1842 and Scotland and England in 1848, only 9 years before *The Misty Morning* was published. Railway travel was, it appears, for the relatively well off, and it offered them quick and easy access to the wider world. When Sarah Golloch and Jeanie Skeldrin go off with masses of band boxes and reticules in the gig to catch the train in order to visit the Golloch parents, all the village women turn out to see them pass, such is the relative novelty of the sight and the uneventfulness of village life. It may be some consolation to the present day traveller to know that when they returned to Bramble Green the train was late.



Figure 17: Railway Travel

The train also provides a speedy means of escape from the restrictions of Bramble Green. Grinton Gobbler, fleeing justice, is heading for the station and freedom abroad when he meets his



nemesis in the form of an angry bull. At the end of the book the dreadful Tawse family no doubt caught the train to the port to emigrate to Australia as an escape from their disappointments in the village. This was a time of massive emigration to the colonies; in fact the bulk of British emigration took place between 1853 and 1880, and no doubt a good few of Juniper Green's citizens, like Mr Tawse, initially took the train when they went to seek new opportunities overseas.

Regrettably I have had no time to examine the superstitions of the poor, the portrayal of the policeman as a semi-literate clown, education in the village, agriculture, the community of *The Dark Night*, and so on. Unfortunately, like Mr Tawse and his family, we have to bid Bramble Green farewell.

If I may, I will leave you with you a few examples of the nineteenth century Scots spoken by the lower class characters; a colourful, expressive, lively language born of a rural way of life that has now gone, but whose loss leaves us the poorer. Note how much of the verbal imagery is taken from nature or agricultural life.

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### **Examples of Scots from *The Misty Morning***

Mrs Artichoke of her unconscious husband's appearance: - "I was most awfu' doited to let his brucket, coomey face pit me sae muckle about..."

Mrs A. to her husband after he comes round: - "...for a' the times ever I saw ye hae a wee drap, ye ne'er was sae sair forjaskit."

Mrs Curmuddie to Dr Plyphleme: - "I'll spread yer weel earned title o' stupid cuddy-ass through the hale country..."

Mrs Butterscales of her husband: - "Is my auld daidlin' goose here?"

Mrs B. to Mr Chizzle: - "Jist you keep quiet, ye auld cankered athert."

Mrs B. to Mr Chizzle: - "jist keep a calm sough, or I'll maybe say more than ye ettle"

Mrs C. to Mrs A.: - "What about this new blichen, then, they've brocht for a doctor?"

Mrs C. of the Bramble Green girls and the new doctor: - "the hizzies hereawa are unco glaikit..... there's plenty o' them wad think him a great windfa', and wad jump at him like a cock at a grossart..."

Mrs A. of the doctor; - "...he's jist a wee, dumpy, brucket, black-avised crater wi' a lang beard like a billy-goat."

Mrs C. on the unpredictability of what the doctor will do: - "A boss tatie's whyles no easy kend till the skin's broken, and it's often queer wather in the wast whan the wund's in the east."

Mrs A. on the same topic: - "It's about the same thing to pit herrin' on a straught spit as on a crookit ane..."

Mrs C. on the doctor's choice of Jeanie: - "... he's in an unco poker aboot it, an' thinks an awfu' lot o' the bit puir peasweep-lookin crater."

Mrs A. on the same topic: - "...some thocht he wad looked some ither airt, and no 'ca'd his hogs to sic a puir market'."

Mrs A. on the Tawse girls; - "... thae reekit, yellow-neckit, brown-faced, gipsy-lookin', ill-faured, trollopin tawpies up the toun there..."

Mrs A. on the fight between Tawse and Dr Golloch: - "...Tawse had the wrang sow by the lug when he began tryin' on his capers wi' him."

Mrs A. on the Tawse girls' desperation to find a man; - "... they wouldna gie themselves muckle thocht aboot it, but would snap him like a craigie-heron wi' a puddock."

Mrs C. telling her daughter to be quiet: - "Will ye devauld, ye yelpin pyet ye?"

Mrs C. on Gobbler: - "it's yon snoolin, snoukin jook they ca' Gobbler"

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## GLOSSARY

Brucket: of things: marked in some way, as with soot, mud, etc., streaky, lined

Coomey: begrimed, dusty, speckled

Forjaskit: exhausted, worn out, broken down

Blichen: in general a term of abuse or contempt. A person useless for any thing

Grossart: gooseberry

Boss: hollow, empty

Peasweep: peewit, lapwing. Of human beings or their characteristics: sharp-featured, gaunt, shrill-voiced, shrewish, whining, complaining, peevish, ailing

Reekit: stained by smoke, sooty, smoke-cured like a kipper

Tawpie: giddy, scatter-brained, untidy, awkward or careless person, gen. applied to young women

Devauld: to stop, cease, leave off

Pyet: magpie

Jook: a shifty, tricky character